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Women's Gendered Experiences of Rapid Resource Development in the Canadian North: New Opportunities or Old Challenges?

by

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ABSTRACT

Rapid resource development in northern and rural Canada is leading to unprecedented social, political, economic and environmental changes in a number of communities. In particular, gendered identities and divisions of labour in northern Canadian communities are poised to be dramatically altered by increasing labour demands, shifting time-use patterns, and intensifying income inequalities. Through a feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis of print media coverage of gendered issues in Fort McMurray, and semi-structured interviews with thirty-two women working in either the male-dominated oil sector or the female-dominated social services sector, this dissertation examines how women in Fort McMurray, Alberta—the host community for the Athabasca oil sands—negotiate their identities and make sense of the opportunities and challenges associated with the recent oil boom. Drawing on materialist feminist and feminist poststructuralist theory, this dissertation first elaborates a comprehensive analytical framework for investigating gender in the context of natural resource extraction. This framework contends that gendered identities are inherently multiple, and divisions of labour are embedded in particular temporal and spatial contexts. Furthermore, this framework examines discursive and material contradictions in diverse gendered experiences of resource extraction in order to move beyond universalizing gendered interests and identities. Second, this dissertation examines how discursively constructed female subject positions in local and global print media over the past decade adopt a frame of frontier

masculinity. I demonstrate that these subject positions become resources upon which women in Fort McMurray draw on to negotiate their identities in ways that perpetuate a sense of dependency and anomalousness. Finally, I explore how neoliberal discourses of individualism and meritocracy provide a potential site of resistance to hegemonic frontier masculinity in women's narratives of their opportunities and challenges. However, I ultimately argue that neoliberal discourses and practices do not prove transformative of gendered identities and divisions of labour because women are only able to partially engage with neoliberal subjectivity, which neglects collective interests and wellbeing.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The objective of this dissertation is to produce a case study exploring the personal and professional experiences of women in Fort McMurray, AB, a northern Canadian community undergoing rapid resource development. Specifically, this study examines the challenges and opportunities of women working directly in the primary resource sector and in the social services, as the lived experiences of women in each of these sectors are often overlooked in the literature on natural resource development (Reed 2003). This study contributes to the academic literature on women's experiences with resource development in Canada by developing an analytical framework that draws on multiple theoretical and epistemological perspectives, and by providing a detailed and pertinent case study that can inform policies designed to mitigate the impacts of rapid resource development.

Throughout the vast Canadian North, rapid resource development, such as mining and oil and gas projects, is dramatically altering the economic, social and environmental landscapes of both rural and urban communities. These projects have opened up tremendous income-earning opportunities for local residents and new populations in search of employment (Buell 2006). At the same time, the boom and bust cycles of rapid resource development can entail tremendous social change, such as shifting demographic compositions, time-use patterns and levels of social cohesion (Uhlmann 1981; Marchak 1983; England and Albrecht 1984;

Freudenburg 1984; Walsh and Simonelli 1986; Gramling and Freudenburg 1992; Shields 1998; Curtis et al 2005; Nichols Applied Management 2006).

These potential benefits and drawbacks of resource boom and bust cycles have been studied fairly extensively; however many of these studies have focused on isolated, single resource towns with relatively homogenous populations (e.g. Robinson 1962; Lucas 1971; Siemens 1973; Moen 1981; England and Albrecht 1984; Gill 1990, Wilson 2004; Brown et al 2005). At the heart of much of this academic literature has been a pervasive assumption that 'standard North American families' represent the core populations of interest in resource communities, and that impacts should be studied in the context of male breadwinners and stay-at-home wives (e.g. Robinson 1962; Lucas 1971; Siemens 1973; Luxton 1980). The importance of this particular social relation for supporting resource industries was reflected in the tendency of resource companies and the Canadian government, in the 1960s and 1970s, to establish new communities in resource development areas that catered to single families (Lucas 1971; Siemens 1973; Gill 1990; O'Faircheallaigh 1995; Scott 2007). These communities were specifically designed to encourage the presence of women, not through employment opportunities, but through the construction of schools and shopping centres, which were deemed to be attractive to women (Lucas 1971; Gill 1990; Scott 2007). The underlying assumption was that married men were more stable, loyal and productive workers than any other section of the population (Scott 2007).

Yet, in the context of increasingly globalized economies, technologies and societies, the complexion of resource communities is changing in ways that challenge the narrow perception of resource community's populations and gendered divisions of labour. Rapid resource development is beginning to diversify not only the primary sector of resource communities, but the secondary and tertiary sectors as well (Randall and Ironside 1996; Reed 2003; McLeod and Hovorka 2008). Despite the stereotypical view of Canadian resource communities that "the contributions by nonresource industrial sectors are insignificant" (Randall and Ironside 1996, 21), nonresource-based employment opportunities are increasingly important in resource communities, especially for women. McLeod and Hovorka (2008) note that the booming oil and gas industry in High Level, Alberta has lead to increased work opportunities for women in the expanding clerical, retail, services, and tourism sectors. Moreover, Reed (2003) points out that the forestry industry provides employment not only in jobs unique to the resource industry such as loggers, but also truck drivers, machine operators, and jobs in inventory and mensuration, management, information and administrative services. Because these jobs are not categorized in the Canadian census as 'unique to primary industries', the collective knowledge of women's participation in these industries is incomplete.

Due to huge labour demands and a shift towards more long-distance commuting of resource workers in booming energy and mining sectors (O'Faircheallaigh 1995), previously ignored and marginalized sections of the

population, such as single women, aboriginal people, and immigrants, are being drawn into lucrative employment opportunities from both local and extra-local regions. These populations bring different interests and cultural practices to resource communities, but they also face distinct material and discursive challenges. Very little is known about the identities and experiences of these populations, specifically in the context of rapidly changing social relations undergirding employment opportunities in these communities. Although these populations tended historically to be concentrated in the secondary economic sectors (Reed 2003), much of the empirical information regarding employment opportunities in the primary sectors of resource communities is not sufficiently disaggregated to provide an accurate picture of the challenges and opportunities of their involvement in this sector. The specific types of employment undertaken by these populations, such as low-level clerical work or unskilled labour within resource companies, are not considered as part of primary resource sector (Summers and Branch 1984; Reed 2003). In the context of the recent global economic downturn, which has caused a contraction in Canadian oil and gas and mining operations, less is known about what happens to these populations and professions as resource industries undergo a bust.

Formally employed women are a particularly 'invisible' population in resource communities. These communities have been associated with strongly gendered divisions of labour privileging the male breadwinner (Luxton 1980; Moen 1981; Marchak 1983; Gill 1990; McLeod and Hovorka 2008). Academic

attention to women in resource communities has focused primarily on their domestic roles as stay-at-home wives and mothers of male resource workers (e.g. Luxton 1980; Moen 1981; Gill 1990). It is significant to note that a substantial portion of the academic work shedding light on women's experiences emerged during the 'second wave' of academic feminism, which placed considerable emphasis on Marxist conceptions of labour and exploitation. According to Nicholson, the "initial tasks facing second wave theorists were to document the seriousness of women's oppression and develop theories to account for it" (1997, 7). These earlier feminist scholars of resource extraction faced the unenviable task of bringing attention to women's interests and experiences in a field where gender, along with questions of race, sexual orientation and class, were at the time largely ignored.

However, second wave feminist scholarship has been subject of considerable critique by scholars who consider themselves 'third wave' (Lotz 2003). The tendency of second wave scholars to universalize the experiences of white, Western, middle-class women is undoubtedly the most trenchant of these critiques (Nicholson 1997; Lotz 2003). Third wave feminists, conversely, have argued that scholarship must be more attuned to the diversity of gendered experiences (Lotz 2003). In this dissertation, I do not suggest that third wave approaches offer a rupture with second wave ones in environmental and natural resource sociology. Rather, I believe they can and should build on this existing

work to include an increasingly diverse set of questions and experiences in scholarship.

Women who do seek formal employment, whether in the primary sector or elsewhere, have been rendered invisible through multiple social and discursive practices. Primary sector industries, for instance, are constructed as 'male spaces' (Miller 2004; McLeod and Hovorka 2008) wherein 'masculine' attributes of strength, aggression, competitiveness and daring are privileged; several researchers have found that women who enter these industries are often met with discriminatory hiring practices, limited opportunities for advancement, sexist typecasting and even sexual harassment (e.g. Tallichet 1995, 2000; Davidson and Black 2001; Reed 2003; Mayes and Pini 2010).

However, it is increasingly clear that, despite these formidable challenges, women are adopting different personal and professional roles within their communities as resource megaprojects diversify local economies and increase the demand for labour (Randall and Ironside 1996; Nelson 2001; Reed 2003; McLeod and Hovorka 2008; Mayes and Pini 2010). Although there have been studies of women working as engineers or executives in resource industries based in major urban centres such as Calgary, AB (e.g. Miller 2002; Ranson 2005, see also Eveline and Booth 2002; Mayes and Pini 2010), the experiences of women who hold male-dominated blue collar jobs in mines and oil patches have not been adequately addressed (for notable exceptions, see Tallichet 1995, 2000; Reed

2003). Data on primary resource industries often do not disaggregate by gender (Marchak 1983; Reed 2003); it is therefore difficult to ascertain the extent of women's participation in these activities, and what opportunities and challenges they may face.

The social services sector in resource communities is another area frequently overlooked, since it relates only indirectly to resource development (Peters et al 2010). Although boomtown literature suggests that numerous social pathologies, such as increased rates of drug and alcohol abuse, violence and high school incompletion, are often associated with booming and busting resource economies (Moen 1981; Archibald 2006), non-resource industries and services that directly confront these social challenges are often underrepresented in social and environmental impact studies (Randall and Ironside 1996). It is insufficiently known how women's experiences in helping professions and the social services sector, which operates at the front lines of these social pathologies, evolve as resource booms and busts occur (Peters et al 2010).

This study, therefore, compares and contrasts the shifting personal and professional experiences, opportunities and challenges of women across these two sectors within the context of rapid resource development in a modern boomtown context. In addition to examining the material factors related to gendered experiences, this study examines social and political discourses that contribute to and shape these experiences. To do so, this study adopts a case study

methodology, which empirically investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin 2003). Flyvbjerg (2001) argues that case studies can potentially make even greater contributions to social science research by foregrounding power relations and shifting subjectivities within a given context. Unlike the natural sciences, which generally presume that the physical context of any phenomena is subject to predictable and universal laws, human and social behaviour are decidedly less fixed. The case study methodology, in Flyvbjerg's (2001) view, allows for a rich, thick exploration of multiple experiences and the role that power differentials play in shaping these experiences. By highlighting these features, Flyvbjerg contends that case studies can contribute to phronesis:

> The goal [of phronesis] is to help restore social science to its classical position as a practical, intellectual activity aimed at clarifying the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and at contributing to social and political praxis (2001, 4).

Given the embedded nature of the phenomena of interest—gendered opportunities and challenges of resource development—within their mutable wider environmental, social and economic contexts, a case study provides rich insight into the multiple tensions and influences at play in women's personal and professional lives.

KEY QUESTIONS

This case study is guided by two key research questions that present a unique angle on the study of gender and natural resource development in Canada and address important theoretical gaps in the understanding of this topic:

1) What are the key material and discursive issues and contradictions that arise in women's personal and professional experiences and identities in rapidly developing resource communities?
2) What strategies and resources do women use to negotiate these contradictions, and what are the perceived potential drawbacks and benefits of these strategies?

In drawing on the experiences of women employed in the traditionally 'masculine' oil sands sector and women employed in the traditionally 'feminine' social and community services sector, these guiding research questions will serve to provide a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the complex challenges of gender relations, particularly in the employment context, in resources communities undergoing rapid development and social and environmental change. The long-term aim of this project is to advance a more specific and situated academic understanding of gendered issues which takes into explicit account both their material and discursive dimensions (O'Shaughnessy and Krogman 2011 [in press]).

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY: THREE DISSERTATION PAPERS

This dissertation is organized into three distinct papers that collectively address the guiding research questions. The first paper (Chapter 2) develops an analytical framework for the study of gendered contradictions in the context of natural resource extraction, which is in turn used to inform the following papers. The second paper (Chapter 3) draws on both semi-structured interview data and a discourse analysis of media to explore how women in Fort McMurray negotiate subject positions available to them in the context of hegemonic frontier masculinity. The third paper (Chapter 4) focuses specifically on the ways women in Fort McMurray understand and articulate their sense of opportunity and challenge as their community experiences the dramatic material changes associated with rapid resource extraction. Brief abstracts of each paper are presented below.

GENDER AS CONTRADICTION: FROM DICHOTOMIES TO DIVERSITY IN NATURAL RESOURCE EXTRACTION

Given the varied nature of resource dependent communities, the gendered experiences of women and men may vary in unexpected and contradictory ways. Building on a review and critique of existing theoretical approaches and studies of US and Canadian extractive resource communities in both the feminist and rural social science literature, I provide an analytical approach to engage with gender in the context of these dramatic changes. This framework, which integrates key insights from recent feminist theorizing, summarizes emergent constructions of

masculinity and femininity in a given context by emphasizing the possible contradictions along three broad lines: material, material-discursive, and discursive. This framework shifts the analytical focus from emphasizing broad (often a-temporal and a-spatial) generalizations about women's and men's experiences with resource extraction, to exploring the diversity of these experiences, and where they might result in contradictory interests, imperatives and expectations.

GOLD DIGGERS, TRUCK DRIVERS AND MOMS: HYPER-REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN'S IDENTITIES IN FORT MCMURRAY AND THE ALBERTA OIL PATCH

Over the past decade, the global media has become enraptured with the social impacts of the oil boom on the community of Fort McMurray, AB. Frontier masculinity, a hegemonic form of rural masculinity based nostalgic and fictitious accounts of the gold rush era, is the key frame through which these social impacts are understood. As result, gendered identities and relations are thrust to the forefront of this media coverage. In this paper, I first explore the female subject positions constructed by this media discourse and frontier masculinity. Second, I examine the ways that women who live and work in Fort McMurray negotiate and resist these subject positions. I argue that the frame of frontier masculinity creates three particular subject positions for women which reinforce beliefs about women's perceived dependency and anomalousness on the frontier: gold diggers, devoted mothers and lady truck drivers. Because of their inescapability in media accounts, these subject positions consequently influence how women in Fort

McMurray come to understand their own identities and experiences in the context of the oil boom.

GENDER AND THE NEOLIBERAL SUBJECT: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND IDENTITIES OF WOMEN WORKING IN AN OIL BOOMTOWN

Resource booms are embedded with promises of abundant employment and income-earning opportunities. The rapidly expanding Alberta oil sands have drawn in huge numbers of workers from around Canada and the world in search of jobs and high incomes, leading to tremendous social and demographic change in the nearby community of Fort McMurray. But do all residents share the same conception of opportunity? How is this notion of opportunity gendered and classed? In this paper, I explore how women in Fort McMurray understand, negotiate and articulate their opportunities and challenges living and working in an oil boomtown. Specifically, this paper examines how women position their experiences in relation to dominant discourses of frontier masculinity and neoliberalism that have ideologically supported rapid resource extraction in the oil sands. Data for this paper are drawn from a study of women working in the traditionally male-dominated oil sector and women working in the traditionally female-dominated social and community services sector. The results of this study suggest that women face multiple barriers in constructing their identities within the framework of neoliberal subjectivity, and their opportunities represent a contingent adaptation to neoliberal development rather than a transformation of hegemonic masculinity.

LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws primarily on two feminist theoretical frameworks to guide the research and analytical process: materialist feminism and feminist poststructuralism. Materialist feminist theory sensitizes the study to temporal, spatial and socio-economic situatedness of gender and other social and ecological relations, while acknowledging that these relations are also resisted and reproduced in their material contexts. Feminist poststructuralism further illuminates the embedded discursive practices that construct ideal notions of the relationships between femininity, masculinity, neoliberalism and the environment. In utilizing these explicitly feminist theoretical frameworks, this study intends to destabilize embedded discursive notions that construct gender identities and relations in the context of social and environmental change in order to question materialist and symbolic practices that are oppressive and unfavourable to women and other disadvantaged gender groups.

MATERIALIST FEMINISM

Materialist feminism is a distinctive body of feminist theory which argues that all social relations are inherently constructed within prevailing historical material conditions. As Jackson articulates,

> [Materialist feminism] involves a notion of social structure – institutionalized sets of social arrangements which pre-exist us as individuals. We are born into a particular place in a particular society

and this imposes constraints on our lives, although we can and do resist these constraints and as feminists we struggle to change them. (1996, 41)

Therefore, materialist feminism accepts that individuals, although constrained by their structural context, will have varied experiences within these structures depending on their specific social location and self-perceptions, rather than applying a universalistic framework upon all women (Jackson 2001). In specific reference to resource communities, this theoretical framework permits a conception of social relations that is highly situated in the prevailing economic system. Furthermore, this framework orients the focus of the analysis toward gendered divisions of labour—a key site where gendered identities are constructed—and the contradictions in the everyday experiences of gender.

Materialist feminism's emphasis on gendered divisions of labour and associated social relations suggests the labour market is a key mechanism through which patriarchy intersects with capitalism to further subjugate women in industrialized, capitalist regions (Delphy 1984; Hartmann 2006). The labour market is assumed to create the valuation of 'productive' male bodies over that of 'unproductive' female bodies, who then become dependent upon men for their essential needs. Within this division of labour, women are placed in a vulnerable and marginalized social location, in which their access to resources and labour power are controlled by men (Annandale 1998).

Materialist feminists allow for differences in individual identities and experiences of divisions of labour through the recognition of discourse as a means of obscuring inequalities and perpetuating social practices even when they hold negative consequences (Jackson 1996, 38). Whereas poststructuralist approaches view discourse and ideas as sources of inequality in themselves, materialist feminists assert that discourse is always rooted in and emanating from material conditions (Jackson 1996, 38). Although individuals can challenge and contest prevailing discourses and ideologies, effectively overcoming social inequalities requires that the underlying social and economic structures be altered or dismantled. Therefore, while materialist feminists do borrow from poststructuralist approaches, they distinguish themselves by retaining a relatively more deterministic view of social practices and relations that are causally related to material conditions which constrain how these practices and relations are understood (Hennessy 1993).

The Marxist problematic adopted by materialist feminism for explaining social and gender inequalities as systematically determined by material conditions is a defining feature of this approach. Gender differences and inequalities do not emanate from given biological differences; they are products of "social structures, relations and practices" (Jackson 2001). Unlike Marxist (or socialist) feminism, which also draws on a Marxist problematic, this approach does not necessarily assume capitalism to be the *sole* determinant of these gendered relations (Jackson 2001). For instance, materialist feminists point to patriarchy as a system of

oppression of women that operates alongside and often synergistically with capitalism (Delphy 1984). Patriarchy, according to materialist feminists such as Hartmann (2006) and Delphy (1984), refers specifically to the subordination of women to men, primarily (though not exclusively) through the latter's appropriation of their (domestic) labour power. Unlike capitalism, the material base of patriarchy is not necessarily economic; patriarchy can emerge in multiple social practices and relations. For example, Delphy argues that sexual harassment can be a form of gender oppression, but does not necessarily—although it can—relate to economic conditions (1984). However, many materialist feminists tend to assume that capitalism and patriarchy are fundamentally interlocking systems.

It is important to note that materialist feminism has a number of major limitations that need to be addressed in the context of this study. First, materialist feminism's notion of discourse, which is seen as ineluctably determined by material practices, does not offer significant insight into the temporal dimension of discursive change. For instance, discursive 'lags' may occur when ideological norms and beliefs emanating from a particular era of material practices remain embedded in a society after these material practices have changed. A key example of such a discursive lag is the prevailing belief that 'a women's place is in the home' despite a growing economic need for labour and household income in many parts of the world. Thus, this study proposes to adopt insights from feminist poststructuralism, which views discourse as more dialectic with material practices (Naples 2003).

A second fundamental limitation of this theoretical framework is the tendency to view women's experiences with capitalism and patriarchy as universally negative. Although materialist feminism recognizes class distinctions in addition to gender as an important form of social difference, in general it does not speak to other factors that may contribute to a variety of experiences at both the structural (e.g. ethnicity) and individual (e.g. personality, skills) levels. This theoretical perspective focuses primarily on women's experiences and unpaid domestic work within the household, and tends to ignore circumstances where women are potentially able to advance within or benefit from the formal labour market. Moreover, materialist feminism tends to reproduce stereotypes of the 'male breadwinner' and 'female housewife', and leaves little analytical scope for explaining or understanding the experiences and identities of women who do not abide this domestic role.

A crucial modification of the materialist feminist approach for this study is to place greater emphasis on the subjective experience within gender, labour and capitalist relations. Like many Marxist-influenced theoretical perspectives, the proclivity toward over-emphasizing the homogenizing structural factors to the detriment of varied human experience is a risk with adopting a materialist feminist framework. However, this theoretical framework does provide a potential mechanism for guarding against an overly structuralist analysis. For instance, Ferguson suggests that "situating labor—sensuous, practical activity in both its alienated and non-alienated forms—as the starting point of social theory (instead

of structures and functions), foregrounds the experiential *and* human agency" (2008, 50 emphasis in original). Emphasizing labour, according to Ferguson, shifts the focus to the interactive processes of producing and reproducing social relations rather than assuming these are entirely predetermined. This approach reasserts the *historical* material element that views social relations as situated in *particular* temporal and spatial contexts.

In a similar vein, Reed suggests a social embeddedness framework as a means to examine gendered identities as actively produced and reproduced in particular contexts. Consistent with materialist feminism, embeddedness signifies "a sense of rootedness of place and social life; in one sense, a growing up together of space and place" (2000, 368) in which identities and experiences are locally constituted and practiced in specific locations. Thus gendered experiences and identities may substantially differ both materially and discursively in different places, regardless of a universal and overarching economic and cultural system of patriarchal neoliberalism.

FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALISM

Feminist poststructuralism is one of the most important and pervasive theoretical developments in recent feminist scholarship (O'Shaughnessy and Krogman in press [2012]). One of the defining features of feminist poststructuralist thought is an explicit questioning of the fixity of the category 'woman' and its appropriateness as the core analytical variable in feminist

scholarship (Ray 2006). Instead, feminist poststructuralists have urged for greater attention to the construction of femininities and masculinities, and their relationality (Butler 1993). As a result, feminist poststructuralism is marked by a shift in methodological and epistemological strategies in addition to theoretical ones.

By troubling the universal category of woman, identity and subjectivity become central to feminist poststructuralist analysis. This body of thought places emphasis on the ways in which gendered identities are constructed through discursive practices, as well as how subjectivity is produced through the negotiation and resistance of these practices. Feminists working within this tradition tend to highlight the discursive production and performance of idealized femininities and masculinities, particularly the ways in which they are constructed in opposition to one another, and the ways in which discursive productions are inscribed on the body (Weedon 1987; Butler 1993). For example, Medved (2009) notes how biological discourses of postnatal women's bodies as weak and recovering have contributed to morally charged perceptions of these women's inability to act as primary breadwinners and a natural responsibility to adopt caregiving responsibilities.

In contradistinction to modernist theories (including materialist feminism), feminist poststructuralism radically challenges the notion of fixed, unitary subjects (Butler 1993). Instead, feminist poststructuralism insists that the subject

is by nature fragmented and fraught with contradictory desires, identifications and imperatives. The repudiation of a stable subject and the notion of gender performance, most commonly associated with the works of Judith Butler, have been widely criticized as being anti-foundational and relativist and thus incompatible with a feminist political project (Smith 1999). However, recent scholarship has demonstrated that, when combined with qualitative methodologies, feminist poststructuralism can address issues of power, oppression and inequality by highlighting unfavourable discourses and how adopting various subject positions can lead to avenues of resistance (Adams and Bettis 2003; Cahill 2007; Gannon and Davies 2007; O'Shaughnessy and Krogman 2012 [in press]).

Because of its epistemological premises, feminist poststructuralism provides the advantage of increased flexibility in qualitative research (Gannon and Davies 2007). From a methodological perspective, feminist poststructuralism seeks not to provide a linear or universal account of 'women's experiences', but to deconstruct such narratives that constrain identity formation and explore the contradictions within and across experiences (Gibson-Graham 1993). Outliers, for instance, are analytically important for revealing how dominant discourses ignore or disempower certain experiences and identities in a given context, and are often highlighted in feminist poststructuralist research. For example, Gough and Whitehouse (2003), using a feminist poststructuralist frame, draw on their own unique narratives as feminist graduate students in an Environmental Education program to critically interrogate the political impacts of the pervasive Man-Nature

binary within their discipline, and highlight how it ostracizes some minority students in their seemingly progressive program. Additionally, poststructuralist feminists tend to pay considerable attention to texts and language as key methodological resources. Baxter, for examples advocates a feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis method which deconstructs texts in public or institutionalized forums where "the kind of issues arising the relationship between discourse and power are arguably more conspicuous" (2003, 9). Baxter uses this method to analyze how curriculum policies in the UK impact gendered interactions in the classroom.

In contrast to conventional, non-feminist poststructuralist approaches, feminist researchers tend to use poststructuralism in a hybridized manner with existing feminist approaches (Gannon and Davies 2007; O'Shaughnessy and Krogman 2012, [in press]). In fact, key feminist scholars such as Hennessy (1993) and Gibson-Graham (1993; 2006) have advocated the blending of materialist feminist and feminist poststructuralist approaches. Similar to materialist feminism, feminist poststructuralism urges greater attention to the spatially and temporally localized contexts of the research setting. However, these two bodies of thought diverge with respect to the ontological power of material and discursive forces. As discussed in the preceding section, this dissertation draws on both materialist feminist and feminist poststructuralism to provide a more dialectical account of material and discursive practices.

Despite the widespread recognition of poststructuralist approaches in feminist scholarship, this body of thought has not been widely incorporated into rural sociological scholarship, including the sub-section focusing on gender and gender relations. One notable example is Gibson-Graham's (1993) study of subject positions available to women in Australian mining communities. Gibson-Graham found that women were limited to identifications with 'mining town women', who are deemed psychologically vulnerable and isolated, or 'miners' wives', who are auxiliary members of working-class solidarity, both of which are of secondary importance to the predominant male, working-class identity of these towns. The participants in this study readily identified with these available subject positions and dismissed their own knowledge and experiences regarding the social, economic and political processes impacting their communities. Similarly, Reed (2000)'s study, which is sensitized to feminist poststructuralism but does not explicitly state this influence, shows how women's identities on opposing sides of logging conflict were discursively limited to that of environmental activists or loggers' wives, creating internal tension for study participants who sympathized with both sides of the conflict. In both studies, adopting a purely materialist feminist theoretical stance would risk reinforcing narrow conceptions of women's identities. The examination and deconstruction of subject positions allowed the respective researchers to explore the contradictions and tensions within participants' narratives, while maintaining an explicit recognition of the social, economic and political forces shaping the material realities of their lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

GENDERED IMPACTS OF RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The impacts of rapid resource development on women constituted an important area of study in the late 1970s and 1980s for rural and natural resource sociologists. More recent work, however, has emanated from a more diverse array of disciplines, particularly in the North American context. In the early literature, a fairly consensus-oriented view suggesting women's experiences of resource development in boomtowns are comparably more negative than that of men (e.g. Luxton 1980; Moen 1981). A counter narrative also emerged, suggesting women's wellbeing post-boom may comparably better than pre-boom (e.g. Freudenburg 1981; Gill 1990; McLeod and Hovorka 2008). However, very little literature deviates from this victim-or-victor debate to examine the possibility of contradictory effects of resource booms and busts on women's lives (Reed 2003).

The 'women as victims' literature exposed an important finding within boomtown experiences: the economic benefits in the form of increased incomes and employment opportunities do not often accrue to women given their tendency to be excluded from these opportunities. Second, women typically assumed responsibility for social reproduction such as childrearing and maintaining social cohesion in rural and resource communities, at both the household and community level (Moen 1981). The potential social pathologies and dislocation, such as increasing rates of crime and substance abuse, resultant from the

increasing incomes and population transience can create an extra burden on women to maintain community integration and wellbeing (Albrecht 1978; Moen 1981; Walsh and Simonelli 1986).

Moen's (1981) study of two coal-mining communities in western Colorado demonstrated that female newcomers who migrated to these boomtowns with their spouses faced an increased sense of isolation and depression wherein their lives became home-centred since employment opportunities were limited. While involvement in social networks had a mitigating effect on this seclusion and assisted with stabilizing the wider community, "those who are most negatively affected are finding it increasingly difficult to cope and adapt or to help maintain the social integration and stability of the community while those who are most active are finding their resources and energy stretched to the limit" (1981, 110-111). Moen also noted that long-term residents of these communities did not benefit equally from the boom, which also increased overall cost of living. Women's social status, indirectly tied to their husband's economic circumstances, was compromised for those who did not see an increase in their household incomes.

Luxton's (1980) intensive study of three generations of women in Flin Flon, Manitoba, a post-boom mining community facing economic bust, exposed the extent to which their wellbeing and daily lives were bound with the schedules and desires of the men within their households. Luxton found that women in this

community took on the substantial burden of running the household in its entirety to allow the men to work long hours, which constrained opportunities for engaging in social activities. In addition, psychological and health literature has suggested that women face higher levels of depression and other mental health issues in resource communities than their male counterparts (Moen 1981; Evans and Cooperstock 1983). These threats to wellbeing are often attributed to the considerable isolation and the difficulty of forming new social connections in communities where class divisions and social distinctions between newcomers and long-term residents are often highly pronounced (Walsh and Simonelli 1986).

In response to the 'women as victims' literature, a number of studies adopted the counter-narrative of 'women as victors' of resource development, which characterizes a large portion of the current academic literature on gender and natural resource development in the North American context. Freudenburg (1981) noted that wider research traditions suggest that women tend to be disadvantaged by traditional sex roles in general, regardless of the socioeconomic context. In rural areas where traditional sex roles are more socially ingrained, it is possible that "energy boom development could potentially have a liberating and beneficial effect upon rural women by disrupting traditional patterns" (1981, 223). Freudenburg explored three variables of both men and women's wellbeing in four western Colorado boomtowns: overall life satisfaction, social integration and personal feelings of alienation. The results of this study suggested that, though

newcomer housewives tended to have more adjustment difficulties, there were few significant differences between men and women's wellbeing.

Gill (1990) undertook a comparative study of men and women's cognitive structures in an isolated resource community in northern British Columbia to determine whether the community satisfied women's particular wellbeing needs. Gill found that the women in her study deemed their community to be quite adequate with respect to meeting educational and social needs. Though the lack of women's employment coupled with a high cost of living was commonly found to be a drawback, Gill concluded that the stereotypical image of resource communities as "one of male domination with women in subordinate roles suffering from stress related to the isolated physical situation and transient social environment" was debunked (1990, 356).

A key critique of both of these contrasting perspectives is the essentialized portrayal of women as unitary beings with very little agency. Women in resource communities are overwhelmingly constructed as wives and mothers, whose wellbeing is fundamentally tied to fulfillment of their maternal and social reproductive roles. General tendencies pointed to by the variables used to determine the impacts of resource development (e.g. mental health, cost of living, social cohesion), whether positive or negative, are assumed to homogenously apply to all women within these communities. The potentially divergent

experiences and needs of sexual minorities, immigrants, Aboriginal persons, and single and/or childless women are given little analytical space.

More promising are the important but infrequent studies that explore the multiple facets of women's identities, and potential contradictions within diverse experiences of resource development, and take into account the role of environmental change. Reed's (2000) study of women's activism in British Columbian logging community offers an insightful look at the paradoxical dimensions of women's identities and experiences in light of a collapsing forestry industry and widespread public anti-logging sentiment throughout the country. In this research, Reed found women in forestry communities, though nearly all remarked high levels of sexism, had highly varied value systems in relation to the forestry industry. While some women became strong activists of environmental conservation and denounced the forestry industry for its destruction of old growth rainforests, other women became highly active in advocating for the logging industry and, therefore, for the survival of their communities. Reed's work demonstrates that essentialized understandings of women's interests, wellbeing and social roles as nurturers of both their communities and the natural environment can in fact be conflicting. The impacts of resource development, both in times of boom and bust, cannot be assumed to have a uniform impact on all women within a community.

The Status of the Women Council NWT, an advisory board to the territorial government, has made recent efforts to ensure gender concerns are adequately integrated into the social and environmental impact assessment processes for major resource development projects. In a report submitted to the Mackenzie Gas Project Joint Review Panel, the Status of Women Council NWT (2004) presented concerns over the long-term community effects of large populations of transient workers coming to work on constructing the pipeline, such as increased teen pregnancies, HIV infection and drug use, are not reflected in the short-term focus of the Environmental Impact Statement. This report further raises broad questions regarding the impacts of the project beyond increased employment opportunities, such as support for women's traditional activities such as providing food, shelter, child and elder care, health and over community wellbeing, and how these impacts will be experienced differently by Aboriginal women. This report highlights the possibility for resource development to have contradictory impacts on women's lives across time, as well as across cultures, classes and communities.

Considerably more attention to gender is paid in the study of resource busts in recent rural sociological scholarship. For instance, Sherman (2009) recently studied the economic outcomes of households who maintained rigid gender identities and divisions of labour in comparison with households who adopted more flexible constructions of femininity and masculinity following the closure of a sawmill in a small Californian community. Sherman (2009) found

that flexible households fared considerably better than their more rigid counterparts. Similarly, Nelson and Smith (1998), found that the moral male breadwinner norm is retained in rural communities long after the primary economic driver, such as mills or mines, are closed, which in turn causes women to be maintain responsibility for social reproduction in the household regardless of whether they have become the actual breadwinner in their household.

GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOUR AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN RESOURCE COMMUNITIES

One of the key foci of the literature on the impacts of resource development on women is the gendered division of labour that characterizes employment opportunities and social reproduction in resource communities. Gendered divisions of labour have been well documented in the academic literature on resource boomtowns in the late 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s (e.g. Lucas 1971; Siemens 1973; Luxton 1981; Sinclair and Felt 1992). This literature generally portrays resource communities as geographically isolated, demographically homogenous, and economically dependent on a single industry. Literature addressing the gendered divisions of labour as resource communities become increasingly economically and socially diversified is less abundant (McLeod and Hovorka 2008). However, a common thread in both recent and older literature on gendered divisions of labour is the continued relevance of socially and discursively constructed notions and beliefs about 'masculine' and 'feminine' occupational roles and spheres, regardless of the increasing participation of women in the workforce.

Research on gendered divisions of labour is often situated within a materialist theoretical framework that emphasizes divisions between productive and consumptive practices and the subordination of women's unwaged (re)productive work to men's (Luxton 1980; Moen 1981; Gill 1990, Sinclair and Felt 1992; Davis 2000; O'Toole and Macgarvey 2003). These studies assert that women are both materially and discursively constricted to a subordinate role in the community, wherein the primary resource industry and its (male) workers occupy a primary position. The key emphasis in these studies is the undervaluation of the social reproduction roles undertaken by women to maintain community and social functions that support the dominant resource industries. Scott, for instance, argues that "[w]orking-class communities are typically identified according to what the men do: a steel town, a mining town… female-coded types of employment do not identify communities. The family wage ideology tends to erase the service-sector work often done by women" (2007, 493).

Social reproduction refers to "the dynamics that produce and reproduce people in material, social and cultural ways" (Bezanson 2006, 434), which includes the labour involved in emotional and physical care-work and provisioning of basic needs for other members of the household and society, and communicative and social networking within communities (Walsh and Simonelli 1986). For example, Davis's (2000) study of fisherman's wives in isolated Newfoundland fishing villages revealed that women routinely took on the

embodied labour of 'worrying' for their husbands at sea, which mentally and emotionally 'liberated' the male fishermen to undertake their dangerous professions. Recently, the literature on isolated resource communities with high populations of migrant workers has pointed to the increasingly politicization of women's social reproductive work, particularly the work related to community building and social activism (Measham and Allen 1994; Reed 2000; O'Toole and Macgarvey 2003). However, gendered divisions of labour in resource communities, particularly as they relate to social reproductive work, are likely to be configured in locally specific ways.

Employment opportunities for women in resource communities are also shown in the literature to be embedded in particular social, temporally and spatial contexts, and to vary significantly from place to place. However, where formal work opportunities outside the home for women do exist, they are frequently limited to clerical, retail or service occupations, generally in the secondary and tertiary sectors (Gill 1990; Reed 2003; McLeod and Hovorka 2008), which are often seen as natural extensions of their informal social reproduction work. In a study of a northern Alberta boomtown, McLeod and Hovorka (2008) suggest that women's employment opportunities in the secondary and tertiary sectors are increasing and diversifying substantially, providing women with positive, satisfying economic experiences. For many, working in the secondary and tertiary sectors provided an avenue to fulfill traditionally feminine roles of community building while participating in the wage economy. The authors, therefore, contest

the conventional view of women as relegated to the domestic sphere in resource boomtowns, given the positive impact of economic diversification of women's opportunities. However, the authors nevertheless remark that access to the more lucrative primary sector employment remains highly limited for women.

Women who are employed in the feminine-coded helping professions, such as the social services and non-governmental agencies which provide key services to the community like women's shelters, youth centres, and counseling services for sexual health and substance abuse, face particularly challenging circumstances in northern and rural resource communities. Although the provisioning of social support is often perceived as a collective but informal responsibility of women in rural communities (Waltman 1986), the high turnover and heterogeneity of populations in resource communities can render access to such social support networks difficult, especially for newcomers (Walsh and Simonelli 1986; Schmidt 2000). Thus, formal social services are particularly important for dealing with the social impacts associated with resource development. However, Uhlmann suggests that human service delivery in energy boomtowns tends to be "neglected until problems reach crisis proportions" (1981, 19). While Uhlmann acknowledges this tendency may be due to a prioritization of municipal and administrative needs by local governments over the provision of social, health, youth and seniors' services, it is also a result of the face that in energy boomtowns, "people and problems arrive several years before the tax base from new industrial development is available to local government" (1981, 19).

Regardless of whether resource booms have taken place, services and community organizations have been undergoing a withdrawal throughout much of rural Canada (Halseth and Ryser 2004; Riebschleger 2007; Peters et al 2010), and many of the formal resources needed to address social change in resource communities, such as childcare provisioning that accommodates shift work, are not available. According to Gillespie (2007), erosion of service provision in northern rural and resource communities is not necessarily a result of a lack of financial support, but of a difficulty attracting adequate human capital. Salaries in the helping professions, whether governmental or non-governmental, are often insufficient, and this discrepancy can become magnified in the context of rapidly increasing living costs in boomtowns.

Riebschleger (2007) argues that social service workers who are trained in urban institutions may be inadequately prepared, both personally and professionally, for work in northern and rural regions. Communities with large proportions of transient, migratory and temporary foreign workers, many of whom engage in long-distance commuting pose an interesting challenge that is unlikely to occur in the same magnitude in major urban centres. Social service workers often much meet such challenges with significantly less formal supervision (Schmidt 2000). Riebschleger found that many service providers coped by

> engaging in an informal system of quid pro quo resource sharing….
> Accessing and providing information; "stretching" agency client entry

> criteria; “leaping bureaucratic barriers” to assist clients with special needs for whom there were no community services; and creating small, multiprofessional, multiagencies and other collaborative arrangements. (2007, 209)

This ad hoc nature to service provision reflects a further challenge for rural social workers: a blurring between their professional and personal lives (Schmidt 2000). Schmidt (2000) suggests that those working in the helping professions in rural communities tend to have high visibility, resulting in a ‘fishbowl’ syndrome. For instance, Riebschleger (2007) notes that social workers may trade personal favours for professional ones or face professional drift into their personal lives, such as expectations that they participate in community activities. Heather et al (2005) have further noted that the gendered nature of rural restructuring to the helping professions has not been sufficiently recognized, and the extra-burdens for women are often rendered invisible. For instance, professional drift may be normalized for women who work in these professions, since it intertwines with their perceived gendered roles as nurturers and care-givers.

As primary resource industries become increasingly complex and differentiated, it is important to recognize employment opportunities are likely to become more heterogeneous, with women occupying an increasing variety of professional roles, including those which have traditionally been considered

'masculine'. Yet, despite these material changes in resource communities, the discursive legacy of resource work as 'masculine work', and the norm of the male breadwinner remains a considerable barrier to women. According to Reed:

> [J]obs in "primary" (extractive) industries have "primary" importance to local communities and policy makers. Women's employment within these communities is viewed as secondary or tertiary, not only because they are more likely to be in manufacturing and services sectors, but also because they are seen as being of second and third-order importance to the overall workings of the forestry community. (2003, 378)

Reed also makes the insightful remark that academic literature on gendered divisions of labour in resource communities tends to reify the primacy of masculinity and the invisibility and/or incapability of women (2003). While women's formal employment in resource communities, whether in the primary, secondary or tertiary sectors, tends to be quite limited, Reed notes that much of the empirical information available on employment status in the resource sector is not disaggregated by gender. Moreover, Reed found that due to the narrow definitions of what counts as resource occupations according to the Canadian Census and other large-scale studies, many of the resource occupations held by women, such as clerical and administrative work for resource companies as well as cleaning and cooking in work camps, are discursively erased, like much informal social reproductive work which sustains these industries at the community level.

The primacy of resource industry occupations held predominantly by men is also reflective of the ideology of frontier masculinity that characterizes resource industries and communities. This masculinization of resource industries serves to exclude women discursively, materially and physically. According to Brandth and Haugen (2005), work is a crucial determinant of how masculinity and male identities are constructed and performed within rural resource communities, differing substantially from urban notions of masculinity because of the need to define oneself against, or as having control over, nature is more salient in rural areas. Miller suggests that frontier masculinity reflects a vestigial notion of man's relationship to the environment wherein

> [s]uccess in the harsh frontier environment required toughness and tenacity. And those qualities, which were originally required of ranchers and hired hands, are still admired. They have left *cultural imprints* on the contemporary scene. (2004, 61 emphasis in original).

Miller (2004) further suggests that particular qualities associated with masculinity are rewarded, including risk taking, self-reliance, individualism, competitiveness and aggression. Fiske (2005) supports Miller's portrayal of frontier masculinity, noting that the 'Northern frontier' remains a prominent image in the Canadian context of resource development, actively supporting constructions of frontier masculinity as

> a social space in which to be wild; a space where rivers are dammed against all odds in the name of the collective southern interests and where women's liberation is damned in the name of frontier

> individualism; a space in which to surrender to the exotic… (Fiske 2005, 64)

As much ecofeminist literature argues, Fiske suggests that this frontier masculinity reproduces itself through the conjoined subjugation of the natural environment and of women. In Fiske's view, the demonstration of survival capability by women in the wild frontier environment threatens the rugged individualism of frontier masculinity. Thus women are frequently erased from historical accounts and narratives of the northern frontier. In speaking of her work on Canadian trapline history, Fiske states:

> [M]ale heroics cannot be sustained if women too wrest their living from a harsh world. If women routinely butcher and kill wherein lies the glamour the male narrator has appropriated for himself? More compelling a threat, if women of a subordinated race/ethnic group provide for others free from male company whom will men protect? (2005, 59)

This exclusion of women from frontier narratives and identities contributes to highly material practices of excluding women from the employment opportunities bound with frontier masculinity. In her study of female engineers in Alberta's oil industry, Miller (2004) found that within this discourse women were often presumed to be incapable of adopting these qualities to the same extent as men. Those women that did transgress these ascribed gender roles faced

considerable barriers, both at the level of everyday interactions and structural practices. The women in Miller's study reported downplaying their feminine identities through mechanisms such as dressing more 'masculine' and eschewing any display of emotion at work. On the job, the female engineers claimed that male colleagues treated them with paternalistic or condescendingly chivalrous attitudes that inhibited their opportunities to demonstrate their capability. Furthermore, formal and informal bonding opportunities with colleagues tended to revolve around typically 'masculine' activities such as golfing, and no provisions for childcare were made to support women's participation. In a similar study of female engineers in Alberta, Ranson (2005) notes that women who were also mothers or who became pregnant had considerably less ability to downplay their femininity. As a result, many women abandoned their engineering careers altogether, and few women attained the positions of highest status and influence within the industry.

The few existing studies of women employed in blue-collar jobs in the resource sector support the findings of Miller (2004) and Ranson (2005). In a study of women in national resource management in Australia, Davidson and Black (2001) found that women's employment within resource management was highly circumscribed to jobs that seemed to involve inherently feminine skills, such as communication and education. In addition to typecasting, the women interviewed reported high levels of discrimination and harassment by male colleagues and supervisors. In a study of shift work in Canadian paper mills,

Preston et al (2000) note that work hours in resource industries often render women with children unable to work outside the home because of the difficulty of finding child care that fits with erratic work hours. O'Faircheallaigh (1995) further remarks that child care is becoming an increasingly complex issue as the trend toward long-distance commuting in resource industries increases.

Tallichet's (1995, 2000) study of underground coal mining in West Virginia found that, as a minority group, women experiencing sexual harassment and discrimination on the job had little recourse to formally complain due to the increased segregation and tension they would face by co-workers. In addition, the women interviewed reported being excluded from critical training opportunities they needed to advance in their careers and attain more desirable and lucrative positions. This systematic discrimination was also found to occur in the local labour union, further constraining female coal miners' recourse.

It is interesting to note that very few studies of women's experiences and gendered divisions of labour in resource communities have adopted an ecofeminist perspective in their analysis. Clearly, ecofeminist theories have numerous limitations, as discussed elsewhere in this proposal. However, the absence of ecofeminist theory in this body of literature reflects a deeper tendency to minimize the physical environment as a fundamental contextual factor shaping social practices, and to focus almost predominantly on labour practices. Yet, in a large-scale study of western American boomtowns, Nelson found that "[c]hanging

human-land interactions… including shifts from production to consumption, loss of identity tied to certain types of land use, and damage to certain aesthetic qualities of the landscape" (2001, 401) to be the most pertinent themes raised by residents in his four case study communities when asked about their experiences with resource development and local economic restructuring. Rapid resource development in the Canadian North has expanded employment opportunities for both women and men, including occupations with varied implications for the surrounding environment in areas such as land reclamation, resource extraction and local tourism. It is important to understand how these opportunities are potentially gendered, and bound with constructions of frontier masculinity, and local and global environmental values.

While this study intends to draw on more recent feminist theoretical developments that call for greater attention to the multiplicities of experiences and identities, it will build on the insights offered by this existing body of literature on women and resource development. Most notably, this existing work highlights the fundamental contributions of labour practices to gendered relations and the social identities of resource communities and its residents. This study will maintain a critical level of attention to labour practices and identity within the particularly unique context of Fort McMurray's resource boom, which has created unprecedented demands for labour. Specifically, this dissertation examines subjective constructions of appropriate gender roles and behaviours in relation to labour, and how these may be changing alongside larger social, economic and

political processes. A second key issue emerging from the existing literature is the potential for multiple, and potentially contradictory, subjective understandings of the benefits and costs of resource extraction. This dissertation places considerable emphasis on the discourses shaping to social constructions of costs and benefits, namely frontier masculinity and neoliberalism.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this project is a case study. Case studies are used to empirically investigate a phenomenon in its "real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin 2003, 13). Given the embedded nature of the phenomena of interest—women's gendered opportunities and challenges of rapid resource development—within its mutable environmental, social and economic contexts, a comparative case study can provide rich insight into the multiple tensions and influences at play in women's personal and professional experiences. Yet, while case studies recognize the situatedness of the phenomenon of interest in its bounded historical and environmental context, the method acknowledges that dynamic processes are occurring within these contexts and across time. Thus, the case study method requires a high degree of adaptability, opportunism, and reflexivity.

This case study is undertaken from a feminist approach, particularly in the analytical strategy. Specifically, the study has been analytically informed by Dorothy E. Smith's feminist methodology of the everyday world as problematic,

and feminist standpoint epistemology. Smith proposes that using the everyday world as problematic involves a mode of inquiry that

> is consciously designed to start in people's everyday lives and with their experience problematizes the social relations and organization that extend beyond experience and coordinate our lives with those of others elsewhere and elsewhen. (1999, 409)

As such, this methodology offers an analytical guide for using contradictions between lived experiences and the wider forces enacting upon them as a problematic for investigation. The dialectical relationship between individual agents and structural forces are therefore the key point of interest within this method.

Drawing on historical and feminist materialism, as well as ethnomethodology, Smith (1999) argues that women, like other oppressed groups, have particular subjectivities located in their embodied, everyday lives that, like Hegel's slave, provide them with unique vantage points into the systems of (patriarchal) oppression that enact upon them. According to Smith, "the standpoint of women locates us in bodily sites, local, actual, particular; it problematizes, therefore, the coordination of people's activities as social relations organized outside historical settings, connecting people in modes that do not depend on particularized relationships between people" (1999, 75). This feminist standpoint is not a given condition of women, nor based on essentialist and biological notions of womanhood. Rather, it emanates from women's particular

contradictory social locations wherein they both resist and reproduce the patriarchal norms in their everyday lives. Moreover, women's work, whether formal or informal, frequently "anchors the impersonal and objectified forms of action and relations to particular individuals, particular local places, particular relationship" (Smith 1987, 108). As such, they are in a position to have a more comprehensive, multi-layered view of the social relations and material practices orienting their lives, particularly as they related to their formal and informal labour.

This methodological approach insists that research begin with the assumption that "the knowing subject is always located in a particular spatial and temporal site, a particular configuration of the everyday/everynight world" (Smith 1992; 91). Since these knowing subjects are always embodied and situated, it is presumed they have expert knowledge in their own experiences and lives. However, broad and diffuse discursive and structural processes, which Smith refers to as relations of ruling, coordinate "the activities of people in the local sites of their bodily being into relations operating independently of person, place, and time" (1999, 75). Since these relations of ruling generally represent the interests of extra-local actors and institutions, whether that be the CEO of a specific mining company or the widespread institution of patriarchy, they often contradict the values, interests and knowledge developed in the localized everyday/everynight practices of situated individuals. Moreover, these relations of ruling tend to be highly obscure and difficult to identify. However, Smith (1987,

1999) points out that discourses, particularly those encoded in texts, are important access points for uncovering relations of rulings.

Smith insists that inquiry should begin at the level of the everyday/everynight experiences, the heart of social practices. However, these practices and experiences must be viewed as operating in a dialectical fashion with wider relations of ruling that create contradictions in women's lives. These relations of ruling are identifiable only through this situated inquiry that reveals the contradictory experiences most pertinent to the research participants. Thus, rather than imposing a Marxist notion of capitalist exploitation, or other pre-existing analytical framework, to explain contradictions in the everyday/everynight experiences, the analysis must begin with the contradictions in subjective experiences as identified by the research participants and expanded outward to explore and explicate the relevant extra-local forces organizing these localized experiences. Smith (1987) advises that the research participants, who are 'expert knowers' of their own lives, have the strongest insight for identifying the entry points into these contradictions and relations of ruling. The role of the researcher, subsequently, is to trace back and expose the obfuscating relations of ruling leading to these contractions in lived experiences.

LOCATION

The community selected for the case study—Fort McMurray—represents an 'extreme' case in terms of its magnitude and pace of resource extraction.

Extreme cases are useful because they can "clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences" (Flyvbjerg 2001, 78). Major oil and gas extraction in and around Fort McMurray has been underway since the 1970s, but began its current boom of unprecedented growth and rates of extraction in the mid-1990s. Unlike conventional oil and gas, the region surrounding Fort McMurray contains primarily bitumen, which requires significantly more environmental destruction in its extraction, which generally takes the form of open pit mining or steam-assisted gravity drainage (SAG-D), depending on the how deep the bitumen is located (Nikiforuk 2008).

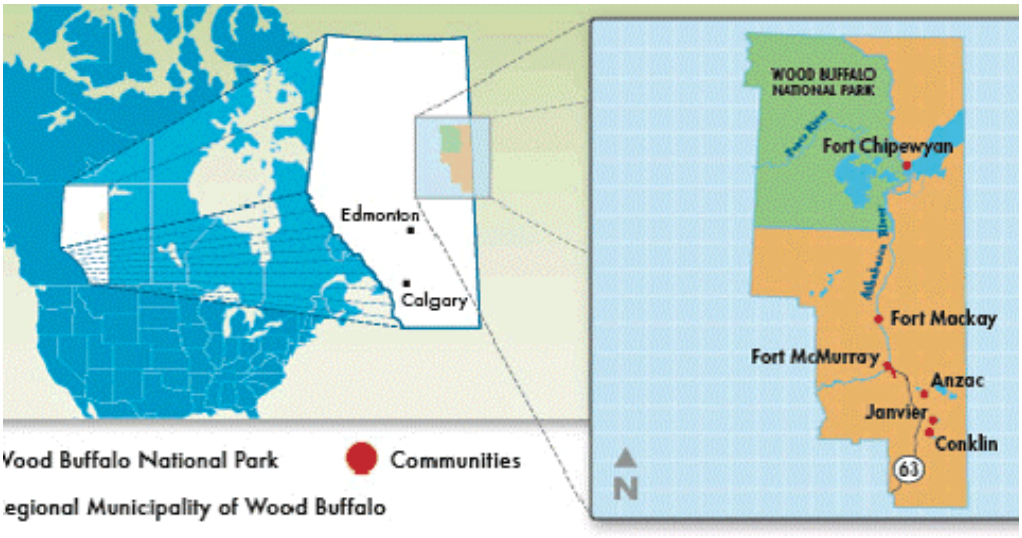

Image source: http://www.shell.com

The magnitude and pace of resource development and subsequent social change in Fort McMurray and its regional municipality of Wood Buffalo (pop. 103,334 [Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo 2009]) are unprecedented in Canada. Located in close proximity to the Athabasca oil sands in northeastern Alberta, Fort McMurray has become a key hub for large oil companies and

migratory workers in Alberta's oil and gas industry (Nikiforuk 2008). In 2006, it is estimated that the five major oil companies operating around Fort McMurray collectively profited over $12 billion (Taylor et al 2007). Between 1999 and 2007, production in the oil sands increased from approximately 300,000 barrels per day to 1.4 million barrels per day, and is estimated to reach three million barrels per day by 2015 (Pembina Institute 2008). Currently, the oil sands in Northern Alberta cover an area of approximately 65,000 km^2 (Pembina Institute 2008).

The community of Fort McMurray has recently experienced huge rates of in-migration and population turnover, with a projected shadow population of transient workers estimated at approximately 25,000 (Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo 2009). Statistics Canada (2006) indicates that the Wood Buffalo Regional Municipality's population increased by 24.3% between 2001 and 2006. Thus, Fort McMurray faces not only tremendous infrastructural challenges in keeping pace with the industrial and population growth, but also critical changes at the cultural and community levels. Tremendous labour shortages have driven up the cost of labour (Taylor et al 2007), encouraging substantial levels of migration from Canada and beyond. The province of Alberta's yearly net migration in 1997 was approximately 50,000, growing to over 70,000 yearly by 2007, resulting in major infrastructural shortages (Government of Alberta 2008). A major portion of this migration and shortfall occurred in Fort McMurray, where

housing, wastewater treatment plants, highways and other key infrastructure and services struggled to keep up with the growth (Government of Alberta 2006).

Due to these relatively unprecedented levels of growth and labour demand, the historical material contexts in which gendered experiences of resource development are constituted are likely to be significantly different than conventional view of resource development communities advanced in the academic literature (McLeod and Hovorka 2008), as described below.

INSTRUMENTAL VERSUS INTRINSIC VALUE

Since the objective of this study is to contribute to mid-range theory of women's experiences and policy initiatives designed to mitigate the gendered impacts of rapid resource development, this project represents an instrumental case study. Instrumental case studies contribute to more generalized understandings of the process or phenomenon of interest (Stake 1995). However, the selected case also holds intrinsic value for the study of gender given its unique social, economic and political composition, which diverges significantly form the small, isolated, single industry dependent, and demographically homogeneous communities targeted by many existing studies. In particular, the unusual magnitude of social change occurring in Fort McMurray warrants significant scholarship, as it presents a number of unique characteristics that call into question the dominant perception of resource communities in the academic literature:

- Fort McMurray is relatively *urban*, with a population over 100,000. Though northern and relatively isolated from other major urban centres, Fort McMurray has relatively high accessibility through air travel and highways.
- Given the scale of development and diversification of the regional economy, the population of Fort McMurray is increasingly *cosmopolitan*. In contrast to the conventional view of migrant and temporary foreign workers as predominantly blue collar, the influx of newcomers to Fort McMurray is characterized by a tremendous variety of educational and employment statuses, as well as cultural and national backgrounds.
- Resource development mega-projects in and around Fort McMurray have been subject to considerable local and international *media exposure*, both positive and negative. A study by the Canada West Foundation found the Alberta oil sands were the subject of over 4,000 national and international media items between 2009 and 2010 (Gibbons 2010). Combined with stricter impact assessment processes than in previous decades and increased partnership with local stakeholders, this media exposure is contributing to an increased potential for *accountability* of resource development projects.
- The demand for labour in the oil sands mega-project has resulted in a push by government and corporations to incorporate women and ethnic minority groups (predominantly Aboriginal people) into the labour force.

DATA COLLECTION, SAMPLE AND ANALYSIS

Case studies involve multiple forms of data collection to provide a complex array of information and insight into the analysis. Data collection in this study was three-fold: semi-structured interviews were conducted with women employed in both the primary resource sector and the social services sector, a focus group with key informants in the helping professions, and a discourse analysis of media representations of women and gender identities in Fort McMurray and the oil sands.

The semi-structured interviews, which were all undertaken in the Summer and Fall of 2009, were used to elicit an understanding of the participant's lived experiences. The interviews touched on questions of what opportunities and costs they perceive the resource boom has on their personal and professional lives, whether these opportunities and costs are perceived to be differentiated by gender, how they negotiate these opportunities and/or costs, and whether their gendered identity and experiences are believed to be impacted by changes to the surrounding physical environment and demographic makeup of their communities. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix A.

The sample for these interviews consisted of thirty-two women, half of whom were employed in the primary resource sector and the other half in the social services sector. The primary resource sector, for the purpose of this study, includes all occupations related to the extraction of natural resources such as

tradespersons, process operators, heavy equipment operators, pipefitters, and reclamation specialists located on-site of resource development projects in the vicinity of the study communities. Individuals employed in the primary resource sector but not regularly working on-site of resource development projects such as engineers, accountants, project managers and clerical workers, were excluded from the sample. Those in similar positions working on-site, however, were included in the study. The human and social services sector positions addressed governmental and nongovernmental provisioning of social housing, job placements, childcare, substance abuse, sexual health counseling, youth drop-in centres, and similar social services. Individuals employed in the health and medical fields were excluded from this study.

An initial reconnaissance trip to Fort McMurray was undertaken in November 2008 in order to identify early themes and potential participants. Interview participants were then recruited through a purposive snowball sampling technique, starting with existing personal connections and 'cold-calls' to various employment sites, unions and community groups relevant to the study (e.g. non-profit organizations, trade unions, etc.). Telephone and email contact was made with initial reconnaissance contacts, existing personal contacts and cold-calls to various agencies and gatekeepers in both sectors. These contacts were asked to pass on the project information and contact sheet to other potential participants. Diversity with respect to age, ethnicity, language, length of residency in Fort McMurray, career status, marital and family status, sexual orientation, and class

were guiding criteria for the snowball recruitment. The project information sheet can be found in Appendix B.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, print media documents pertaining to women and gender relations in Fort McMurray were collected. Based on the initial reconnaissance trip, the high level of media attention and global scrutiny placed on Fort McMurray, particularly in regard to the portrayal of women, was identified as a core concern. As Iyer claims, "media are complex present-day sites for subjectivity formation and are endowed with contradictory forces of 'control' and 'becoming'" (2009, 243). As such, media texts can be considered important mediums for the relations of ruling pertaining to subject formation and normative gender identities. In the specific context of Fort McMurray, news media are also conveyers of gossip, rumours, urban myths and stereotypes regarding social and gender relations in Fort McMurray, which DiFonzo and Bordia (2007) argue are important social mechanisms for making sense of the uncertainties of social change and creating collective identity. Indeed, a substantial portion of Fort McMurray's media coverage—both local and extra-local—directly emphasized and reproduced Fort McMurray's numerous folk devils. It is these specific media articles that explicitly claimed to expose the social changes in Fort McMurray and included representations of women and/or gender relations that were selected for the study. For the purpose of this study, the sample of media was limited to national and international print news and magazines sources, between 2000 until present day. However, other forms of media attention to Fort McMurray,

including radio, internet videos, websites and web commentary, and television news and reality shows, were also extensively examined for contextual information. The articles directly included in the study were obtained by searching for various combinations of the terms 'Fort McMurray', 'Wood Buffalo', 'Oil Sands', 'Social Impact', 'Social Change', 'Frontier', 'Klondike', 'Gold Rush', 'Boom', 'Women/Woman', 'Men/Man', 'Gender', 'Masculine/Masculinity/Male', and 'Feminine/Femininity/Female' in multiple databases including CBCA, Factiva, Google Scholar, and Communications and Mass Media Complete. In total, thirty-four sources were included in the study. A full list of included print media sources in available in Appendix C.

Data analysis proceeded in a qualitative manner, wherein emerging themes and patterns were identified in ongoing basis as interviews are conducted, and transformed into codes that represent emergent analytical and theoretical ideas (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). In qualitative research, the analytical process is generally not considered separate from, but rather coextensive with the data collection process. Throughout the analytical process, codes were compared with existing theoretical and empirical literature, theoretical memos and field notes to refine them from initial (i.e. literal/descriptive codes) to interpretive categories (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). To manage the interview and media data and assist with the analytical process, NVivo (computer software designed for qualitative research) was used.

Given the importance of feminist methodological insights in this study, particular analytical attention is given to contradictions and absences in the data, both in the form of linguistic and discursive occurrences and in narrated experiences (Smith 1999). Such contradictions and absences are key analytical entry points into the wider forces and practices that interact with participants' individual experiences, which may not be initially evident from a superficial exploration of the data.

SOCIAL LOCATION

As an outsider to the community of Fort McMurray, a city renown for its weariness with outside objectification and a strong insider/outsider dynamic, it was critical that I be aware of how my social location might impact the research process. Given that the majority of my participants in my study have post-secondary educations, distinguishing myself as a relatively neutral researcher from media reporters was a relatively smooth process. As this study was presented as part of a larger, long-term research project on the cumulative social impacts of resource development on the community by Naomi Krogman, the principal investigator of the larger SSHRC project that supported this study, I was able to establish a rapport of trust with the participants.

ETHICS

Ethical approval for this research project was received in May 2009 through the Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences Research Ethics Board prior to the commencement of field research. Findings were shared with community members at a conference entitled, Unwrap the Research: Exploring Life in the Fishbowl in October of 2010 in Fort McMurray where I presented the findings of paper three, and Naomi Krogman, the principal investigator of the larger SSHRC project that supported this study, presented some of the findings at a School of Energy and Environment presentation in March of 2010 at the University of Alberta.

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CHAPTER 2 – GENDER AS CONTRADICTION: FROM DICHOTOMIES TO DIVERSITY IN NATURAL RESOURCE EXTRACTION[1]

ABSTRACT

Given the varied nature of resource dependent communities, the gendered experiences of women and men may vary in unexpected and contradictory ways. Building on a review and critique of existing theoretical approaches and studies of US and Canadian extractive resource communities in both the feminist and rural social science literature, I provide an analytical approach to engage with gender in the context of these dramatic changes. This framework, which integrates key insights from recent feminist theorizing, summarizes emergent constructions of masculinity and femininity in a given context by emphasizing the possible contradictions along three broad lines: material, material-discursive, and discursive. This framework shifts the analytical focus from emphasizing broad (often a-temporal and a-spatial) generalizations about women's and men's experiences with resource extraction, to exploring the diversity of these experiences, and where they might result in contradictory interests, imperatives and expectations.

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INTRODUCTION

Numerous social and economic transitions underway for more than thirty years have altered many dynamics in resource dependent communities (O'Toole and Macgarvey 2003; Harvey 2007; McLeod and Hovorka 2008). Transnational capital has accelerated activity in forestry, mining and energy-based communities, where tremendous wealth has been generated as well as short-term, high demands of mobile labour sought by corporations for various phases of extractive activities. More recently, Young and Matthews (2007, 180) argue that neoliberal restructuring has resulted in a number of specific changes to communities reliant on resource extraction in British Columbia, including rights liberalization (permitting firms to subdivide, lease and trade tenure-rights, permitting mineral claims, exploration and development on Canadian Crown lands), market liberalization (open markets for logs) and spatial liberalization (state makes few demands on companies to try to capture value-added opportunities regionally, assure stable employment, and make corporate actors commit to protecting specific environments). Contract workers are increasingly sought from outside the host country's boundaries to provide companies with flexibility in production and labour arrangements (Hayter et al 2003). Additionally, the increasing proportion of dual career couples, full or part time paid working women, women in male dominated fields such as forestry, oil and gas development, mining, and service business ownership suggests that gender roles have become more varied in North American resource dependent communities (McLeod and Hovorka 2008).

Gendered experiences and identities in the context of these changes in extractive communities represent a small but important section of the social science literature on resource communities and resource development. However, very few theoretical and analytical frameworks exist to inform this scholarship and characterize the importance of gender within these broader structural changes. While a number of scholars inform their inquiries into gender and extractive based communities with feminist social science (Harris et al 1995; Naples and Sachs 2000; Reed and McIlveen 2006), the majority of literature on extractive based communities has not made the link to the feminist sociological subfield that has most prominently pushed the research boundaries on gendered experiences (Banerjee and Bell 2007). According to Reed (2003a) and others (e.g. Randall and Ironside 1996; Davis and Gerrard 2000) much of the theoretical work emanating from within the social sciences on resource extraction and its host communities has either rendered women's and sexual minorities' experiences invisible, or has addressed gender issues in a cursory fashion.

The existing literature addressing gender in Northern resource communities was largely developed in the late 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Luxton 1980; Freudenburg, 1981; Moen 1981; Moen et al 1981). At that time, the economic and social fabric of resource communities in the US and Canada was presumed to be quite different: single industries dominated local economies in isolated communities, populations consisted of predominantly young, white, heterosexual families, and gendered divisions of labour were highly

differentiated, wherein men occupied the role of primary breadwinners while women remained confined to unpaid labour in the home (Randall and Ironside 1996; Porter 1999; Scott 2007).

Extractive resource communities have changed in recent decades with transnational capital-backing of projects, communication technologies, labour recruitment from extra-local and international places, and environmental and competing land use challenges to traditional extractive industries. Some resource dependent communities are caught in a series of booms and busts, others rely on several natural resource-based industries (including those that support tourism), and many may be characterized by a changing division of labour, whereas others still have suffered long term declines in their regional and economic importance in relation to urban manufacturing regions. Correspondingly, the gendered experiences of women in such communities are also likely to vary. Reed (2000, 2003a, 2003b), Gibson-Graham (1993), Davis (1993, 2000); Tallichet (1995, 2000); Kafarowski (2005, 2009); Sandilands (2002, 2005) and others have begun to document the nuanced experiences of women with all their variation in places of resource reliance and rural environmental contestations. This paper seeks to highlight this work and build on it with an analytical approach to changing gendered experiences in the context of contemporary resource extraction, which focuses on contradictions in experiences of gender at material and discursive levels. I argue such a framework will be useful for scholars to situate their gender-related social science research on extractive communities in the broader suite of

emerging work in this specific topical area, especially in terms of feminist scholarship that recognizes diversity and inherent contradictions in gendered experience. I also wish to encourage greater articulation around the epistemological approaches to the study of gender in natural resources.

To develop this framework, I draw on a wide range of feminist, environmental and rural literature, including scholarship on gendered experiences in agriculturally based communities and the global South (e.g. Naples 1994; Little and Austin 1996; Sachs 1996; Agarwal 2001; Westermann et al 2005; Bryant and Pini 2009). While this framework may be useful to cases in these wider regions and contexts, I argue a more narrow focus on extractive-based communities in the global North in the paper is warranted. Two Canadian authors, Reed and Christie (2009) suggest that feminist scholarship in distant countries appears to gain more scholarly attention in the environmental social sciences than that closer to home. The impacts of globalization are likely intensified in extractive based communities and have more unpredictable social outcomes (Stedman et al 2004; Young and Matthews 2007). Further, the fluctuations in population, migration, booms and busts, occupational categories, and environmental alterations make these sites ideal for exploring transitions and contradictions in gendered experiences. By focusing on extractive based communities I cogently draw on existing examples and omissions of the integration of feminist scholarship in one scholarly area of inquiry. I include forestry and fishing-reliant communities in the

extractive category in North America given the ability for these industries to be large scale and exhaust these resources beyond their renewability (Clapp 1998).

I argue there are two key shifts in feminist theorizing about gender that have occurred over the past three decades, which I believe are worthy of greater attention in the study of resource development, as identified by Ray (2006, 460): 1) the shift from 'universalizing to particularizing and contextualizing women's experiences' and 2) from "conceptualizing men and women as categories and focusing on the category 'women' to questioning the content of the category and shifting to the exploration of gendered practices". In conjunction with these shifts, feminist scholarship has moved away from grand theorizing about gendered experiences toward middle range theories and "empirically grounded work on specific issues and contexts... [which can] analyse women's everyday existence and the meanings women give to their lives without losing sight of structural patterns of dominance and subordination" (Jackson 2001, 286). This nuanced approach places emphasis on the multiplicity of experiences and identities in the shifting historical and cultural contexts in which gender is (re)produced and experienced. I use these feminist insights to develop an analytical framework to study gendered experiences that recognizes emergent constructions of masculinity and femininity and the possible contradictions between these constructions and the material practices and opportunities organized around gender in a given context. This framework shifts the analytical focus from emphasizing broad (often a-temporal and a-spatial) generalizations about women's and men's

experiences with resource extraction, to exploring the diversity of these experiences, and where they might result in contradictory interests, imperatives and expectations.

NATURAL RESOURCE SCHOLARSHIP: WHY GENDER MATTERS

Despite the undeniable relevance of gender as a critical variable in social experiences of resource development, the environmental social sciences, particularly scholarship on natural resources, has largely disregarded gender as an important analytical category (Mayes and Pini 2010). In many cases, gender is often addressed only superficially, and generally conflated with 'women's issues' that may be distinctive from the dominant interests of men (Banerjee and Bell 2007). Such women's issues are most often those related to childcare, local health, and consumption opportunities, and may not provide insight into the ways gender is internalized, experienced or embedded in larger power structures (Bryant and Pini 2009).

More recently, attention is turning towards women's employment opportunities in resource development (e.g. Eveline and Booth 2002; Reed 2003a, b; McLeod and Hovorka 2008; Mayes and Pini 2010); however, surprisingly little is known about who is actually participating in primary resource industries. Data on women in the primary sector are notoriously incomplete and rarely give insight into the wage and skill levels of women's employment (Reed 2003a; Mills 2006). Studies on women's perceptions of, and involvement in, resource management in

Northern contexts are even less forthcoming (for exceptions, see Davidson and Black 2001; Reed and Varghese 2007). Moreover, Reed and Christie further point out that

> while gender remains one of the key axes of inequality scrutinized by environmental scholars of the Third World, researchers focused on problems in First World settings continue to omit gender (e.g. gender role making, gender relations or gender identity) as a central construct in interpreting how power circulates and affects environmental change, conflict, and management (2009, 246-7; see also Clancy and Roehr 2003; Mayes and Pini 2010).

The dichotomization of men and women, as well as masculine and feminine interests, into two overarching categories, according to feminist philosopher Val Plumwood (1991), obscures the fact that much of our experiences and interests, regardless of gender, may be shared. Gender is clearly an important social location that may entail different insights, perspectives and needs of particular issues such as health, community wellbeing, economic development and environmental sustainability, but these issues are nevertheless relevant to all people in a resource community. Moreover, as resource communities and resource development diversify and take on different economic, demographic and cultural characteristics (Randall and Ironside 1996; Nelson 2001), it is quite possible that these discursive polarizations of masculine and feminine interests will modify as well (Midgley 2006).

A welcomed development over past few decades is the inclusion of feminist advances in areas like agrarian (e.g. Naples 1994; Little and Austin 1996; Sachs 1996; O'Toole and Macgarvey 2003; Midgley 2006; Bryant and Pini 2009) and development studies (e.g. Leach 1992; Rocheleau et al 1996; Agarwal 2001). In the study of resource extraction and resource-dependent communities, there is also increasing attention to the diverse and contradictory gendered interests and identities (e.g. Gibson-Graham 1993; Reed 2000, 2003a, b; Sandilands 2002; Scott 2007; Mayes and Pini 2010). However, the attention to feminist theorizing in this particular sub-section of rural and environmental scholarship remains comparatively marginal, and much of the work on gender is emanating from disciplines other than the rural and natural resource social sciences, such as cultural studies, feminist labour studies, and women's studies. Yet, even within these complementary disciplines, resource extraction is rarely met with as much attention as other environmental and rural issues (e.g. environmental activism, food studies, gendered experiences in agrarian settings, etc.)

Given the relative paucity of studies in the area of gender and natural resource extraction in the global North, there is little understanding of how gendered experiences, identities, opportunities and challenges have changed over time. In previous decades, the focus of scholarship on gender and resource extraction in Northern contexts within the rural and natural resource social sciences was largely preoccupied with a victor-or-victim debate (for further discussion on this debate, see Reed 2003a), where women's experiences with

resource development and extraction were generally compared with the dominant male experience (e.g. Gill 1990). Underlying these early approaches was an assumption that women's experiences and interests are relatively unitary, focused on concerns such as health care and children's education. Similarly, Courtenay (2000, 2006) has remarked that very few studies address men's perspectives on their personal and family health and wellbeing in resource communities. The experiences that would generally be characterized as outliers, such as those of sexual minorities or of women working in male-dominated resource occupations, received, and continue to receive, considerably less attention.

Integrating attention to gender issues in resource extraction without relying on essentialized conceptions of women and men exposes the inherent analytical difficulty of recognizing and addressing widespread gendered inequalities and distributions of power over time and space, without reifying these differences as somehow natural or inevitable. However, scholars attuned to feminist theorizing are exploring the diversity among women and men, and the possibility that individuals may have competing interests due to conflicting gendered and other imperatives. For instance, Reed's (2000, 2003b) study of women's activism on both sides of a logging dispute in coastal British Columbia demonstrates the potential for contradictory feminine gender imperatives. Women in Reed's study concurrently held concerns about protecting the environment and supporting the forestry industry in which the male members of the community

were employed—what are normally characterized as two opposite sides of overt conflict in the community.

Given the pace and diversity of structural changes in resource industries and communities, there are a number of questions that have been brought up by scholars concerned with gender that have not been adequately explored or addressed. For example, the trend toward fly-in/fly-out labour operation in mining, oil, gas and other resource-based industries in Australia and Canada (Houghton 1993; O'Faircheallaigh 1995; Storey 2001) is an important topical area that showcases the need for more temporally and spatially situated accounts. Since the 1980s, resource companies have generally preferred fly-in/fly-out arrangements (FIFO, also referred to as long-distance commuting) to the construction of new towns, as they reduce initial capital expenditures and are more likely to attract skilled labourers who are unwilling to permanently reside near the work site (Houghton 1993; Storey 2001). Recent studies on long-distance commuting in resource industries that include a gender lens have focused extensively on the psychosocial and health impacts in the context of urban, middle-class, heterosexual nuclear families in which the male head of household is the breadwinner (e.g. Kaczmarek and Sibbel 2008; Taylor and Simmonds 2009; for exceptions see O'Faircheallaigh 1995; Pirotta 2009). Many of these studies have concluded that these households have the necessary coping abilities to withstand the strains of long-distance commuting, and often find these arrangements more positive as they can be financially lucrative and increase

career opportunities for women in the metropolitan areas. Yet, important issues have been raised in different contexts that have not been incorporated into the literature on this topic. For instance, Aboriginal women in small communities in the Northwest Territories of Canada (where employment opportunities outside of FIFO mining are limited and social ties beyond the nuclear family have high importance) have raised concerns around the need for directly deposited paychecks, visitation flights, and specific training opportunities for women in the mines (Status of Women Council of NWT 1999). Furthermore, the experiences of female long-distance commuters have not been well documented (for an exception see Pirotta 2009), despite O'Faircheallaigh's statement in 1995 that this "is another issue which clearly requires further research" (211).

FEMINIST INSIGHTS FOR STUDYING GENDER AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION

Recent feminist theorizing has significantly advanced the ways in which gender configures into the analysis of identities, embodiment, inequalities and other social practices. Perhaps the most sophisticated—and pertinent for the study of natural resource extraction, given the pervasive victim-or-victor debate—feature of feminist theorizing is the re-orientation from examining women and men as "'master' categories" (McCall 2005, 1777; see also Ray 2006) while maintaining the analytical salience of gender, and gendered inequalities, opportunities and challenges. The dismantling of master categories of 'men' and 'women' requires a fundamental shift away from emphasizing only broad-scale

trends among men and women as groups, and assuming that what members of these groups hold in common is most analytically salient. As Lorber argues,

> The common practice of comparing women and men frequently produces data that is so mixed that it takes another level of analysis to sort out meaningful categories for comparison. It would be better to start with patterns of behavior derived from data analysis of all subjects and then see the extent to which they attach to the conventional global categories of sex, sexuality, and gender, or better yet, to one or more of the components. (2006, 450)

When examining natural resource extraction and resource dependent communities throughout the world, it is evident that gender diversity refers not only to intersections of ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and class, but also to the relationships with the environment, opportunities for participation in extractive industries and political leadership, household and community divisions of labour, and appropriate gender behaviors.

A number of prominent scholars in the rural social sciences have proposed various feminist-compatible methods that facilitate a greater awareness of the diversity of gendered experiences, such as narrative (Harris et al 1995), ethnography (Naples and Sachs 2000), focus groups (Pini 2002), activist research (Naples 2003), and textual/discourse analysis (Brandth and Haugen 2005a, b). However, both within feminist and rural social science scholarship, the development of *analytical* strategies which allow researchers to provisionally use

gender ‘categories’ to explore divisions in society while simultaneously recognizing the fluidity and transience of what *constitutes* these categories, has been a more challenging endeavor (McCall 2005; Reed and McIlveen 2006). I believe that the small but growing body of work on gender and resource extraction that combines environmental social sciences and other feminist disciplines provides important analytical insight that can be of use for engaging with gender, intersectionality and resource extraction. I wish to highlight and characterize this work along this proposed framework in order to provide a resource for other scholars in the field of gender and natural resource extraction in the global North, as well as to point to important areas of scholarship that I believe require increased attention.

In the following section, I present an analytical framework designed to facilitate the ways rural social scientists and other scholars of resource extraction can engage with gender. To illustrate this framework, I draw on the work of both feminist and environmental social scientists in the area of natural resource extraction and gender. It should be noted that the authors I reference do not necessarily organize their studies along this proposed framework; however I find their work exemplary of the analytical strategies I am promoting. I choose to present these analytical strategies as a framework rather than as a theory, since my intention is not to provide explicit predictions about nor definitively explain the impacts on gendered experiences resulting from natural resource extraction. My intention is to further contribute to the dialogue between feminist theorizing and

the scholarship on natural resource extraction by emphasizing analytical strategies that permit a more thorough understanding of diversity and change in gendered experiences.

DISCURSIVE AND MATERIAL CONTRADICTIONS IN GENDERED EXPERIENCES

While understanding the local and historically situated permutations of gender is an essential starting point, the examination of the interplay of global and local forces on constructions of and contradictions in gender is equally fundamental. Feminist scholars have long been aware of the richness of exploring contradictions in daily, subjective experience as an entry point for accessing gendered meanings, identities and power inequalities (Smith 1987; Hennessy 1993; Naples 1994; Gibson-Graham 2006). Contradictions are a particularly useful focus of investigation because they open up the level of analysis across the global, regional, community and household levels (Smith 1987). Exploring and uncovering the multiple contradictions—as opposed to emphasizing only what is consistent among genders across different contexts—in the lives of men and women in resource communities can provide a more thorough understanding of how the benefits and consequences of economic restructuring in resource dependent towns and regions are distributed in relation to gender. Furthermore, such contradictions can also serve to break down false dichotomizations of women's and men's interests, and provide a more relational understanding of gender.

I present a framework that is grounded on the fundamental feminist premise that gender has a material and discursive dimension, which interplay to create a variety of opportunities and contradictions for men and women (Sloan 2006; Scott 2007; Bryant and Pini 2009) across macro-, meso- and micro-levels (O'Toole and Macgarvey 2003). This framework characterizes these contradictions along three broad lines: material, material-discursive, and discursive (Table 1). While these three categories do not necessarily address all possible types of contradictions in subjective experience, they do represent a useful analytical starting point. By 'material' practices, I am referring to the social structures, conditions, relations and ways of organizing directly and indirectly related to resource extraction that interplay with the daily lives of men and women. I refer to these as practices because they are often in a state of flux. These practices, which include resource-use policies, demographic shifts, alterations to the physical environment, modes of production, global and household divisions of labour, can emerge at both the local and extra-local level. Similarly, discursive practices, which include the production and reproduction of subject positions, ideologies, stereotypes, cultural beliefs and other forms of negotiated meanings around gender and resource extraction, may be place-specific or have more global resonance. The ways in which gendered and sexual identities are performed, or inscribed onto bodies, landscapes and other spaces, according to our framework, would be characterized as discursive practices.

The notion that gender is simultaneously material and discursive reflects the fact that the ways in which social practices are organized according to gender are interrelated—but not always precisely in line—with the discursive constructions of gender in a particular location. The socio-cultural meanings and ideologies pertaining to particular gendered practices are variable, subjective, and may have an internal logic that can support, naturalize, obscure or challenge related social practices. Material social practices and conditions, such as global and household divisions of labour, do not necessarily vary in a consistent or direct fashion with discursive changes. For instance, Miller (2004) reports that women increasingly occupy highly skilled positions such as engineers and geologists in the mining and oil and gas fields, yet these industries remain highly masculinist, and pervaded by paternalistic discourses of women's (in)ability to perform their jobs.

Certain generalizations will be relevant across a wide variety of contexts, such as the tendency for men to occupy the primary breadwinner role. However, these generalizations are likely to be resisted in many cases, and will take on different facets and meanings from place to place. It is these contradictions that should be the primary focus of analysis. I argue that an examination of gender in the context of resource extraction requires first and foremost an understanding of the particular constructions of gender that are most salient to the locale, rather than an assumption that these constructions can be understood a priori. Just as resource development is a highly variegated phenomenon across and within

industries (Stedman et al 2004), gender is likely to be experienced and meaningful with equal nuance. The experience of gender in a West Virginian coalmine, a west coast forestry town, the Alberta oil patch, and an Arctic fishing village may have as many differences as similarities.

For instance, there is a strong perception that rural areas—resource communities in particular —are characterized by a logic of the "masculine" public sphere and the 'feminine' private sphere (Little and Austin 1996; Bates 2006; Midgley 2006; Scott 2007). In some communities, this may result in a circumstance where women have very little access to waged employment, participation in resource management or public decision-making (e.g. Luxton 1980). Yet, in other cases, issues of public decision-making, including local politics and employment outside the home, are well within the purview of women's responsibilities (e.g. Midgley 2006). Kafarowski (2009) points out that in the small northern Inuit community of Inukjuak in Nunavut, women have achieved higher levels of education than men, and have a higher rate of participation in waged employment and volunteer positions. Yet, these achievements are not accompanied by a higher status for women in the community where (men's) subsistence-based activities like hunting and fishing are accorded more value and prestige.

Empirical trends that highlight inequalities between men and women, such as levels of women's participation or exclusion in resource management boards,

are an important element of understanding gendered experiences with resource development. While inexorably fundamental, these trends and differences between men and women do not entirely capture the relevance of gender. As Kafarowski's (2009) example attests, gender is pivotal in *how* such trends and inequalities (or relative equalities) play out in the daily lives of men and women. In many cases, localized constructions of gender may in fact render certain seemingly beneficial equalities or other social forces as contradictions in the daily lives of women and men. For instance, O'Toole and Macgarvey (2003) noted that the forces of cultural and economic change in one region of Australia offered women greater opportunity to adopt leadership roles in their communities. However, many women encountered what O'Toole and Macgarvey called a "double bind" (2003, 180), wherein women who were too outspoken were chastised and labeled as "mad" by their male counterparts, yet those who remained more silent were simply ignored. In either case, these sanctions limited the effectiveness of women's participation. Indeed, examining only the empirically identifiable trends related to gender differences which follow a cause-and-effect logic—as is the predominant analytical method in scholarship on gender and resource extraction in the global North—might not reveal the emergence of such contradictions. I believe that an explicit analytical focus on the emergence of gendered contradictions can provide an important complement to the literature on resource extraction.

Table 1
Material-Discursive Contradictions in Gendered Experiences of Resource Development

Type of Contradiction	Characteristics	Example of Topical Areas	Examples of Methods	Levels of Outcomes
Between Material Practices	Commonly addressed in natural resource and feminist scholarship Examines a set of observable conditions/practices in relation to others Often tries to establish "what is changing or changed"	Relationship between shift work and childcare practices (e.g. Preston et al., 2000)	Amenable to mixed methods Useful for social impact assessments	Macro-level Meso-level
Between Material Practices and Discourses	Commonly addressed in natural resource and feminist scholarship Examines relationships between a set of conditions/practices in relation to beliefs and negotiated understandings of these practices Often asks why certain groups' interests are dominant while others are marginalized	Cultural practices around women in non-traditional occupations (e.g. Davidson and Black, 2001; Tallichet, 1995, 2000)	Amenable to ethnographic methods Commonly used with social constructionist and critical theories	Meso-level
Between Competing and Contradictory Discourses	Commonly addressed in feminist scholarship, less common in natural resource scholarship Examines conflicts between dominant discourses, ideologies, stereotypes, socio-cultural meanings and identities Often explores dissonances between subjective identities and social norms/expectations	Conflicts between women's social roles as environmental activists and as labor activists (e.g. Reed, 2000; Scott, 2007)	Amenable to discourse analysis, interviews, media studies Commonly used with post-structuralist and postcolonial theories	Meso-level Micro-level

MATERIAL CONTRADICTIONS

Contradictions between material practices are often the most overt and empirically observable, as they tend to result from broad, intersecting forces of economic, political and cultural restructuring. As such, material contradictions pertaining to gender often have macro-level outcomes and consequences. However, they may also have meso-level consequences that are specifically tied to particular communities and regions. As extractive industries and resource communities encounter numerous changes in their material organization, the direct consequences of these changes are often the object of investigation: job losses, shifts in the organization of production, relocations of capital investment,

etc. But direct consequences do not tell the whole story. For instance, Davis indicates that policies governing resource industries are often ignorant of their impact on local social relations: "It is currently the vogue among Canadian policy and development planners to see the solutions to the declining resource base as involving nothing short of a radical rearrangement of the social relations and customs…" (2000, 344), demonstrating an ignorance of the extent to which resource industries have been built upon social reproductive labour and other cultural practices that have traditionally been the purview of women (Luxton 1980; Felt et al 1995), and the sometimes traumatic consequences for men employed in roles for which there is strong occupational identity.

Even where resources are not declining, labour practices may reorder household responsibilities. For example, Preston et al (2000) undertook a comparative study of shift work in three paper mill communities, and found that the responsibility to adapt childcare and other household responsibilities to men's shift work rotations fell almost entirely upon their wives, whether or not their wives were working outside the home. The authors also found that employed women were likely to quit their jobs in order take care of their children, or, in one community, to hire live-in nannies. These strategies involved dramatic changes to the material organization of the household.

What is important to recognize is that the outcomes of contradictory material practices can vary across communities in surprising ways. For instance,

following the collapse of the fishing industry in Newfoundland, Davis found that women in one community, Grey Rock Harbour, increasingly undertook paid work and make-shift welfare projects outside the home "that would stereotypically be defined as male, such as painting houses, paving paths, and developing tourist facilities" (1993, 468) alongside men. However, in another Newfoundland community heavily impacted by the collapse of the fishing industry, Corner Brook, Bates (2006) found that women who entered into waged employment did so *inside* the home in traditionally feminine ways, such as making clothing or running hair salons and daycares, which maintained a spatially-segregated gendered division of labour.

The intersection of gender with other axes of structural inequalities, such as race or class, is also likely to play out in the form of material contradictions. Recently, Bryant and Pini (2009) argued that gender and class in rural communities are intimately interrelated, and need to be examined in both their structural and lived-experience contexts. Like McCall (2005), Bryant and Pini (2009) assert that gender and class are not additive, but have complex interrelationships with emergent properties that are not easily untangled. When traditional markers of class for men change, such as land ownership or occupation, the class status of women in the household may not vary in direct proportion, given that their markers of class may be different, such as participation in volunteer activities. An evident contradiction emerges wherein a woman's class status (because of how it intersects with her gender) may not align

with her household's class status (which tends to be dependent on the male head of household). In resource communities undergoing significant restructuring–such intersectionalities are a particularly important focus for understanding gendered experiences at the community level.

The tremendous number of structural changes occurring in resource communities and industries are also a key site of material contradictions that I believe require further scholarly investigation. I call for more attention to the varied experiences men and women have with deindustrialization, resource booms and busts, fly-in/fly-out labour arrangements, collapsed resource stocks, and community-based resource management. How, for instance, are these diverse structural changes across resource sectors intersecting with more varied household compositions (e.g. single persons, same-sex couples, roommates, extended families, etc.), patterns of social and cultural interaction, and more employment opportunities for men and women?

The analysis of material contradictions is compatible with a diverse range of theoretical and methodological approaches. However, since material contradictions reflect broad-based patterns of intersecting practices with particularized outcomes, I believe that mixed-methods studies are particularly useful for uncovering these contradictions. Furthermore, I believe attention to material contradictions could be particularly useful for gendered analysis

components of social impact assessments related to new resource development projects.

MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE CONTRADICTIONS

Contradictions at the material-discursive level tend to result in consequences observable at the meso- or community-level. Such contradictions are perhaps the most pervasive since they reflect the reciprocal influences of material changes, such as changes in employment opportunities, income, housing availability, and so forth, with beliefs, values, meanings and perceptions of the practices associated with material changes. Material-discursive contradictions are most widely recognized in studies that examine gendered identities in resource communities, and are highly compatible with ethnographic methodologies, and social constructionist and critical theories. Reed (2003a, 375) touches upon such a contradiction—referring to it as a "paradox"—in her exploration of women's marginality in a British Columbian forestry community. According to Reed:

> Women who sought employment in forestry reported on outright exclusion from work opportunities or documented both sexism and marginalization in their work environments. Yet, despite these experiences, all women retained strong support for their partners in forestry and/or the forest industry more broadly. Indeed, some women even celebrated the characteristics of masculinity that define forestry culture and effectively eliminated equal opportunities for women in

> forestry employment. Consequently, and perhaps inadvertently, they reinforced their own marginality. (2003a, 375)

Wicks (2002), in study of an underground coal mine in Nova Scotia where 26 male workers were killed from a major explosion in 1992, found that the internalization of masculine identities and responsibilities specific to their occupations as well as to their roles as heads of households resulted in an institutional practice of working in unpleasant and risky conditions and neglecting safety standards:

> As a function of financial need and limited employment opportunities, these men became vulnerable to a labour market that treated workers with very little regard. With livelihood being a prime issue, these men continued to work in the face of danger. They were trapped between wanting to quit their jobs but feeling unable to as a result of a need for money accompanying their roles as husbands and fathers. The result was a 'willingness' to stay in the very jobs that put these men in real danger, jobs that carried with them notions of appropriate behaviors that downplayed, or even ignored, risks. (2002, 321)

In these examples, it is evident that it is not simply the existence of strongly gendered identities that is of relevance; it is the contradictory consequences in the form of marginalization from necessary income-earning opportunities and the increased risk to personal safety that are of interest.

Hegemonic masculinities are another loci of material-discursive contradictions in resource extraction (Brandth and Haugen 2005a, b; Cloke 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt describe hegemonic masculinities as constructed models of gender relations that "express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires… [and] articulate loosely with the practical constitution of masculinities as ways of living in everyday local circumstances" (2005, 838). Hegemonic masculinities always exist in a hierarchical relation to other forms of masculinity as well as femininity. In resource communities, hegemonic forms of masculinity are bound with occupational identities. As Dunk and Bartol's (2005) study of a Canadian forestry community exemplifies, hegemonic forms of masculinity are constructed not only through discursive mechanisms like sexist and racist humor and language, but also through material ones both in the workplace and in the wider community, such as excluding women, gay men and Aboriginal persons from spaces like bars and sports facilities. However, in light of deindustrialization in their community and the decline of unionized extraction-based jobs, this particular form of masculinity has ill-equipped male workers to adjust to the changing political economy:

> the local working class is heavily affected by these changes. The male working-class culture that developed during the industrial era was based around male solidarity as expressed in the informal male group and a strong anti-intellectualism. The male working-class solidarity was also strongly sexist and racist. It has not equipped the local male workers to react in a progressive manner to more recent changes. (2005, 41)

The notion of hegemonic masculinity and the increasing mobility of labour in some resource sectors, such as mining, oil and gas, also pose potential material-discursive contradictions. Rural masculinity scholars have insisted that there is no single overarching notion of masculinity in rural contexts (Campbell and Bell 2000; Cloke 2005). What are the consequences of transposing various types of masculinities in different resource contexts? For example, the booming oil sands in Western Canada, which relies on a large mobile workforce to meet its labour shortage throughout the 2000s, has been widely regarded as a 'saviour' for many male resource workers from Eastern Canada where forestry and fishing operations have largely collapsed. Are masculinities unique to fishing villages and forestry towns undermined in oil extractive industries characterized by a frontier masculinity? Are these various forms of masculinities compatible with mobile work camps where more traditional household patterns of social reproduction are ruptured?

Changing technological practices in extractive industries are also a potential source of material-discursive contradictions. The introduction of technologies and machines such as tractors in agrarian regions (Brandth 1995; Saugeres 2002) and chainsaws in forestry industries (Brandth and Haugen 2005b) have been shown to reinforce the masculinity of rural occupations and may even render women's participation in rural industries even more invisible (Saugeres 2002). However, anecdotal evidence (Gardner 2002; Mayes and Pini 2010;

forthcoming by first author) suggests that in other industries, namely oil and gas extraction, large-scale technologies may in fact be perceived as enabling for many women wishing to enter the field. In the Alberta oil patch, for instance, there is a widely held perception that women's 'inherent' tendencies to be gentler with machines make them better and more desirable heavy equipment operators.

Examining material-discursive contradictions can shed light on the women as victors-or-victims debate, and explain why in certain circumstances women are able to access increased employment opportunities in the face of resource development while in other cases the benefits do not spill over to women. McLeod and Hovorka's (2008) recent study of an oil and gas town demonstrates that women benefited from an economic boom by the generation of multiple employment opportunities in the secondary and tertiary sectors, which were discursively constructed as a form of their (gendered) community-building responsibility. In other cases where formal employment is viewed as competing with women's culturally ingrained community and household responsibilities, women are not as likely to benefit in the same way from economic diversification.

Conversely, Tallichet's (1995, 2000), and Davidson and Black's (2001) studies of women in resource-related occupations that have historically been dominated by men demonstrate that women may face considerable barriers to career advancement due to cultural or ideological constructions of appropriate gender behavior. For instance, many women working in these non-traditional

occupations reported being typecast into undertaking particular responsibilities and tasks at their jobs that were deemed more 'suitable' to women, such as cleaning up workspaces. Women were also prevented from undertaking responsibilities that were not deemed suitable to their gender, but which provided essential training and skills needed to advance into higher status, higher waged positions. Similarly, Eveline and Booth (2002) argue that invocation of female miners' sexuality was an integral feature of an affirmative action policy at a large gemstone mine in Western Australia, in which "the stress is placed on how male employees benefit from having female co-workers" (566) who "lent a dash of sexual excitement to work life, such as 'painted fingernails and a bit of leg'" (567).

A thorough investigation of the interactions between the gendered material practices and the discourses that circulate throughout resource industries can shed important light on the ways marginalization is sustained and justified in resource contexts. The continual exclusion of women from employment opportunities through discursive constructions of female bodies as anomalous in resource sectors is a key example. Material-discursive contradictions can also provide insight into the continuation of self-destructive practices occurring within resource industries and communities. For instance, hegemonic masculinities that associate masculine identities with extractive industries, can encourage health and safety risks, and often remain pervasive long after the social and economic practices they advocate have disappeared.

DISCURSIVE CONTRADICTIONS

The third category of contradictions—between competing discourses—is perhaps the least perceptible and discussed in environmental and natural resource social sciences, despite increasing attention in feminist research. This area of inquiry examines the ways in which cultural constructions, through language and other symbols, embed within them gendered expectations and culturally constructed gendered categories. Such constructions, embodied in discourses, are not merely reflections of material practices, but are gendered notions of what is possible or appropriate (Gibson-Graham 2006; Scott 2007). Such gendered notions may hold contradictions that manifest in real consequences for men and women within their daily life. Though discursive contradictions may be connected to either global or local forces, their outcomes tend to be most apparent at the micro-level. Post-structuralist, postcolonial and other theories attuned to differences and diversity in discourses, and methods such as semi-structured interviews, discourse analysis and media critiques are highly amenable to investigations of this type of contradiction.

The intersections of available subject positions are perhaps the most significant loci of discursive contradictions in the context of resource extraction. Beliefs and visions of women's identities in resource communities and industries are especially prone to extreme polarization, which can designate and limit appropriate gendered action and behaviors. Gibson-Graham (1993) and Reed (2003a, b) observe that there is a tendency to assume there is a singular discursive

construction of 'woman' in rural and resource communities based on their maternal roles as hardworking supporters of their male family members. Women who transgress this role are often subjected to oppositional discursive constructions of their gender, as seen in the debate whether women can be 'good mothers' while being 'good workers' (Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

Another such polarization can be found in ideal constructions of women-as-sexual-beings and women-as-capable-employees. Miller's (2004) study of female engineers in Alberta's oil industry evinces the incompatibility of women achieving status as capable employees in their male dominated occupations with visible markers of 'femininity' and female sexuality such as wearing make-up or moderately revealing clothing. In order to cope with their male dominated profession, women in the study expressed the need to erase outward signs of their sexuality and femininity, including expression of emotion and intuition.

The polarizations of feminine subject positions, however, can also be more place-specific and ephemeral—lying under the surface for long periods of time and only precipitated by other conflicts and events—and therefore less easily anticipated. Reed's (2000) investigation of a logging dispute in coastal British Columbia centers on a potential discursive contradiction regarding justifiable forms of women's activism. Although some women's social location as mothers is often assumed to entail compatible positions as environmental protectors *and* defenders of their communities, the logging dispute of interest in this study—

Clayoquot Sound—generated a major protest movement in the early 1990s pitting female environmental activists against women who protested in support of the logging industry. Reed asserts the presence of female activists in support of the logging industry was both denigrated and ignored within the academic and environmental activist spheres, since it could not be reconciled with the strong discursive conception of women as environmental protectors.

Another important, though frequently overlooked characteristic of resource communities and industries, is that masculine identities are as likely to take on multiple facets and constructions as feminine ones (Connell 1993; Brandt and Haugen 2005a, b); however, the dominant constructions of masculinity are much less likely to be as dramatically polarized and oppositional. For instance, it is clear that occupational identities are central to constructions of masculinity in communities where a single resource industry accounts for the majority of employment opportunities. Yet, as Wicks' (2002) study of underground coal miners suggests, their discursive identities as patriarchs financially supporting their households did not conflict with their identities as tough, risk-taking coal miners; in fact, these masculine identities were mutually reinforcing.

Male identities in resource communities, therefore, are seemingly capable of drawing on multiple sources and forms of masculinity without necessarily incurring contradictions, as long as their occupational identities within the gendered division of labour are not challenged. For example, there is rarely an

inherent contradiction in being a good father and a good worker, but there can be a contradiction in being a good mother and a good worker. Thus, it would appear that men are at an advantage over women with respect to pre-empting and resolving discursive contradictions. However, it is important to recognize that when masculine occupational identities and the gendered division of labour are challenged, particularly in the face of an economic bust, men may in fact fare the worst in terms of psychological well being (Brandth and Haugen 2005a). In certain contexts, women may be less discursively tied to a particular profession, and may be able to move between different feminine identities and subject positions more easily than men (Dunk and Bartol 2005).

A clear example of this is found in Davis' (1993) study of the changing gendered division in a Newfoundland fishing village following the collapse of the fishing industry. Whereas women and men were previously engaged in a women-on-land/men-at-sea division of labour, they are increasingly reliant on 'make-work projects'[2] in order to qualify for unemployment insurance, which often involves working together on land in the same physical space. According to Davis:

> Women believe in doing their best even if it is a make-work project. In contrast, men resent make-work projects as government handouts. They view the projects as demeaning and as the result of the government's insensitivity to the issues that affect the local fishery. Thus men, when on

[2] Davis (1993, 464) defines make-work projects as "short-term job creation programs and are considered by locals to be useless and demeaning [including] a baseball park, paving pathways with crushed stone, and building picnic tables for tourists."

> the projects, do their best not to work or be productive—it is a passive-aggressive form of protest. Women resent what they perceive to be as men's laziness and men resent women as being goody-goodys who 'suck up' to the establishment. (1993, 468)

Moreover, Davis' study remarked that women 'have come to view men as a liability rather than an asset to family finances' (1993, 467), particularly since men are increasingly engaged in excessive alcohol consumption and other behaviors that jeopardize their core identities as 'hardworking' fishermen. It should be noted that, although women seemingly fared better than men in the face of the fishery collapse, this shifting female identity from hardworking, domestically based spouse to independent breadwinner has not been without consequence or contradiction in other facets of their lives. In particular, Davis notes that women were increasingly ascribed an unrespectable "image of 'sex object' rather than spouse or family member…. Women have gone from an image of dependable to dangerous" (1993, 468).

As Davis' (1993) example attests, discursive contradictions may be prompted by collapses in a resource industry that abruptly render long-standing occupational identities obsolete in a new socio-economic milieu. Davis's work (1993, 2000; for others see Brandth and Haugen 2005b; Eveline and Booth 2002; forthcoming by the authors) is among the few studies of gender and resource extraction that adopt a longitudinal approach. Yet, it is evident that the construction of new subject positions for men and women over time may

contradict with the predominant subject positions in the past, as well as with hegemonic forms of masculinity that shape social relations and gendered expectations. Brandth and Haugen's well know work on changing masculinities in forestry and agricultural industries in Norway (2005a, b) demonstrates how previously hegemonic forms of masculinity, such as the "macho image" of "strong, vigorous men posing with their power saws and machines fit for fight and ready to bring down the forest" (2005b, 155-156) in the 1980s which privileged characteristics of virility, youth and physical strength has given way to organizational and expert masculinities represented by "men with status and authority in superior positions who are acting out their managerial decisiveness, assertiveness, authority, oratorical gifts, and negotiator skills a site that is very competitive" (157) in the 1990s.

The instability and displacement of hegemonic masculinities in various resource industries and communities raises important questions of if and how subject positions available to women are shifting. For instance, Mayes and Pini (2010) argue new subject positions for women in Australia's mining sector are premised on a neutralization of their feminine bodies. They show how the new class of female mine managers and corporate leaders that arose during the purported "feminine revolution in mining" in Australia (2010, 233) are nevertheless presented as anomalies in the masculine field of mining by the constant attention to their bodies, and held to account with the gendered expectations of earlier subject positions of "mining women" and "mining wives"

(233). Indeed, the ways in which bodies are inscribed with contradictory gendered meanings around being productive or sexual is an important area of investigation that has only been marginally touched on within this body of scholarship and deserves greater attention.

CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to provide analytical insights for a more comprehensive and gender-sensitive account of natural resource industries and communities, and encourage more scholarship around the ways in which women and men live with contradictions and reframe and re-imagine the future of their livelihoods and communities. Drawing on the existing literature of gender and extractive natural resources in the global North, including that which has been developed within feminist scholarship, I argue that material practices and discourses that organize gender in particular settings can be shifted and modified as the local context of resource development changes in ways that defy simple cause and effect logic.

The three sets of contradictions articulated in this paper provide insight into the multiple dimensions of gendered social relations organizing resource communities and industries. Material contradictions, for instance, expose the frequent discordance between the economic and ecological policies and practices around resource extraction and the often invisible labour performed by women inside and outside of resource industries. Conversely, material-discursive

contradictions can highlight the disconnect between these policies and practices and the values, symbols and beliefs around gendered identities. Finally, discursive contradictions, which I argue require greater attention in natural resource scholarship, point to the polarizations of gendered identities, systems of knowledge, and values in ways that can disempower certain individuals and groups.

Recognition of the contradictions in experience and diversity of men and women's experiences is encouraged by an epistemological engagement with our proposed framework. I believe that studies examining the three dimensions of this framework—material, discursive–material, and discursive contradictions—can cultivate a deeper, increasingly nuanced and authentic scholarship on gender and natural resources. In light of these insights, the social sciences of natural resources is equipped to address gender as a primary, rather than peripheral topic, where the complexity is recognized and still amenable to authentic scholarly representation. There remain continuities and contradictions in both gender and in research over a long and rich history, and periodically it is helpful to take stock, and reflect on the empirical work in relation to the theoretical advancements in the same area.

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CHAPTER 3 – GOLD DIGGERS, TRUCK DRIVERS AND MOMS: HYPER-REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN'S IDENTITIES IN FORT MCMURRAY AND THE ALBERTA OIL PATCH

ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, the global media has become enraptured with the social impacts of the oil boom on the community of Fort McMurray, AB. Frontier masculinity, a hegemonic form of rural masculinity based nostalgic and fictitious accounts of the gold rush era, is the key frame through which these social impacts are understood. As a result, gendered identities and relations are thrust to the forefront of this media coverage. In this paper, I first explore the female subject positions constructed by this media discourse and frontier masculinity. Second, I examine the ways that women who live and work in Fort McMurray negotiate and resist these subject positions. I argue that the frame of frontier masculinity creates three particular subject positions for women which reinforce beliefs about women's perceived dependency and anomalousness on the frontier: gold diggers, devoted mothers and lady truck drivers. Because of their inescapability in media accounts, these subject positions consequently influence how women in Fort McMurray come to understand their own identities and experiences in the context of the oil boom.

INTRODUCTION

As the subject of, on average, 350 news articles per month (Canada West Foundation 2010), the Athabasca oil sands of northern Alberta and, consequently, the nearby community of Fort McMurray are quickly becoming one of the most hyper-represented sites in the world. The highly publicized community of Fort McMurray contrasts jarringly with other small, northern Canadian resource communities largely forgotten by the rest of the nation. As the central hub for the oil sands – the world's second largest oil reserve (Government of Alberta 2009) and Canada's largest source of new greenhouse gas emissions (Grant, Woynillowicz, and Dyer 2009) – Fort McMurray is rapidly evolving into a cautionary tale of boomtown greed and excess.

Over the past decade, journalists from around the globe have visited Fort McMurray to witness firsthand how the community is responding to the social, environmental and economic implications of its recent oil booms and busts. These accounts, which inexorably position Fort McMurray as a modern day Klondike gold rush town, have somehow become newsworthy, despite the fact that rarely is anything *new* presented. Tales of crumbling infrastructure, debilitative rises in housing costs, and a huge shadow population of mobile workers bringing gambling, drugs and prostitution to a once sleepy town have been repeated (and often exaggerated) in publications like The New York Times, The Economist, and the Guardian.

Yet, these images are juxtaposed with a forceful counter-narrative in the media of Fort McMurray as a land of opportunity; a place where anyone can step off a Greyhound bus into a six-figure job that does not require high school completion. Much of the media attention has sensationalized Fort McMurray's image as an overwhelmingly 'male' place, focusing on the tribulations of young men from around the world who flock to the oil patch in hopes of striking it rich. Legends of the male-to-female population imbalance purport acrimonious, highly sexualized relations between women and men and, even when challenged, reify the inherent frontier masculinity of Fort McMurray. Invariably, these public accounts seep into the local psyche and are reproduced in rumours and urban myths circulating in the community. In fact, the local municipal government recently funded a nearly $700,000 Cdn public image campaign[3] designed to debunk the "biggest myths about our region, and show you the truth behind the big stories," and promote Fort McMurray as a family-friendly place (Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo 2008).

Frontier masculinity, a central discursive construct in the media narratives of Fort McMurray, has become an important area of investigation for scholars seeking to make sense of social and gendered relations in northern and rural resource dependent communities. Scholars such as Miller (2004) have explored this form of hegemonic masculinity to demonstrate how characteristics and qualities valorized in cultural representations of the frontier era continue to be

[3] This campaign is a separate venture from the more well funded oil sands public image campaign put forth by oil companies and corporate interest groups.

privileged in contemporary resource towns and industries. A fundamental feature of frontier masculinity is the perception that women are physically and emotionally unfit for the frontier (Hogan and Pursell 2008). As such, few studies have explicitly focused on subject positions of women created within the discourse of frontier masculinity and their cultural and economic implications. Yet, it is evident in the media surrounding Fort McMurray's oil booms and busts that women are being drawn into and hyper-represented within the cultural imagination of the community as the new Wild West frontier.

Feminist discourse scholars argue that gendered identities are often produced and reproduced in media sites because of their public and institutionalized nature (Baxter 2003). In this study, I explore constructions of three distinct subject positions for women in Fort McMurray within recent print media accounts: the gold digger, the devoted mother, and the lady truck driver. I highlight how these subject positions contribute to the sensationalism of Fort McMurray and while strategically reinforcing the narrative of the community as a land of economic opportunity and as a place despoiled by outsiders profiting off the boom. Following this, I draw on semi-structured interview data with women working in Fort McMurray to explore how they negotiate their identities within this context of hyper-representation and frontier masculinity.

OPPORTUNITY, DESPOLIATION AND THE DISCOURSE OF FRONTIER MASCULINITY

The intertwined narratives of Fort McMurray as a "boomtown on a bender" (The Economist 2007, 46) and as a land of opportunity that routinely appear in both media and lay accounts are distinctly framed within the discourse of frontier masculinity. First coined by Connell, frontier masculinity refers to a form of patriarchy, or hegemonic masculinity, that draws on cultural mythologies and nostalgic imagery of the Wild West era in North American history:

> On the frontier of settlement, regulation was ineffective, violence endemic, physical conditions harsh. Industries such as mining offered spectacular profits on a chancy basis. A very imbalanced sex ratio allowed a homosocial masculinization of the frontier. (1993, 611)

According to Connell's usage, hegemonic masculinities are not simply qualities of male identities; they discursively construct social and economic relations and provide the cues through which all individuals in a society understand and perform their gendered identities. Hegemonic masculinities operate analogously to discourses; in Foucauldian terms, discourses are systems of representation that produce knowledge and ways of thinking about social phenomena (Hall 2001). In effect, hegemonic masculinities are forms of historically and temporally specific social practices that can produce subject positions and sustain particular configurations of power. Like discourses, hegemonic masculinities are often productive and tend to be achieved through tacit acquiescence rather than force.

Subject positions created through hegemonic masculinities rarely correspond to actual individual personalities; instead they reflect the "creation of models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures" (Connell 1987, 184). A key notion in Connell's early writings on hegemonic masculinity is the correlative idea of 'emphasized femininity,' which is "formed around compliance with [women's] subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men" (1987,183). Often, hegemonic masculinity is constructed in direct opposition to emphasized femininity as well as dependent forms of masculinity. Thus, hegemonic masculinity can produce multiple male and female subject positions. The frontier era, which culturally informs frontier masculinity, is particularly unique because it is an overwhelmingly male-dominated one, with very constricted space and opportunities for women. In fact, women's identities within frontier masculinity are almost entirely circumscribed to their relationships of dependency on men (Stoeltje 1975). Historical and linguistic studies of women's subject positions in Wild West or Klondike era novels and films are abundant (e.g. Stoeltje 1975; Jameson 1984; Kay 1991). However, there is little investigation of how contemporary frontier masculinity creates subject positions for women in modern settings like Fort McMurray.

Numerous scholars have noted the presence of frontier masculinity as an organizing frame in contemporary northern resource communities and industries, wherein nostalgic and mythologized accounts of the frontier era enjoin particular values, behaviors and relationships in the current day (Miller 2004; Anahita and

Mix 2006; Hogan and Pursell 2008). Within the frame of frontier masculinity, resource communities are constructed as 'male spaces' where men and male-dominated occupations are given primacy (Reed 2003; Scott 2007). Hegemonic masculinities, especially in rural contexts, are deeply embedded in a working class occupational status and endorse specific visions of the physical environment (Brandth and Haugen 2000; Hogan and Pursell 2008). The Canadian North – noted for its low population density and extreme weather conditions – is frequently represented as a 'modern-day resource frontier' waiting to be exploited for the good of the nation-state. Like other rural masculinities (Little 2002), frontier masculinity reinforces a production-centric mentality wherein man's relationship with the environment is defined by one of domination and extraction. The extraction of natural resources, such as oil, gas and minerals, are constructed as mechanisms through which individuals can assert their physical strength and participate in the free market.

Historically, working classes have had to combat an image of dependency and subjugation to other forms of hegemonic masculinity (Scott 2007). But, in many resource extraction contexts, such as Fort McMurray, frontier masculinity can become hegemonic when it is financially rewarded and culturally resonant with wider community values. Like much Wild West lore where the physical environment was seen as a harsh and dangerous place where only the strongest, most-daring, 'manliest' of men survive, residents of isolated resource-dependent communities like Fort McMurray tend to privilege qualities self-sufficiency,

daring, ruggedness and strength (Miller 2004). The reward for those who do 'make it' on the frontier are reward with considerable financial rewards.

Fort McMurray's image as a modern day Klondike boomtown has been perpetuated in many ways, including urban myths, blogs, and even academic articles (e.g. Krim 2003). However, the news media has been particularly complicit. As Fairclough (1989) argues, news media are key sites where discourses are perpetuated and subject positions are (re)produced. News media has a particular claim to 'truth' by positioning itself as objective, while downplaying its role in representing various phenomena. However, Litosseliti suggests that, as "the media have to operate on a market basis and respond to commercial pressure and increased competition, there is now a greater emphasis on entertaining readers and viewers" (2006, 91), which lends itself to increased sensationalism, tabloidization, and narrative approaches. These latter tendencies, which further add to the representation of 'truth' in media, are quite evident in the portrayal of Fort McMurray as a larger-than-life place that seems more legendary than real. The construction of particular gendered identities are an especially important strategy through which print media engages in these narratives.

METHODOLOGY

As Litosseliti insists, gendered discourses like frontier masculinity are both "*gendered* as well as *gendering*" (2006, 58, emphasis in original). That is, infinite subject positions are produced and gendered, but not all are adopted or

have resonance in a given context. When certain subject positions are taken up, they provide ways of seeing the world. In order to fully investigate how frontier masculinity creates subject positions for women in the news media and how these positions are taken up by women who live in Fort McMurray, I adopt a two-fold data collection strategy of feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews.

In the summer and fall of 2009, I conducted semi-structured interviews with women in Fort McMurray as part of a larger project focusing on the opportunities and challenges resulting from the rapid development and expansion of the oil sands. Thirty-two women, working in either the traditionally male-dominated oil sector or the traditionally female-dominated social and community services sector were recruited through a snowball sample.

In the early stages of the field research, many participants discussed the impact of the (predominantly negative) media attention on their gendered experiences. I subsequently decided to bring copies of various media pieces to the interviews to use an entry point for discussing the participants' reactions to the constructions of women and gender relations. For participants who did not bring up media attention on their own, I would present certain news pieces, and explain that, as part of my interest in gender, I was interested in how such representations might impact their lives. This strategy was particular useful for addressing negative perceptions of women without directly invoking and reifying these

images in the interview context. I was able to convey to the participants that my interest was not in sensationalizing gendered identities in Fort McMurray, but rather in deconstructing portrayals that exist in the media.

In the following section, I use feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis (FPDA), which Gavey describes as "the careful reading of texts… with a view to discerning discursive patterns of meaning, contradictions, and inconsistencies" (1989, 467), to explore the gendered images embedded in media surrounding Fort McMurray's recent boom and bust. FPDA, as Baxter (2003) contends, does not assume to reveal any intrinsic 'truths'. As a poststructuralist approach, the objective of FPDA is to deconstruct dominant discourses and explore spaces of polyvocality, resistance and subversion within them. According to Davies and Harré, the "strength of the poststructuralist research paradigm… is that it recognises both the constitutive force of discourse, and in particular of discursive practices and at the same time recognises that people are capable of exercising choice in relation to those practices" (1990, 46).

The media texts included in this study were selected from print and online news sources as well as popular magazine published between 2000 and 2010. Two selection criteria were used: a) the articles promoted either the narrative of Fort McMurray as a land of opportunity or as a land of despoliation; and b) included a representation of gender and/or frontier imagery. In total, thirty-four articles were analyzed. Following the discourse analysis, I present the

perspectives of the interview participants on their hyper-represented discursive environments, and explore how they negotiate their identities in relation to the subject positions produced in the media.

The overall methodology of this study is strongly influenced by Smith's notion of institutional ethnography (2006). Smith argues that discourses embedded in texts can provide insight into how people's activities are coordinated at a social level, "*beyond any one individual's experience*" (2006, 1, emphasis in original). Though Smith insists that there is no specific how-to manual for undertaking institutional ethnography, one basic tenet of this method is a continual dialogue between the lived experiences of research participants and the texts that coordinate these experiences. Although I present the results of the two data collection strategies sequentially in this paper, a dialectical engagement between these strategies occurred throughout all aspects of the study. Themes emerging from the participants guided the selection of media discourses for analysis, and that analysis in turn shaped the direction of the semi-structured interviews in order to produce a comprehensive analysis of women's identity formation in Fort McMurray.

FRONTIER MASCULINITY AND FORT MCMURRAY AS A 'MALE SPACE'

As the site of one of the largest resource booms in recent memory, Fort McMurray is constantly invoked as a modern day gold rush town. Comparisons to the Klondike gold rush and to the Wild West are inescapable in media reports and

serve to set the context of Fort McMurray as a place at the precipice of economic opportunity and social collapse. As The Guardian proclaimed in 2007,

> Just as the California gold rush came to define the American dream, so Fort McMurray defines a particular kind of Canadian dream. Go west. Fort McMurray can change your life. But first, perhaps, consider what price you are willing to pay. (Edamariam 2007, 4)

As evident in the above quote, nostalgic mythologies of the Wild West, frontier era idolize a lone male hero (Stoeltje 1975; Wright 2001), which in turn reinforces hegemonic frontier masculinity.

A frequent tactic in print media on Fort McMurray is to open the article with the wistful introduction to the plight of a male mobile worker, and close with a reflection on the protagonist's future. Depending on whether the article is adopting the narrative of Fort McMurray as a land of opportunity or of despoliation, the reader witnesses the progression of the lone male protagonist on his journey toward salvation or self-destruction. The Globe and Mail, for instance, features the story of young man making $32 an hour working at a major oil mine:

> By most accounts, Augustine Bruce looks and acts his 21 years.... But here's the thing about Augustine Bruce: He's rich beyond his years. He already owns his house. (Patriquin 2006, 38)

Whereas Bruce's story concludes with positive prediction that he is likely to retire by the age of 45, another young man's story featured in the Vancouver Sun paints a grimmer picture:

> Even when living in the remote work camps of Alberta, Ken was never far from his next fix. If cocaine wasn't being used inside his camp of 3,000 oil workers in the outskirts of Fort McMurray, it lingered just outside in the pockets of the drug dealers who prowled outside the gates like predators…. By his late 20s, the young welder was engaging in whirlwind cocaine binges that lasted days. (A. Ferguson 2007, C5)

Regardless of the outcome, readers are cued to sympathize with the man through reminders of the vast dangers lurking on the wild frontier and the difficulty coping with temptation while working far away from their families.

Within the discourse of frontier masculinity, and replicated in these media accounts, responsibility for the despoliation of the community and personal self-destruction—whether through substance abuse, gambling or prostitution—is deflected from men who work in the resource industry. The casinos, bars and other sites of debauchery are strategically presented as a necessary vice for hardworking men who have limited time and opportunities to escape the brutal physical demands of their jobs. Though the predominantly male workforce's participation in gambling, cocaine, adultery and other vices is acknowledged, the responsibility for this behaviour is not internalized as a reflection of the character of these men. It is presented as the inevitable result of the myriad external temptations that exist on the uncivilized northern frontier.

In addition to the social temptations, media reports routinely emphasize the physical dangers of the wilderness and the psychological challenges of working in the barren, isolated North. Described by the Guardian as "a town whose weather can be, even by Canadian standards, brutal: in winter temperatures hover below -40C, not counting windchill, for weeks," (Edamariam 2007, 4) Fort McMurray is presented as place where one has to be tough not only to fit in, but to survive. Even the highway connecting Fort McMurray to the larger metropolis of Edmonton approximately five hours away is commonly referred to as "Hell's highway" (Nikiforuk 2008, 36), "Suicide 63" (CTV Edmonton 2007) and "Alberta's deadliest highway" (CTV Edmonton 2008) given the level of fatalities that have occurred along this stretch of undivided highway. Correlatively, the oil sands industry itself is portrayed as exceedingly physical and dangerous work. Reports of worker fatalities, for instance, are commonly referenced (Krugel 2008; Cryderman 2010), as are the monster machines that "can crush a pick-up truck without noticing it" (Edamariam 2007, 4).

The repeated references to the dangers and isolation associated with the environmental landscape further contribute to the perception that Fort McMurray is "Canada's manliest place" (Libin 2007, A10). The media's fascination with the inherent masculinity of Fort McMurray implies that men's stories are central to the understanding of the community's essence. Women, conversely, are to be read as an anomaly in the landscape and narrative of Fort McMurray, where they largely outnumbered by men. A controversial Chatelaine article paints a bleak

picture of Fort McMurray's physical landscape that is unwelcoming to women:

> The place sure looks as if it was built by and for young males. It's a bachelor pad of a city, functional and grey and fusty, like a bare-walled room with an unmade bed. Franklin Avenue, the city's main strip, is lined with cinder-block hotels, restaurants and strip malls. (Preville 2006, 119)

This Chatelaine article highlights some of the more visible landmarks in the town: the Oil Can Tavern, the Boomtown Casino, and Cowboys Bar. Noticeably absent from the article are the spaces and places that are associated more readily with community building—the abundant non-profit agencies that sit adjacent to the bars (strip or otherwise), the local college only a few kilometres from downtown, and the industry-sponsored family resource centre located across the street from the city hall.

GOLD DIGGERS AND OTHER BAD WOMEN ON THE FRONTIER

> *"Whether it's gambling, coke, meth, crack, weed, hookers or a drink, there's always something there that's going to try to take you away from your ethics, morals and money." (Tetley 2005a, A24)*

The media representations of female identities in Fort McMurray resonate strongly with those featured in historical and cultural representations of the North American frontier era. These subject positions are, therefore, defined by the woman's relationship to men—whether it is a relationship of sexual temptation,

subservience or resistance. Indeed, the iconic frontier images of the saloon madam, the steadfast helpmate, and the renegade cowgirl (Stoeltje 1975; McGrath 2007) have been adopted and reworked to contribute to the story of Fort McMurray as the modern frontier boomtown.

Within the logic of masculine centrality, women's 'natural' position within the social order is that of economic dependence on men. As such, women who display self-interest or economic ambition are constructed as necessarily parasitic. This is the defining characteristic of the most prevalent female subject position portrayed within the media: the Fort McMurray gold digger. The predecessor to the modern day gold digger is the frontier whore, who Wright describes as "socially tainted because of her independence; she is too cavalier about sex, she acts like a market competitor, she associates with questionable men, she seeks wealth and property" (2001, 153). These women tend to exist at the margins of society and do not perform the dutiful role of supporting the male heroes.

A significant portion of Fort McMurray's media attention has been directed at the existence of such 'bad women' who take advantage of the gender disparity in the community by using their sexuality to gain wealth and status. As the National Post describes,

> If you believe tales making the rounds about Fort McMurray, it's the women, not the men, to watch out for. Proud locals complain about those

> rumours: that the place crawls with perfumed gold-diggers who come here to help blue-collar men spend six-figure incomes. (Libin 2007, A10)

Similarly, the Guardian reports that such bad women create a source of tension in the community:

> Men complain that women just want them for their money, but, as one woman said tartly, if they will go out at night wearing a Syncrude badge (guaranteed $100,000 a year), what do they expect? (Edamariam 2007, 4)

The media's fixation on the term 'gold digger' is not coincidental. This subject position is portrayed as the female parallel to the predominantly male mobile workforce in the oil sector. However, the bodies of female gold diggers are described as sexualized and seductive, rather than strong and tough. Moreover, any women who display personal or economic ambition are conflated with gold diggers: "There are guys in them thar' hills of this booming frontier town, but you'll need to step over the gold diggers, divorcées and escorts to get 'em" (Preville 2006, 119). Within media reports, the audience is cued to identify bad women through the explicit reference to their sexualized physical appearances. For instance, a Chatelaine article provides this physical description of 'Tori':

> in her late 20s, pretty, with long blond hair and a full-figured medium-height frame. She's wearing a twin-set and a tight knee-length black skirt

> with matching stilettos…. Tori's business: she's an escort. (Preville 2006, 119)

Similarly, Tori's boss, 'Paige', is described as having "'bleached blond hair and fake boobs,' as she puts it, which gives her the aura of a porn star" (Preville 2006,126). Paige's escort agency has been featured in numerous other articles, including the National Post (Libin 2007) and Canadian Business Online (Sanford 2005). Furthermore, it has become a veritable cliché to refer to the "10 Yellow Pages ads for escort services" (Fortney 2006, 1; see also Tetley 2005a; Edemariam 2007; Struck 2007).

Whereas escorts and strippers appear as overdrawn caricatures in media accounts of Fort McMurray's social makeup, most gold diggers appear in a more spectral from—existing in rumours and urban legends. These women are another mythic danger of the wilderness background. For example,

> 'Fort McMurray is a challenging place to be single if you're a man,' says Eunice Peterson…. I spent a Friday night at Cowboys, the downtown club of choice for twenty- and thirtysomethings. It's a cavernous place with concrete floors and waitresses with straw cowboy hats and lots of cleavage. (Preville 2006, 122)

In this statement, the writer removes any sense of the 'waitresses' as subjective agents, and naturalizes them as fixtures of the bar, alongside the 'concrete floors'.

DEVOTED MOTHERS OF FORT MCMURRAY AND OTHER STEADFAST WOMEN

> *Frances Jean doesn't care that her house and lot in downtown Fort McMurray could fetch as much as a cool half million in the current housing frenzy. The home where she and her late husband Bernard raised four children, including local Conservative MP Brian Jean, is testament to a 40-year commitment to this frontier town set in a verdant river valley in Alberta's far north. "It's my town," says the energetic 74-year-old, her hands resting defiantly on her hips. "There are still a few of us here with community pride." (Fortney 2006b, A10)*

In Wild West tales, the morality of male frontier heroes emerge through their interactions with good women, who act as a civilizing force on the frontier (Stoeltje 1975; Wright 2001). Good women act as subservient helpmates to the men, dutifully taking on the burden maintaining their households and contributing to community wellbeing on behalf of their husbands, which permits the frontiersmen to retain a façade of autonomy. Moreover, the work performed by these good women provides a counterbalance to the plundering of the community's resources. These women are presented as those that dutifully stand by their men and repress any complaints about their lack of opportunities or the boredom of living in such isolated sites. By accepting their dependent positions and prioritizing the needs of others, these steadfast women are the direct opposite of the bad women of the frontier.

It is evident in the media that such frontier images of steadfast women resonate in current depictions of women's identities in Fort McMurray. In direct contrast to the gold diggers of Fort McMurray are the women depicted as the devoted wives and mothers of male oil sands workers. In describing these women, media accounts downplay any notion of economic ambition or overt sexuality. Unlike the gold diggers and other bad women, these 'good' women are rarely described by their physical appearance, and never sexualized. Their descriptions and identities are hinged on their family and community commitments, regardless of their employment status. For instance, in an article describing the region's community spirit in the face of economic and social challenges, the Calgary Herald provides this introduction to a local community advocate: "Francoeur herself was sceptical arriving from Ontario 18 years ago, a young mom with three kids in tow and a husband with promising work as a computer technician for the Wood Buffalo Health Region" (E. Ferguson 2007, 20).

However, simply being a wife or mother does not automatically qualify one as a devoted wife and mother of Fort McMurray. One needs to make a public commitment to the community and to upholding traditional family values. For example, The Globe and Mail tells the story of 'Tammy', a waitress at a local strip club who despite staying in the community because of her male relatives' work, has not made a commitment to living in Fort McMurray:

> The money is the only reason to stay, though it doesn't stop her from talking about leaving. Things are complicated by the fact that her family

> has moved here—her husband works the bar at Showgirls, and her father and brother work in the oil sands. “You have to have a plan,” she says more than once. When she arrived a year and a half ago, she and her husband planned to stay for five years, but even that’s up in the air. A couple of months ago, her husband, who used to fix computers, decided in a fit of frustration that they would leave, which thrilled Tammy. But they’re still here. (Patriquin 2006, 38)

In this passage, Tammy is seen as not having committed to life in Fort McMurray. Her aspirations conflict with those of her male relatives and her desire to leave is central. Tammy’s storyline contrasts with Francoeur’s explicit commitment to her community and her husband’s economic opportunities. In the following example, the readers’ attention is directed to the precise moment of Francoeur’s commitment:

> "I felt a little sorry for myself and thought, ‘OK, I'll be the good wife, stay for two years, then go right back home.’" But the family thrived. The kids fit in right away, excelling in school, sports, even the local arts scene. "Suddenly, I realized this was a great place to raise a family." (E. Ferguson 2007, 20).

Such devoted wives and mothers appear less frequently in the media than do gold diggers. They most often appear in order to strategically reinforce the contradictory narratives of opportunity and despoliation by either proclaiming

Fort McMurray to be a great place to raise a family or by denouncing the social breakdown of Fort McMurray. As a woman is quoted in the BBC news,

> Amanda Parker, 41, moved to Fort McMurray six years ago from Ontario with her children and husband, an oil worker. "There's too much money and people don't know what to do with it," she says. "The opportunities are great here," she says, "but the downside is the drugs and alcohol. There are parents doing shift work, they give the kids money and the kids do what they want, so you get kids out of control. (Shenker 2008)

Similarly, Fort McMurray's mayor, Melissa Blake, is frequently depicted in the precarious position of both defending Fort McMurray as family-friendly and decrying the social pathologies that have developed as a result of the boom. Chatelaine magazine suggests "[s]he believes her town is a great place to raise kids, even though resources are stretched to the limit. It's not unusual to experience a five-hour registration lineup for children's activities such as swimming, hockey or gymnastics" (Preville 2006, 131).

LADY TRUCK DRIVERS

> *Langdon, wearing dainty gold hoop earrings, a pink baby tee under her ill-fitting, dark-blue coveralls and glossy rose lipstick, giggles as she bounces in the truck's cab. (Tetley 2005b, B1)*

Given the overarching discourse of frontier masculinity that permeates narratives of Fort McMurray, the opportunities that have captured the attention of

global media are predominantly those that emerge in the male-dominated sectors. One exception, however, is the minor but notable media fascination with 'lady truck drivers' (heavy equipment operators). With their enormous size, the trucks in question are arguably worthy of fetishism in their own right. Many heavy haulers reach over seven meters in height and can carry upwards of 350 tons (Oil Sands Discovery Centre 2009). A number of well-known publications, including the New York Times (Brooke 2001) and National Geographic (Kuznig 2009), feature photographic images of female heavy equipment operators in their respective features on the oil sands. These women are presented as a curious anomaly that feeds into the image of Fort McMurray as an unpredictable and larger-than-life type of place. Such stories and images of female heavy haulers are always conditioned by references to Fort McMurray's oil boom. The New York Times, for instance, suggested that

> With a new oil boom convulsing this northern frontier city, women now make up a quarter of Syncrude's heavy equipment operators…. What is behind the change is an acute labor shortage as Alberta, Canada's energy province, throws itself in high gear to meet the growing American demand for oil and gas. (Brooke 2001, A4)

According to the above passage, this phenomenon is to be read as an aberrance resulting from the unprecedented growth and labour shortage in the region.

Female heavy equipment operators do not fit neatly within the gold digger/devoted mother dichotomy. Because of their employment status in the

lucrative oil sands sector, such women are by nature economically *in*dependent. In some instances, economic independence is portrayed as oppositional to gold digging, as in this quote by a local resident in the Washington Post: “"There are some gold diggers, too, 20-year-olds doing what 20-year-olds do everywhere," she said. "But there are a lot more women working hard, working two and three jobs"” (2007, A1). However, the financial ambition that accompanies oil sector jobs, including heavy equipment operation, prevents such women from being seen as good, family-oriented women. As such, the media often treats ‘lady truck drivers’ in the same regard as the category of gold diggers by emphasizing their feminine physical appearances. The New York Times included this description of one woman:

> Driving the world's biggest dump truck to and from the world's biggest electric shovel might be a dream job for little boys the world over. But here was Valerie A. Wagar, gold earrings and fingernail polish in place, gripping the wheel of her Caterpillar 797B one recent afternoon as each shovel scoop dumped 100 tons of sand laced with oil into her load box. (Brooke 2001, A4)

Similarly, a photograph in a recent issue of National Geographic (Kunzig 2009, 52-53) depicts a female heavy equipment operator in her work camp room (her profession is made clear by the photograph’s caption and by her sweatshirt which has an image of a heavy hauler underneath the words ‘Size Matters’), which is heavily decorated with the color pink. This particular image appeared in a photographic spread entitled ‘Portraits of a Boomtown’ which featured pictures of

homelessness, traffic snarls and environmental destruction, suggesting such overt displays of femininity in the masculine world of oil sands work camps should be read as evidence that Fort McMurray is out of control and deviant.

In both the National Geographic and New York Times, the anomaly of the female body operating a giant machine is emphasized, and thus what is seen as newsworthy. Ironically, heavy equipment operation is considered a skilled trade in the province of Alberta—an area where women continue to be highly underrepresented. Less than 13% of all skilled trade professionals (a category which includes other oil sands trades such as electricians and welders) in the region of Fort McMurray are women (Government of Alberta 2006). Women are considerably more likely to be found in oil-related careers in areas like science professionals, engineers, human resource professionals, and upper management. Yet, the surge of women in these categories has not caught the attention of the global media in the same way as female heavy haulers. The latter are more readily amenable to a particular subject position that conforms to the discourse of frontier masculinity. The lady truck driver reinforces the narrative of opportunity that circulates in accounts of Fort McMurray, that anyone has a chance of making it big if they are daring enough. However, it also reinforces narrative that Fort McMurray is booming beyond control, that these women are forsaking the role of community and family caretakers.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the female bodies and dispositions of lady truck drivers, which are portrayed as unfit for the type of work in which they are engaging. The Globe and Mail, for example, suggests a female truck driver they interview

> doesn't look like a person who would enjoy living in a camp with 1,500 roughnecks, let alone spend her days erecting scaffolding at the site. With large, patient eyes and an infinitely polite demeanour, the 5-foot-2-inch woman looks as if she should be teaching preschool…. She looks like she's about to pass out. (Patriquin 2006, 38).

The Guardian observes that the toughness and ability to conquer nature may be lacking among women working in the oil sands:

> Leigh Wild drives a bulldozer for Syncrude. It's a good job and she is grateful for it, but there are things that trouble her. The sandhill cranes, for example. "When I'm at the end of a night shift, at dawn, or when the sun goes down, I see them walking out through the discharge from the coke line, eating insects. I try to scare them away, because it's so sad to see them in such a place. Almost heartbreaking." (Edamariam 2007, 4)

Ironically, the media's fascination with lady truck drivers, regardless of the fact they do not conform to the more apparent subject positions of gold diggers and devoted mothers, has the overall impact of perpetuating the discourse of frontier masculinity. The depiction of female heavy equipment operators as physically and emotionally unfit and anomalous indirectly points to the characteristics that are required: physical strength, ruggedness, independence, and the ability to conquer

nature. As such, the media attention subtly implies that female heavy equipment operators have not 'earned' their positions through hard work and the demonstration of these qualities, but through the labour shortage that accompanied the boom.

NEGOTIATING IDENTITY AND HYPER-REPRESENTATION

According to Davies and Harré (1990), subject positions offer cultural and conceptual repertoires through which individuals understand social processes and their own identities: "Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned" (1990, 46). They describe the process through which this occurs: first, we learn about the categories of identity, and what their exclusions are. Second, we recognize and actively participate in the discursive practices that reproduce these categories. Third, we position ourselves within these discourses and storylines, and finally we make an emotional and moral 'commitment' to a particular category, and begin to see the world from this perspective. Medved (2009), for instance, uses Davies and Harré's theory of positioning to understand how breadwinning mothers in contemporary North America make sense of their identities in the face of pressure to be primary caregivers. Similarly, Gherardi (1996) uses this approach to show how women in male dominated occupations position themselves as 'travellers' or 'guests' in their workspaces.

In the following section, I draw on the interview data to show how women in Fort McMurray position their identities within the discourse of frontier masculinity and the subject positions available within this discourse. Furthermore, I discuss the ways in which contradictions embedded in these subject positions unfold and are rationalized in the participants' experiences and identities living and working in Fort McMurray. In particular, I explore the emergence of the 'bad woman other' in its multiple guises as an exclusionary category from which to build their identities as hardworking, family-oriented women committed to the community against.

IDENTITY THROUGH THE BAD WOMAN 'OTHER'

For the women participating in this study, the good woman/bad women dichotomy, coalescing around the subject positions of devoted mothers and gold diggers, was recurrent in their discussions of their identities. The pervasive image of the Fort McMurray gold digger was the central construct against which the participants constructed their own good woman identities. The bad woman other identity, as articulated by the interview participants, conformed to the strident characteristics attributed to them within the discourse of frontier masculinity: interested in personal economic gain, flagrant sexuality and attention to their physical appearance, and unwillingness to provide community and family support to male resource workers.

For some participants, the gold digger was a concrete and identifiable presence whom they or people close to them had encountered. Yet, other participants described the gold digger in a less concrete form. They spoke in reference to the spectre of the bad woman other, who exists 'out-there':

> Because there are a lot of young women that went from living with their parents to now living with their boyfriend. And don't work. And don't need to. And don't really do much…. If it's drugs, if it's housing, if it's anything, just by being someone's girlfriend you can live in their big house and use their things and there are a lot of men that just have these girlfriends that, I mean they can probably do way better but it's just, I don't know if they take what they can get or just how that works because I am not in that situation… that's where that whole gold-digger thing is. (Megan, social services worker)

In contrast to the bad woman, the identity of the good woman—which flowed through nearly all the interviews—is directly identifiable through their commitment to community and family. This commitment is positioned as directly antithetical to any type of economic self-interest. As Karen describes,

> There are totally different kinds of women up here. I think there are definitely gold diggers and I think there are definitely women up here that intentionally try to get pregnant so that they can have child support as their income. However I do think there is the total opposite of the spectrum where there are… young moms that are up here who are doing

> a fantastic job of using the resources like the family centre and stuff like that.

Renée, a non-profit worker, describes herself as a family-oriented person, which she contrasts with women concerned with economic status and physical appearance. The former is able to make a commitment to the community of Fort McMurray, while the latter is incapable. Observe the depiction of women who place too much emphasis on shopping opportunities as contrasted with community-committed women who are more likely to remain in Fort McMurray:

> What kind of personality lives in Fort McMurray for years? To me, that personality is family-oriented, strong in values, loves outside and loves outside nature. As a family we are always doing things as a family, we are always out enjoying the Fort McMurray nature and researching and checking into this and we hike, we camp, we fish, we hunt, we do all that stuff together as a family. If your value is what's the best shop in town? And honestly, you're not going to make it if that's your values.

For many, the hyper-representation of the gold digger can have tangible consequences, including harassment and inability to trust men. In particular, these consequences arise when they are 'mistaken' for bad women. Anne, a social service worker, recounted

> I was in a bar one night with my husband and some friends. It was at the Oil Can…. This guy walked past me about six times and every time he grabbed my ass…. I turned to him and said, "You need to stop. I'm not

> okay with you touching me."… He looked at me and said, "Let's go fuck." Talk about women being horrid in this town. Yeah, are there [horrid women here]? Absolutely, there are women out there who are gold digging whores, single moms who are disillusioned, who are crackheads, who are whatever. But men come in to this town expecting that they can say whatever they want.

In Anne's case, however, juxtaposing oneself with 'extreme' examples of bad women such as 'gold digging whores' can work to signify oneself as a good woman who should not be sexualized in such a manner. Somewhat ironically, she reports going to a bar where the distinction between bad women and good women can be clearly distinguished:

> It's disgusting. And I don't need to be spoken to that way. And that's why we go to Showgirls [local strip bar]. Because men are too busy looking at the strippers to pay any attention to us. We're safe there.

In the following quote by Renée, her inability to reconcile her own identity as a devoted wife and mother with the attempts by male co-workers to sexualize her is evident:

> Women are known to mother and to nurture and guide. Do I think that it hurts in [my career]? No because predominantly in my area, most of the campaign managers are men. So for me to walk into the room or whatever… [*long pause*] I had one guy poke me in the shoulder and go, "You're much better to look at than the last one." So I just kind of like, oh dear.

Participants described the daily struggles to negotiate their identity as being more extreme in comparison with such negotiations than in other places they have lived. More specifically, there was a greater caution around making the image trade-off between 'competent' and 'warm and friendly' given the latter seemed to diminish a oil sands women workers' ability to be taken seriously at her place of work. As Jennifer, a tradesperson, describes,

> You just have to put up almost energy boundaries around. If [male co-workers] swoop in there and they want to talk to you, you gotta be cordial but not inviting. Because if you're like, 'oh hey, how's it going, great to meet you' then they'll just come at you again and again and again.

Learning to erect these boundaries is, as Nora (social worker) suggests, is "a struggle to have to put it in place all of the time. It is not natural to have to do that." Moreover, as Fort McMurray's population is characterized by a high level of mobility, many women who migrate to the community do not have pre-existing social ties that might help them learn how and when to build these boundaries. It is often an isolating process, fraught with missteps. As such, women may be continually at risk of being perceived as a bad woman.

The intersections of such polarizations of gendered identities with the daily, material lives of women in the community necessarily create a slew of contradictions. Most evident among these are the need to negotiate their waged employment while conforming to the image of the good woman. Interestingly,

having a concrete and rigid image the bad woman other – a personally ambitious gold digger who is more concerned with her sexual desires and physical appearance than with supporting their families and communities – enables these women to resist acquiescing to frontier masculinity's dependent 'good woman' image. In effect, the participants in this study positioned themselves as good woman not by pointing to their family and community commitments (though still central to their identities), but situating their good woman status within *all that is not* the bad women.

For women working in the community and social services, their employment served as a medium for performing their commitment to family and community in which they could feel a sense of reward and value. In addition, much of this work takes place in-town (versus at the oil sands, which are located upwards of a half hour drive from town). The 'conventional' nature of social and community service work allows women to maintain responsibility for family matters, as Evelyn, a long-time community worker, notes:

> Women who are choosing to work in the helping professions – they're not working in the helping professions because they need the money…. because you could make more money at Tim Horton's… So often it's women because they are willing to make the trade-off. Or sometimes it's because they are more adaptable in nature I think because they're willing to trade-off the pay check for the flex time, for being in town and

> being ten minutes away if the school calls and your kid is sick [rather] than being an hour away.

Evelyn's quote, echoed by a number of other participants, reveals an important qualification on women's sense of being valued through their community work. The value of their work is not recognized in a monetary sense in the same way as men's resource work. Rather, as Renée expresses, "if money is what is driving to doing what you're doing then the not-for-profit isn't where you should be… My wage comes in self gratification not monetary value." The renunciation of personal economic ambition in their work, and positioning work as a commitment to the community, is a key strategy through which women negotiate their status as good women.

For women working in oil related jobs, discussion of the economic benefits associated with their employment is unavoidable and presents a challenge to their status as good women within the discourse of frontier masculinity. However, emphasizing the bad woman other's sexualized physical appearance emerged as the key strategy for distancing oneself from the gold digger image. As Jane, a tradesperson, discusses,

> There are the girls that come to work in full make-up and all of that kind of thing, which I also don't do because you're going to go outside and sweat it all off anyway… we have an engineer who comes out and she's wearing spiked boots and really tight jeans and tight low cut tops and she

> is a very beautiful girl but she comes out and the guys are all looking at her like…You know? It looks out of place.

However, some participants discussed the double bind of not conforming to the attempts by co-workers to sexualize them. During one interview, Dana mentioned that one of the perks of her career as an engineer is that she is not required to dress in a feminine way. However, in an exasperated tone, she explained one instance where 'dressing up' was required: "basically, what I'm getting at is if you wear a tank top under your coveralls and you go over and see the operators, it's a lot easier to get stuff done…. Just because they like looking at girls."

CONCLUSION

The growing body of literature on hegemonic masculinities in rural and northern regions has raised important questions and insights about the ways in which gendered relations are constructed and certain characteristics, behaviours and values are given primacy. Yet, as this paper argues, greater attention to the ways in which female subject positions are configured into hegemonic masculinities is necessary in order to more fully comprehend the experiences of those who live and work in rural and northern communities.

While women have largely been left out of the media narratives surrounding Fort McMurray's recent oil boom, it is the "sins of commission", rather than the "sins of omission" (Geertsema 2009, 154), that have the greatest impacts on resident women's lives. Hyperrepresentations in the media of

women's identities in Fort McMurray do not simply erase their experiences; they replace them with marginalized subject positions that reinforce the primacy of the masculine protagonist. Using a feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis of print media reports on Fort McMurray, this paper argues that frontier masculinity is the primary organizing frame through which gender relations and identities in the community are constructed and represented to the outside world. The gold digger, the devoted mother and the lady truck driver satisfy the global imagination of Fort McMurray as a modern day gold rush—a place of extremes that is more legendary than real.

Yet, these discourses and narratives do not only speak to the outside world. As qualitative research with women who live and work in the community reveals, their actions and identities are configured within the atavistic logic of frontier masculinity and the distinct female subject positions it entails. For participants in this study, these subject positions are central identity negotiation process and subsequently reproduced. Nearly all women in this study explicitly identified with the image of the devoted wife and mother, despite frequent attempts by others to position themselves as bad women. Yet, even the image of the devoted wife and mother can entail significant repercussions and contradictions, wherein they are simultaneously excluded from the narrative of Fort McMurray as a land of opportunity and held accountable for narrative of despoliation.

As this paper argues, the production of emphasized femininities within various forms of hegemonic masculinities is often overlooked in current scholarship. However, these female subject positions offer important insight into the ways hegemonic masculinities organize social relations and values. While the images of women as gold diggers, devoted mothers, and lady truck drivers on the frontier are not as widely recognizable as iconic images of male roughnecks and lone cowboys, they are just as powerful in reproducing frontier masculinity. These strong male heroes are defined as the antithesis to dependent females, yet the literary and actual existence of these male 'heroes' is only enabled by the emotional, physical and identity work performed by women.

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CHAPTER 4 – GENDER AND THE NEOLIBERAL SUBJECT: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND IDENTITIES OF WOMEN WORKING IN AN OIL BOOMTOWN

ABSTRACT

Resource booms are embedded with promises of abundant employment and income-earning opportunities. The rapidly expanding Alberta oil sands have drawn in huge numbers of workers from around Canada and the world in search of jobs and high incomes, leading to tremendous social and demographic change in the nearby community of Fort McMurray. But do all residents share the same conception of opportunity? How is this notion of opportunity gendered and classed? In this paper, I explore how women in Fort McMurray understand, negotiate and articulate their opportunities and challenges living and working in an oil boomtown. Specifically, this paper examines how women position their experiences in relation to dominant discourses of frontier masculinity and neoliberalism that have ideologically supported rapid resource extraction in the oil sands. Data for this paper is drawn from a study of women working in the traditionally male-dominated oil sector and women working in the traditionally female-dominated social and community services sector. The results of this study suggest that women face multiple barriers in constructing their identities within the framework of neoliberal subjectivity, and their opportunities represent a contingent adaptation to neoliberal development rather than a transformation of hegemonic masculinity.

INTRODUCTION

Canadian resource-dependent communities have historically been marked by a rigid gendered division of labour wherein male-dominated extractive occupations are morally and economically privileged. These divisions of labour are supported by particular discursive practices and social relations – which Connell describes as 'hegemonic masculinities' (1993) – that value characteristics typically seen as masculine: risk-taking, ruggedness and self-sufficiency (Miller 2004; Hogan and Pursell 2008). Women, as a result, have been largely marginalized from the more lucrative employment opportunities in primary industries (Reed 2003; Scott 2007), while providing a substantial proportion of the labour force in sectors associated with social reproduction and community wellbeing (Peters et al 2010).

Currently, many resource communities are experiencing dramatic economic, social and environmental changes as a result of neoliberal restructuring (Young and Matthews 2007; Hayter 2003). Neoliberalism is one of the most profound social forces impacting resource peripheries in Canada (Hayter 2003; McCarthy 2006; Young and Matthews 2007). However, as Young and Matthews (2007) explain, neoliberalism plays out in unique ways in resource peripheries. Specifically, they point to the simultaneous "rolling out" of neoliberal policies and a "rolling back" of government-based services and social-support programs (Young and Matthews 2007, 182). Hayter (2003) further adds that neoliberalism in Canadian resource peripheries operates on a global scale; resource industries

are increasingly characterized by international ownership and competition and labour mobility (including high levels of immigration and temporary foreign workforces).

While communities facing economic bust have witnessed high rates of job loss and out-migration (Sherman 2009; Corbett 2010), a number of booming communities are experiencing unprecedented labour demands that are opening up new employment opportunities for women and other nontraditional labour forces (i.e. Aboriginal and immigrant populations). These labour opportunities in booming communities create potentially transformative moments of contradiction within forms of hegemonic masculinity embedded in local gendered divisions of labour and class configurations. Whether this potential for transformation is realized or constrained by residual conceptions of normative gender roles and identities, however, has not been thoroughly explored in rural sociological scholarship.

In this paper, I examine the how women in a rapidly booming resource community – Fort McMurray, Canada – understand the gendered challenges and opportunities they face in their personal and professional lives. As the host community for the controversial and lucrative Athabasca oil sands, Fort McMurray has experienced a tremendous economic boom and labour shortage over the past decade. Due to these economic circumstances, this northern Canadian community has been informally anointed as the land of opportunity by local government, media and residents. Yet, the notion of 'opportunity' is rarely

questioned from a critical lens: do all residents of Fort McMurray view opportunity in the same way? Do narratives of opportunity embedded in neoliberal ideologies compete with local, community-based ones? How do localized discourses and practices of gender interplay with the negotiated meanings of opportunity and challenge in a resource-based economy?

Based on qualitative interviews with women who work in the social and community services sector and women who work in the oil sands industry, this study sheds light on the ways in which women make sense of the emerging challenges and opportunities they experience living and working in Fort McMurray. I explore the ways in which these experiences are embedded in unstable class configurations and discourses of neoliberal individualism that conflict with a moral orientation toward collective wellbeing. Including women from two occupational sectors – one traditionally dominated by women, the other traditionally dominated by men – in this study allows a more nuanced understanding of women's diverse experiences as they negotiate frontier masculinity and neoliberalism from their respective social locations. Ultimately, I argue that while neoliberal development has created new labour opportunities for women in various sectors of Fort McMurray's economy, it has not dismantled the predominant form of hegemonic masculinity that organizes gender relations and divisions of labour in the community. As a result, women face multiple barriers constructing their identities within the framework of neoliberal subjectivity, and

their opportunities represent a contingent adaptation to neoliberal development rather than a transformation of hegemonic masculinity.

GENDER, NEOLIBERALISM AND CLASS IN RESOURCE PERIPHERIES

Rigid gendered divisions of labour in resource peripheries wherein women are marginalized from lucrative primary sector occupations are widely recognized in scholarship (Reed 2003; Egan and Klausen 1998; Scott 2007; Sherman 2009; Gibson-Graham 1993; Davis 2000; McLeod and Hovorka 2008; Nelson and Smith 1998). Connell's (1993) notion of hegemonic masculinity has been critical to scholarly understanding of how these practices are socially justified and sustained. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) define hegemonic masculinities as particular configurations of discourses and practices that organize gender relations in a hierarchical fashion in which traits associated with ideal masculinity are privileged. Masculinities are always multiple and situated, but they are not equally influential or hegemonic. In Fort McMurray and other northern Canadian communities, a notion of masculinity rooted in nostalgic representations of the frontier, gold-rush era provides the dominant frame through which residents shape their sense of place and construct their identities. Ideal masculine heroes on the northern frontier are constructed as being self-sufficient, rugged, daring and having the capacity to conquer nature for personal gain (Miller 2004; Anahita and Mix 2006; Hogan and Pursell 2008). Within the logic of frontier masculinity, women are constructed as oppositional to these fictitious male heroes; they are

frail and inherently dependent on breadwinning men, and thus confined to the relative safety of frontier settlements.

An important dimension of hegemonic masculinity theory is that gender relations are never entirely stable. As Connell and Messerschmidt note,

> gender hierarchies are also affected by new configurations of women's identity and practice, especially among younger women—which are increasingly acknowledged by younger men. We consider that research on hegemonic masculinity now needs to give much closer attention to the practices of women and to the historical interplay of femininities and masculinities. (2005, 848)

Perhaps the most crucial question raised by Connell and Messerschmidt's assertion of the instability of gender relations is what are the forces that lead to such moments of transformation of gender relations? Numerous scholars have pointed to the advent of modern neoliberalism as an important catalyst for reconfiguring gendered divisions of labour in the Western world (Adkins 1998; England 2010). By and large, these studies have taken place in urban settings. The unique context of resource peripheries in Canada, as Hayter (2003), McCarthy (2006) and Young and Matthews (2007) have argued, requires a contextually specific approach.

Neoliberalism, as Rose (1996) suggests, does not organize social relations solely on a material level. It is equally a discursive particular, engendering

particular forms of subjectivity. Graham et al contend that an ideology of individualism, "a political perspective that elevates personal rights and orientations above collective ones" (2009, 4), is central to neoliberalism (see also Skeggs 2004; Adkins 1998; Davies and Saltmarsh 2007; Walkerdine 2003). The benefits afforded by neoliberal development are couched in opportunities available to individuals primarily through employment and incomes. In turn, neoliberal subjects are expected to take responsibility for their successes and failures, rendering "trust and commitment to the collective well-being… redundant" (Davies and Saltmarsh 2007, 3). As the world becomes increasingly globalized, the ideal neoliberal subject is, as Walkerdine critically suggests, "completely freed from traditional ties of location, class and gender and to be completely self-produced… totally responsible for their own destiny" (2003, 140). Walkerdine (2003) further asserts that it is the promise of upward mobility and transcendence of class divisions that undergirds the production of neoliberal subjects. Scott's (2007) study of Appalachian coal mining communities demonstrates how faith in the possibility of upward mobility contributes to the residents' justification of numerous harmful environmental and economic practices.

Neoliberalism presents facets of compatibility and contradiction with frontier masculinity and has the potential to both reinforce and destabilize frontier masculinity in resource peripheries. The emphasis on individualism is one of the key dimensions of collusion with frontier masculinity. Wright theorizes that the

individualism inherent in cowboy mythologies served as the foundation for modern capitalism in the United States:

> The standard cowboy story is a cultural drama of individualism. The cowboy symbolizes individualist ideas as does the rugged scenery of the American West. All the images of the West—cowboy hats, horses, buffalo, red rock canyons—carry the cultural message of freedom, equality, private property, civility: the promise of individualism. (Wright 2001, 16)

Individualism is central to the neoliberal promise of meritocracy, wherein individual workers can rise above their class constraints through the marketization of their labour. This notion of meritocracy is particularly important in resource communities characterized primarily by working-class occupations, according to Scott (2007), since labour represents a pathway to independence. Scott (2007) argues that rural, working-class masculinities, including frontier masculinity, are hierarchically positioned as marginal to other types of hegemonic masculinity associated with urban, white-collar and property-owning classes. Through labour, working-class men are able to maintain their independence and gain social privileges by virtue of their wages.

At the same time, neoliberalism substantially challenges the nature of resource work, and, subsequently, challenges prevailing notions of 'who' can perform this work. Labour on the frontier is perceived as physically grueling and dangerous, as nostalgic accounts of the casualties of the Klondike gold rush attest.

This perception served to exclude women from available work opportunities, and is foundational to the logic of frontier masculinity. Resource work is becoming increasingly flexible and precarious, characterized by shift-work, contract labour and long-distance commuting, largely due to the extra-locality of employers (Young 2008; Pini, Mayes and McDonald 2010; Cheshire and Lawrence 2005). In many instances, neoliberal development has led to the stagnation or decline of resource industries (Davis 2000). In others, however, resource industries have become increasingly technologically complex and globalized in scope. Mobility and specialization have become the most prestigious characteristics, rather than tradition and social relations. It is in this disjuncture that neoliberalism offers a potential transformation of gendered divisions of labour and gendered occupational identity formation in rural and northern regions. In emphasizing individualized and internal characteristics, such as personal skill development and willingness to travel, rather than external social structures and practices, neoliberalism presents a façade of gender neutrality.

Feminist scholars of gender and class working within both materialist and poststructuralist feminist traditions have raised numerous criticisms with respect to neoliberalism's transformative potential with respect to gendered divisions of labour and identities. In particular, considerable attention has been paid by these scholars to two mechanisms through which women are marginalized from proper neoliberal subjectivity. The first is women's ongoing collective responsibility for social reproduction within their homes and communities (Adkins 1998). This

work, as Adkins (1998) argues, is foundational to creating a sense of community and collective identity through the maintenance of social networks and norms. Tasked with this responsibility, women are often faced with either a handicap with respect to their ability to embody the mobility, individualization and reflexivity of the ideal neoliberal subject, or social stigma for deviating from their 'fixed' feminine roles.

The second mechanism, as articulated by Skeggs (2005, see also Walkerdine 2003), hinges on the fact that for women, class is produced primarily through embodied cultural and moral signifiers, rather than economic and employment status. These signifiers include a range of symbolic displays, from the bodily presentation of sexuality, to the cleanliness of one's home, to awareness of esoteric political news and cultural trends. Middle-class identity is symbolically marked by women's embodied performances of maternal docility and respectability (Skeggs 1997); working-class women are inherently defined by their inability to perform this respectability (Skeggs 1997, 2005). Thus, even when women use their labour for economic gain, they are often unable to achieve upward mobility—the driving ambition of the neoliberal subject (Walkerdine 2003). Tichenor's (2005) comprehensive study of female breadwinners who out-earn their male spouses, for instance, demonstrates that women's class elevation is not accompanied by increased power within the household or relief from domestic responsibilities.

The large majority of scholars examining the impact of neoliberal development and restructuring on gender dynamics and hegemonic masculinities in North American resource peripheries has focused on communities facing a collapse of their primary industry. In many cases, resource collapse has reinforced rural hegemonic masculinities. For instance, Scott's (2007) study of an Appalachian mountaintop coal mining community found that residents continued to romanticize the mining industry and associated form of hegemonic masculinity long after the mine closed, despite the environmental and community destruction and health problems left in its wake. Similarly, Davis (2000) argued that gender identities in a Newfoundland fishing community became increasingly oppositional and gender relations more antagonistic following the collapse of cod stocks in the 1990s.

In other cases, resource busts have precipitated subtle shifts in hegemonic masculinity. In a study of a northern Californian sawmill town, Sherman (2009) notes that households that were more flexible with regard to their gender identities and to the male breadwinner norm fared much better than households clinging to rigid gender norms. Corbett's (2007, 2010) recent examination of gender and out-migration rates in Nova Scotia following resource depletion suggest that post-secondary education and skill development became increasingly valued by the community relative to work experience and social networks following the slowdown of fishing and forestry industries. While this initially seemed to benefit young women who had higher education and out-migration rates than their male

counterparts, Corbett ultimately found that the male breadwinner norm prevailed and educated women who returned to their home communities were nevertheless considered secondary to uneducated men (2007, 2010).

While resource bust is a common consequence of neoliberal restructuring in resource peripheries, neoliberalism is leading to capital-intensive extraction projects in other communities, causing rapid economic and demographic growth (Beyers and Nelson 2000). In the early 1980s, Freudenburg speculated "that [resource] development could actually lead to a net personal benefit for the women of the energy boomtown merely by the fact that it disrupts social structures and cultural patterns which had previously reinforced traditional (and less-than-satisfying) sex roles" (1981, 224). While Freudenburg's study was inconclusive, there have been relatively few attempts to test his assertion. One exception is McLeod and Hovorka's (2008) examination of women's work opportunities in High Level, Alberta, which experienced a small oil boom. The authors note that while women in this community experienced a trickle-down growth of employment opportunities in traditionally female dominated sectors, they nevertheless faced considerable marginalization from employment in the more lucrative oil industry.

Collectively, the literature on women's experiences in resource communities provides an ambiguous account of the transformative potential of neoliberalism as social force capable of destabilizing hegemonic masculinities. In

this paper, I contribute an additional perspective to this issue in two ways. First, I examine a relatively unique case of neoliberal development in Fort McMurray, AB, the host community of the Athabasca oil sands. Unlike the majority of the examples include above, Fort McMurray recently experienced a tremendous labour shortage in its resource sector. Second, I place more explicit analytical emphasis on the subjective and discursive dimensions of neoliberal development. Specifically, I consider the role of neoliberal individualism, the perceived erasure of gender differences and upward mobility alongside hegemonic frontier masculinity in the subjective experiences of women who live and work in this community.

RESEARCH LOCATION

Fort McMurray, located in the northeast of the Canadian province of Alberta, lies at the heart of one of the world's largest and most rapidly expanding energy mega-projects in the world. Oil reserves in Alberta are second only to Saudi Arabia, with over 49,000 square kilometres of land being leased by the provincial government of Alberta to oil companies for development (Woynillowicz, Holroyd and Dyer 2007). In 2005, annual economic investment in the Athabasca oil sands reached approximately $10 billion Cnd (Government of Alberta 2006). In the same year, oil sands production reached a million barrels per day, a target initially set for 2020 (Woynillowicz 2006). The supply of labour available in the region was unable to meet the growing demand for skilled and unskilled workers. In addition to the high wages associated with the oil industry,

work camps providing lodging and meals were set up at mine sites and living out allowance – an additional $130 tax-free per diem – were introduced as incentives to lure in workers from elsewhere in Canada.

With its promise of high salaries and endless jobs, oil sands work proved to be a particularly strong draw for residents of other resource-based communities in Canada, such as fishing or mill towns that have faced economic collapse. Between 1999 and 2008, Fort McMurray's population rose from 36,452 to 72,363 (Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo 2009). This figure does not include the mobile workforce, estimated at 26,000 workers (Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo 2009), who commute to the mines from elsewhere in Canada on weekly or monthly bases. Because of this phenomenal growth, Fort McMurray and the Athabasca oil sands have become a symbol of economic hope and opportunity in Canada. Economic prosperity, low taxes (there also is no sales tax in Alberta) and job creation have become the Government of Alberta's key justification for permitting the continued expansion of the oil sands in the face of significant local and international criticism over greenhouse gas emissions, other forms of pollution, exacerbations in social inequalities, and other cumulative impacts. More pronounced in government claims is the abundant employment opportunities from oil sands development, which is central to the 'Alberta Advantage'—the province's official slogan at the height of the boom (Government of Alberta 2004).

Fort McMurray's economy has gained a reputation as "modern-day gold rush" (Syncrude Canada Ltd. 2009, 7) where hard work can lead to tremendous personal wealth. However, skyrocketing wages and rapid growth have occurred coterminously with a number of social and infrastructural problems in the community. Water and water treatment facilities in the community are severely overburdened, access to medical professionals is substantially lower than elsewhere in the province, and childcare services are expensive and in short supply (Government of Alberta 2006). A housing deficit estimated at 3,900 in 2006 caused home and rental prices to soar (Government of Alberta 2006). Turnover rates in all industries are significant. For instance, a report in 2006 found turnover rate for teachers in that year to be 25%, 10% for municipal employers and 15% for medical professionals (Archibald 2006). Consistent with boomtown literature (e.g. Freudenburg 1981; England and Albrecht 1984; Petkova et al 2009), the rise of substance abuse and crime is a widespread concern in Fort McMurray; by 2003 drug-related criminal charges had risen to five times the provincial average (Government of Alberta 2006; Archibald 2006).

At the height of the labour shortage in the mid 2000s, government and corporate actors identified women as a key population that could be recruited to meet workforce demands (Government of Alberta 2007). Despite calling for the development of best practices to increase the hiring of women, no women-centric training programs for oil-related occupations were established. While data on women working in Canadian resource sectors is notoriously vague (Reed 2003),

the Government of Alberta reports that women represented approximately 25% of the oil sands workforce in the mid-2000s. However, this figure does not provide information on the types of employment women are undertaking (e.g. proportion of women working in administrative positions versus skilled trades, etc.). Statistics Canada (2006) data for the Fort McMurray region suggest that women for the same time period represented 21% of all natural and applied science professionals, and only 11% of all tradespersons. Information made available by major oil sands companies such as Syncrude, show that women represent 20% of their permanent workforce, and 10% of the leadership (Syncrude Canada Ltd. 2007). Suncor's (Suncor Energy 2010) most recent data suggests that women represent 12% of their oil sands mines workforce, 16% of its in situ workforce, and 7% of its management for operations in the region. It is interesting to note that these figures in the Fort McMurray region, despite the expressed desire for more female workers, is significantly lower than the company's overall workforce throughout Canada, with a 23% female workforce, and 18% female management (Suncor Energy 2010).

While the absolute number of women working in this sector is significant, given the size of the oil sands operation, the percentage of women in this industry remains comparably low. Yet, the demand for female workers in the region is not limited to the oil sands. Occupational sectors that are traditionally female-dominated, such as the social and community services sector, have also grown significantly. However, the income earning opportunities in this sector are

significantly lower than in the oil sands, often part-time, and, in the case of non-profit organizations, entirely dependent on grants. As a result, income differences between men and women in Fort McMurray are substantially higher than the provincial average. While Statistics Canada (2006) reports the overall median income in Fort McMurray (before tax) to be $43,920, for men this number is $76,645 and for women $24,452.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to explore how women's experiences of the challenges and opportunities in Fort McMurray materially and discursively converge and contradict with neoliberal frames of employment, upward mobility, and individualized success. To do this, I draw on Reed's (2000) and Naples' (1994) notion of social embeddedness, in which analytical emphasis is placed on how extra-local processes, such as resource booms, are locally manifested in social relations, practices and discourses, and therefore experienced in place-specific ways. Similar to Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus, a social embeddedness framework can "render visible and intelligible, the multiplicity, consistencies and contradictions in women's positions" (Reed 2000, 363) by highlighting the structural constraints on spaces of agency. As Reed (2000) demonstrates in her study of women's pro-environmental and pro-labour activism in a logging community, social embeddedness can shed insight into women's multiple subjectivities without relying on simplistic and static conceptions of women's identities nor overdetermining their sense of agency.

This study involved thirty-two semi-structured interviews with women working in and around Fort McMurray in the summer and fall of 2009. The interview questions focused on how participants perceived the opportunities and challenges of living and working in Fort McMurray, and how these related to their gender. Participants in the study were recruited via a purposive snowball sample, and selected specifically to maximize diversity with respect to age, ethnicity, language, marital status and length of residency in the community. Interview participants were employed in either the social and community services, or in the oil sands. These two occupational categories were selected specifically because they represent, respectively, a male-dominated and female-dominated sector heavily impacted by the resource boom.

As the price of oil peaked in the mid-2000s, the oil sands industry grew rapidly and created an abundance of work opportunities in diverse fields including engineering, sciences, skilled trades, human resources, finances and management. The impact on the social and community services was equally profound, though less direct. Because of the lure of oil sands work, high rates of vacancy occurred in other sectors. The social and community services, however, faced worker shortages while maintaining responsibility for addressing the social repercussions of the boom, from providing child care services to sexual health programs to substance abuse counseling. The sample of social service workers started with key informants in the community who had thick community networks with those working in the social services sector, and the sample of women working in the oil

sands started with contacts made through personal connections and through a fellow researcher doing an ethnography on Fort McMurray's community dynamics. Interviews lasted one to two hours and took place at a location comfortable for the respondent, including their homes, cafés or offices.

All interviews were transcribed and coded by in NVIVO, with specific attention paid to any contradictions and internal conflicts emerging within the participants' subjective accounts. This analytical strategy, advocated by Smith (1999, see also O'Shaughnessy and Krogman 2011 [in press]), views contradictions as entry points for understanding the larger discursive and social forces organizing participants' lives, including those which may not be readily understood or articulated. Participants' names have been replaced by randomly chosen pseudonyms throughout this paper.

RESULTS

FORT MCMURRAY: LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

All participants in this study, regardless of occupational sector, spoke at length about the abundant employment opportunities presented to them in Fort McMurray. These work opportunities are more comprehensive than simply being hired; participants in this study described the opportunity to choose careers that accommodate their lifestyles and allow them to rise up quickly to leadership positions and develop advanced skill sets:

> The stuff you can do for the first couple of years, in terms of your résumé and what that looks like… there is a lot of things that you [gain experience in, where you] would not get that opportunity elsewhere. A lot of [career] movement, a lot of getting to figure out what you like to do. Being able to switch jobs around and move around…. Whereas if you were in a bigger industry or a bigger area you really have to fight for those positions. Here they just come up and you can move into those fairly easily. So yeah it's great because you really get a chance to try a lot of the things. (Megan, social services)

Participants in this study pointed to these opportunities as evidence of equality between men and women in Fort McMurray, especially in the resource sector, and insist that no barriers exist for women who can prove that they can perform their jobs equally well as men. Fort McMurray was also identified as a unique place for women employed in the resource sector because the greater likelihood of having female co-workers. In this regard, women have greater access to female mentors and role models. In certain occupational sectors, most notably heavy equipment operators, there was a sense among participants that women were in fact preferential hires. As Irene mentions,

> It's just…and they love women drivers, they love women equipment workers and there are lots of process operators and stuff like that. So I think there's lots of opportunities. I would love to, if I didn't have kids, I would probably be running equipment.

However, women's *difference* relative to men was often highlighted. As Gina explains,

> Especially in the oil sands industry, you can get hired at any job given your qualifications, and it's not gender biased…. Well, men are men, they are like, 'Uhh, I'm driving a 700 tonne truck, let's see what it can do', and women are way more cautious and conservative in a lot of ways, more detail oriented in a lot cases, you know they're not out to prove, they're not, for a lack of a better term, dick-measuring with anybody else, they're there to do their work.

For many women, particularly those employed in the social and community services sector, the notion of opportunity rooted in employment clearly reflected a middle-class aspiration afforded by the boom that would be unavailable in other Canadian resource communities. As Veronica (social services) explains:

> We want a house, we want a family, we want to be able to live our life the way we want to and not be in fear of it falling out from under us. Part of the reason why we came out here was for the stability.

Many spoke at lengths about the opportunities to retire at a young age, to live in large houses, and to acquire possessions such as new trucks and ATVs, and being able to travel frequently.

Participants in this study were less forthcoming with the challenges associated with living and working in Fort McMurray. As Karen's (oil sands worker) quote suggests, few participants perceived any barriers to achieving this middle-class lifestyle:

> If you come up here, you can have any type of lifestyle you want… there are the people that, you know if they want to have the family life and be a stay-at-home mom and have a really strong home-base centre of life, you can have that too. I think it's really...you can see whatever you want to see when it comes to living in Fort McMurray up here.

Those who did acknowledge challenges pointed mainly to the high cost of living in Fort McMurray, and the burden of inadequate infrastructure in the face of rapid growth. Most notable of the infrastructural challenges were insufficient child-care and recreational services, elder-care service, grocery store line-ups and traffic. Interestingly, few participants perceived gender as a significant feature of the challenges they experienced, even though they directly related to social reproductive responsibilities that have traditionally been the domain of women.

WHERE ELSE? OPPORTUNITIES AS PLACE SPECIFIC

While participants actively recognized skill development and career advancement as morally valued pathways to success in a neoliberal market environment, they did not credit their current employment to their existing skills, training or work ethics. Rather, they attribute their success to Fort McMurray's

unique labour demand. As Jane, a skilled tradesperson working in the oil sector, notes,

> Where else could I have at 44 years old, go back to school and walk into a job, almost a guaranteed job? Where else could I have done that except up here where they needed people so bad that they will take anyone that seems qualified.

In asking 'where else', Jane is privileging the economic conditions of the oil boom as the enabling factor in her opportunity to gain employment in this male-dominated field, rather than her actual qualifications obtained through her education and apprenticeship. This comment further suggests that Jane is not recognizing her employer's good fortune in her personal investment in her training and her availability for hire in the relatively remote location of Fort McMurray.

A notable consequence of this notion of 'where else' is that participants in the oil sector rarely spoke about opportunities to take their skills elsewhere, despite recognizing their opportunities to quickly develop skills and gain promotions within the oil sands industry. Although a small number of participants spoke of the possibility of moving away from Fort McMurray after a few years of working, they did not cite work opportunities as the primary motivation. Rather, they spoke primarily about choosing to raise families elsewhere, given the community's negative reputation. Dana, an oil sands engineer, responded in this

way regarding whether she would be living in Fort McMurray in five years from the time of the interview:

> Not really. I'm dating somebody here and we're planning on moving in and you know in a couple of years getting married and we don't want to raise our kids here…. If we do get to that point. So probably in the next five years we'll be looking at trying to get a job elsewhere.

It is notable in this quote that Dana does not make reference to working as an engineer elsewhere, despite the transferability of her skills; rather she discusses getting 'a job' elsewhere. Dana's level of education and the prestige associated with her career afford her a certain amount of flexibility and security, yet the tension between her career in Fort McMurray and desire to raise a family elsewhere are evident.

The tension between place-bounded work opportunities and the desire to live in a family-friendly community, interestingly, does not manifest among the participants working in the more female-dominated community and social services sector. Whereas the majority of participants working in the oil sands either had already raised children before working in this sector or are intending to change jobs before having children, a large number of participants raised children while working in the social and community services. The abundance of jobs in this field leads to a widespread perception that they can choose jobs that are compatible with their family responsibilities:

> I could be at work and have to go to a meeting in ten minutes and if I get a phone call saying something is going on that needs my immediate attention on a personal level, my co-workers wrap around me like whatever needs to be done. 'Do you need me to go to the meeting?' 'Is it something that I can pick up and do for you because I have time to go do that?' We're very accommodating of life needing to take precedence over work sometimes. (Veronica, social services)

In contrast to oil sands workers who perceived their work opportunities as dependent on the economic boom, social and community service workers adopted the mantra of 'where else' from a moral standpoint. They recognized the possibility of leapfrogging into higher pay grades and management positions in more urban and southern regions after putting in time in Fort McMurray. However, they framed this possibility in a negative light, as a betrayal to a community that has been good to them.

> There are two communities here…. There is a community that lives here and has a life here. We are the people who volunteer. We are the people who have a career, who aren't on five-year plans…. So they are the community who is involved. We are the communities who are raising our kids here and plan on raising our kids here. They are the people who are building a life here. Yes we work here, but that's not our primary function. Then there's the community who comes here to work. They utilize our systems. They utilize our resources. They drive like maniacs.

> They don't care about where they are. They are here to bring home a paycheck. And at the end of the day, this is not their home. (Anne, social services)

As the quote above demonstrates, women working in this sector ascribe moral value to work opportunities that lead to a commitment to Fort McMurray as home, and the associated commitment to raising a family in the community.

The 'us' (residents making a commitment to Fort McMurray as home) versus 'them' (those who do not make this commitment) division, combined with a sense that work and income earning opportunities are temporally and spatially bound to Fort McMurray's unique economy, directly conflicts with the ideal neoliberal subject that is unfettered by time and space. The mobile workforce, who in many ways is an extreme embodiment of individually motivated neoliberal subjectivity, is clearly identified as one of the major challenges for participants in this study because of the impact on the community wellbeing.

'FORT MCMURRAY'S BEEN GOOD TO ME': OPPORTUNITIES AS PRIVILEGE

The moral commitment to Fort McMurray as home, which was strongly present in the narratives of women working in the social and community services and to a slightly lesser extent in those of women working in the oil sector, coincides with a strong sense of individual benefit. There is a wide sense among residents of the community that Fort McMurray has been good to them, providing unique opportunities and advantages. Alicia, an immigrant to Canada, describes

her gratitude to the community for providing her with what she perceives to be a rare opportunity to work as a female engineer in the oil sands:

> So that's the thing, I really have enjoyed everything from being here. The opportunities as I told you and the fact that I can work as an engineer here which you're not entitled to pretty much anywhere.

While Alicia acknowledges the transition to a northern climate has been difficult, she is enthusiastic about reframing this challenge into a positive opportunity:

> So you do have opportunities to go and play in the snow and make up whatever reason for it…oh it's too cold, so let's make hot chocolate. You always have to try to make the best of it and I think we do have the opportunity to do that here and again when you're working, you have your income and your facilities and you can fly away and get away and get some rest. You can go back home and come back and realize that, yeah, we made a good choice [to move here]. It might be cold but everything else…precious.

Although a number of participants expressed a genuine appreciation for their lives in Fort McMurray, others suggested that gratitude to Fort McMurray is, in fact, gratitude for the financial opportunities associated with working there, which in turn suppresses their recognition of the challenges they face in the community. Erin (social services) describes what she views as the dominant conceptualization of opportunity in Fort McMurray:

> Of course it is Fort McMoney and things like that. [But] I recently heard it referred to as Fort Mc-Me-First, which is very appropriate. That's personally how I feel about that.

Mona (social services) expresses that this sense of me-first and 'only here for the money' does not apply to all members of the community:

> Most people who work at the plant are pretty clear that their job isn't rewarding. The money is rewarding. That people who are the more positive people here will say Fort McMurray has been good to me, and they mean that in terms of finances, in terms of that kind of blessings in your life. The other group of people will say 'I am here for the money, I am making the money, I hate it here right now, I hate every minute of it here.'

Interestingly, a closer examination of this divide between those who extend their sense of appreciation to the wider social context of Fort McMurray as a place to make a good living and carry out their lives, and those who are there for the money, reveals that gender is a key factor at play in the context of where one lands in this contrast. Women, through both formal and informal labour, maintained responsibility for community building, voluntarism and other forms of social reproduction, particularly in light of the fact that men working in the oil sands were often on shift work rotations, with a strong pressure to put in overtime, which effectively reduced their ability to participate in community events. Moreover, those who work in the social services and non-profit sectors discussed

how their work choices actually led to their exclusion from Fort McMurray's financial benefits, unless they were economically supported by someone who works in the oil sands. As Sandra mentions,

> It's very expensive to live here…. I know lots of people in non-profit who make as little as $35,000 a year. Thirty-five to forty-five are kind of the range. And I just think that's not enough. And people, you know it would be nice if they could choose non-profit as a career but a lot has to happen [for that to be possible]. You have to work for an agency first of all that can afford to pay benefits and pay enough money so you can also pay for your needs plus save as well.

Women employed in the oil sands, particularly those who worked shift work, felt a considerable tension between their desire to make a moral commitment to the community and their work. As Mary explains,

> Fort McMurray is an awesome community to which I have given very little because I found with shift work I don't know how you could give. You only…every other week are you able to participate in anything and it's always shifts. They're not the same days of the week as they were the last time you were off…I tried being a part of the Crime Stoppers and it was just too difficult because you can never set a day of the month. You can never say, 'well we'll meet on the third Thursday of every month' because you might be working it, you might not be working it. So it's very difficult I find to give. And this is the first time that I've lived in a community where I haven't been really involved.

A common theme that came up in informal pre- and post-interview discussions (as few were willing to state it on the record) was the notion that working in the social services is a privilege. Privilege, in this instance, is not a reference to difficulty obtaining employment in this sector, as jobs were abundant. Rather it is a direct reference to their economic status as dependent on a household member who works in the oil sands, which in turn allowed them to work in a sector that rarely paid a living wage but provided a supportive work environment for family life. As Evelyn states,

> Often women are not working in the helping professions because they need the money. It's not a place where you come to work because you need money because you could make more money at Tim Horton's probably than a lot of them are getting paid an hour to do their jobs. You can certainly make more money at Tim Horton's or Wal-Mart than you can make an hour in childcare or those kinds of orientations even if you are a professional…. I think because they're willing to trade-off the paycheck for the flex time, for being in town and being ten minutes away if the school calls and your kid is sick than being an hour away maybe. Because they are willing to say to an organization, "I will work for this rate of pay but I need flex time and I want off in the summer." Or, "I will work at the rate of pay you're willing to pay me but I have to be out of here at 2:45 every single day." Or, "You have to understand that I have a special needs child and he's in school normally but when I have to run, I have to run and I can't tell you whether I'm going to be gone for an hour

> or four days. And if you're willing to do that, then these are the skills I bring to the job and I'm willing to work what you can afford to pay me." And my spouse works wherever but he has all the benefits and all that kind of stuff so that's another six to ten percent off the top.

The converse to this notion of privilege is the incredible vulnerability it masks, particularly for women who are financially dependent on a spouse. Valerie, recalling her divorce from her abusive husband, illustrates the difficulty of working in the non-profit sector without additional financial support:

> Yeah. But at the time I did work a few jobs – it wasn't my… uh… choice… like I worked four jobs at one moment when I separated because it's so expensive, you have to survive, like it is unbelievable like how expensive this town is. Like just childcare is more than $1200 [per month].

Participants working in the social services and non-profit sector noted that, given the economic challenges of living in Fort McMurray and lack of women's shelters, staying with abusive partners was relatively common. Similarly, economic pressures encourage many women to enter into dependent relationships, as Karen (oil sands) suggests:

> Just because of the value of the houses here and a lot of the times from my experience and other people may have different experiences that sometimes you get into a situation where it is too expensive to live independently so you get a lot of couples that are saying, well we're dating on and off but we might make a go of it so let's just move in

together so that we're only paying one rent or one mortgage rather than two.

Interestingly, the economic independence afforded by employment in the oil sands also belies a host of vulnerabilities for women. Those who are participating in training and apprenticeship programs, for instance, face enormous economic pressures. Anita, who was finishing an apprenticeship, discussed her precarious housing circumstances since moving to Fort McMurray with little social support as a teenager with her then-boyfriend:

> …so we moved up here [to live] with his sister, then me and her got into [a disagreement], so then we were only here for a couple months and we moved back home. Then I broke up with him and moved back up here on my own and I moved in with my cousin. Then she kicked me out because her brother was moving up. I lived in camp, out of camp, in camp, out of camp for four months or so, until I found a steady job. [Laughs] I'm gonna get a down payment soon… After you move 18 times in three years, you get used to it…. I move a lot…. Having my own house, a steady place to live, would make life so much better. I don't like following other people's rules but when you live in their house it's something you have to do. I like my own space and stuff. Like, if I could get my own place, a house that I could live in, it would be a lot less stressful…. Like, when my wallet disappeared, I was pissed off, I

know somebody stole it. I know the guy I was living with stole it but I can't prove it.

At the time of the interview, Anita was sleeping on the couches of various acquaintances, despite working a part-time job in addition to her apprenticeship.

The sense of gratitude women have for their jobs, and the suppression of complaints, can have an even more pernicious impact on working in male-dominated sectors. Participants in my study reported facing subtle and overt forms of discrimination and harassment in their workplace that are well documented in the literature on women in non-traditional occupations (Tallichet 2000; Mayes and Pini 2010). These range from paternalism and sexist language, to gender-based wage gaps and sexual assault. With the exception of wage gaps, these incidents were most commonly reported among those working in the skilled trades (in which local unions set wage grades) and as general labourers. Rather than framing these as systematic barriers or challenges, most of the participants normalized these practices and internalized the responsibility for dealing with them. Anita, for instance, discussed her goal of acting more professional in the workplace by refraining from fraternizing with coworkers in order to avoid sexual harassment:

My goal is to act more professional this year…. My co-worker, my journeyman, he made me feel so uncomfortable and would ask to touch my boobs and stuff. 'You know this is very, very unprofessional? This is not the job'. And he just kept asking and asking, like, 'if I touch your

boobs, would you smack me?' Half the time I think he was serious and half the time I think he was joking.

While such overt instances of sexual harassment were more common in the trades, insidious forms of harassment and discrimination occurred in nearly all occupational categories, including those with more even gender distributions. Dana, an engineer recounted

> Basically what I'm getting at is if you wear a tank top under your coveralls and you go over and see the operators, it's a lot easier to get stuff done…. As long as you take it with a grain of salt and you don't…as long as you're not offended by it. Like for me I'm just like, whatever I need to get this done and that's the easiest way to do it… Just because they like looking at girls. They're boys, that's just the way they are.

Lisa, a scientist, similarly observed how she downplayed any sense of gender discrimination she felt on the job and focused on moderating her response to it and actively avoiding clothing that revealed her figure rather than seeking to change the workplace culture where men are comfortable making sexual overtones on the job. Despite this effort, Dana did show circumspection around men's promotion prospects compared to women in the same positions, but again her focus on her internal locus of control, in a way that embraced tolerance.

> The company I work at, again there are lots of young women working in the company but the top positions are all men. And sometimes you do

> wonder if there's some sexism going on when you see the guys getting big projects over you. But in my day-to-day life I don't worry about it too much.

PIONEERING SPIRIT: OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

While participants in this study clearly adopted a neoliberal perspective of opportunity, in the sense that individuals ultimately hold responsibility for their career-related successes and failures, frontier masculinity was nevertheless an important reference for their identities. The sense of Fort McMurray as an isolated, northern frontier clearly emerges from Mona's comments:

> It's kind of the edge of that pioneering spirit, I mean, I don't want to reinforce the stereotypes. We're not real frontier [laughs]…. You are going to feel isolated and insecure and afraid the forest fires are going to burn you. Um, and I mean there's that sort of whole, very, very subtle undercurrent of there's [dangerous] things sitting out [around us]. Those [oil sands] plants, if they blew up, we'd be Hiroshima…. And again nobody talks about it. But, you know, it's true…. And so you have to have, I think you have to have that little bit of wanting to be a bit of an adventurer, a bit of a pioneer… Um, and I guess, and I would see, I would describe myself a little bit that way too. So I don't know. So, yeah, if you want all the conveniences and the predictability and security, don't come to Fort McMurray."

Indeed, participants in this study strongly valued many of the characteristics associated with frontier masculinity—ruggedness, daring and self-sufficiency. These characteristics were seen as necessary to succeed in Fort McMurray, as well as a source of Fort McMurray's lure and excitement.

The pioneering spirit emerged frequently in participants' discussions of their outdoor-based hobbies, such as fishing and hunting. However, it was also a key component of the sense of validation interwoven in their employment narratives. For those working in the oil sands, contributing to one of the world's largest and most technologically complex resource extraction projects was a major draw. As Arlene expressed, "you know for a new grad I would never expect to be running a multi-million dollar project by now. I would have never have dreamt it." Arlene goes on to explain that is not simply the size of the operations the leads to excitement, but the opportunity to be at the cutting edge of new technologies:

> …every challenge we have is like, there is no such thing as a small challenge here, it's all big challenges so for us it's an exciting industry to be in… you're in stuff that's never been tried and there is nowhere to go to find out what somebody else did because we've never done it before. So that part is kind of exciting. Yeah. So I guess instead of it being kind of scary, it's actually neat because you really don't know what's around the corner for you because you don't know how it's going to work....

On the other side of the coin, working on a mega-project with such global impact created a number of internal challenges and struggles. The environmental and social scrutiny placed on the oil sands was deeply internalized by a number of participants. As Jane expresses:

> I'm really tired of working for places that people hate without even knowing all the information…. They get a little bit of information here and there, they piece it all together and decide that they hate that particular organization. So it's exciting to work for a company like [major oil sands company] that is so big and they are at the forefront and all that kind of stuff. So that part is really neat but it draws an awful lot of negative attention after the ducks and Greenpeace coming up and it draws more negative attention and what not. It would be more exciting if there wasn't so much negative comments being made about it. You know, nobody says, 'Oh my God, look what these guys have accomplished.' You know? Nobody is saying that everybody is just saying, 'Oh look what they are doing to the environment.'

This sense of resentment toward the outsider gaze on Fort McMurray and the oil sands was particularly prevalent among those working on the environmental side of the operations. Critical outsiders are depicted as uniformed about mitigation efforts around oil sands environmental impacts and important scientific innovations, and unappreciative of the contributions oil sands workers make to the Alberta economy by working in this industry. Carrie, an environmental scientist,

> A lot of people think that [major oil sands company] and especially Fort McMurray is like the devil or like one of these big organizations that's horribly bad and I think the challenge isn't my day to day work, the challenge is getting people to know exactly how much effort does go into the environmental side… so when you have to explain what you're doing and kind of justify that it's not all oil oriented, that's kind of frustrating or even just to try to believe you that honest to God we are doing environmental stuff up here and it is kind of frustrating sometimes.

Interestingly, the pioneering spirit was equally important for those who worked in the social and community services sector. Given the lack of resources and high rates of turnover in this occupational sector, resourcefulness and self-sufficiency were highly valued qualities. As Ellen explains,

> This is the centre; the world spins around us. We don't spin around the world. And I feel that a lot. You know we've been the axis of a whole bunch of things. We've also been frontrunners in doing a whole bunch of stuff…. Things like that. But it's always like that, we've always had these really great ideas and then they go off somewhere else and somebody else takes them and uses them; we have to, we have to adapt real quick. So sometimes some of the stuff that we create goes, whoosh, like wildfire, like a tipping point, we create it, and then everyone else goes, oh, there is a best practice in Fort McMurray, we'll take that.

The pioneering spirit among social and community service workers also coalesced with a sense of making a difference in their community and embracing leadership roles based on need. As Evelyn suggests,

> To know that you have the opportunity to make a difference is very important. It's very key here. If this was a stable community, that opportunity might not be there. I don't know where you grew up but if you grew up in a small town… if you were twenty-three years old or twenty-five years old, would you have an opportunity to sit on a board for a volunteer organization and probably chair it in two years time?

What is notable about the above quotation by Evelyn is that the opportunity to make a difference is framed as a benefit to the individual. The actual impacts of this opportunity are not the yardstick for success. Mona suggests this opportunity for individuals to make a difference in their community without adequate training or resources is in fact a major challenge to social learning and capacity building:

> Sometimes you encounter people who are so unqualified for their position that it's terrifying…. sometimes it can be problematic because I think sometimes people get themselves in positions and they don't have a clue what they're doing… I guess if I ever want to take over an [executive director position] and run an organization into the ground, this is the best place for me to do it…. It can be a really good opportunity but it can also be problematic…. We don't know what the word capacity

means. There is just no sort of collective, historical experience of working with social issues in the nonprofit sector.

Thus, while the individual's opportunity allows leadership experimentation and flexibility, it also runs the risk of little accountability to outsiders in regards to how well the organization is meeting its goals, reaching needy clientele, and building capacity over time to do a better job based on institutional memory, a secure funding base, and targeted goals. Common among all of the interviews was the theme that reactionary decision-making, based on short-term funding promises, circumscribed many of their decisions.

NEOLIBERALISM AND GENDER IN FORT MCMURRAY: CONTINGENT OPPORTUNITIES AND RE-INSCRIBED FRONTIER MASCULINITY

While the confluence of frontier masculinity and neoliberalism in Fort McMurray clearly reinforces the primacy of individualized economic opportunities and characteristics of ruggedness and self-sufficiency among the male workforce, it results in a contradictory sense of opportunities and challenges for women in the community. Research participants narrate their experiences from a partial and incomplete neoliberal subjectivity, often positioning themselves as outsiders to the 'legitimate', individualized workforce in Fort McMurray, regardless of their employment sector. The results of this study suggest that women in Fort McMurray internalize the neoliberal discourse of individualized benefits achieved through labour opportunities, yet are not absolved of family and community wellbeing responsibilities that are ascribed to them through frontier masculinity. In consequence, participants struggled to coherently articulate the

gendered challenges they face, which often manifest at a collective level, and represent the antithesis to an individualized sense of benefit and achievement.

Women in this study spoke at length in praise of the abundant employment options and household earning opportunities available to them as a result of the boom, which they viewed as a largely positive phenomenon. This notion of opportunity reflects a neoliberal sensibility in which anyone, regardless of gender, race or class, is deemed capable of using their labour to secure their livelihoods and must take responsibility for their individual wellbeing. The subservient position many of the respondents assumed, around 'I am lucky to have this job' also fits with a neoliberal approach that emphasizes the responsibility of the labourer to be adaptive, and to sell one's labour to the highest paying option available, or to accept low wages in exchange for a job choice based on commitment to place, greater autonomy and flexibility of work hours. In contrast to gendered imperatives of frontier masculinity, women in Fort McMurray's neoliberalized economy are encouraged, and even expected to undertake formal employment. However, women in this study demonstrated a fragmented engagement with neoliberal subjectivity, and presented their opportunities as contingent on the labour scarcity associated with the boom and thus still secondary to the male breadwinner idealized in frontier masculinity. By framing their income-earning opportunities as place-specific, they are stand in contrast to the inherently mobile and flexible ideal neoliberal subject.

Unlike the experiences of women working non-traditional resource jobs in regions facing tough economic times (Davis 2000; Sherman 2009), participants in this study never faced accusations of 'taking a man's job'. In Fort McMurray, the oil extraction mega project has become so large and complex that specialized occupational categories that are not tied to historical working-class male identities, such as reclamation scientists and stakeholder relations advisors, are contributing to the labour demand. The perception that women are welcomed employees throughout the oil sector certainly marks a dramatic change from the widespread sense of marginalization from resource occupations women face elsewhere in northern and rural Canadian communities (Egan and Klausen 1998; Dunk 2003; Reed 2003; Davis 2000). However, this perception contradicts the fact that, proportionally, women's inroads into the oil sector are still slight.

Neoliberal notions of individual responsibility for skill development underscored women working in this sector's understanding of their opportunities. Acquiring the necessary training and proving oneself capable were presented as the only hurdles to be surmounted. This internalization of responsibility for one's success, combined with the perception that historical gender biases are rendered obsolete by the massive labour demand, have muted the discussion of widespread gender-specific challenges, including sexual discrimination and harassment. Participants held the view that they are equally capable of performing their occupational duties, despite being frequently marked as a sexualized other by coworkers. Rather than framing these practices as a widespread, structural

challenge, they normalized discrimination and harassment as part and parcel of working in a resource industry and internalized responsibility for dealing with these practices. In an earlier study of urban female oil engineers in Alberta, Miller (2004) argued that these strategies of normalization and internalization

> that the women developed to survive and, by some standards, to thrive, are double-edged in that they also reinforced the masculine system, resulting in short-term individual gains, and apparently long-term failure to create more equitable values in the workplace.

In Fort McMurray, it is evident that, without dismantling the hegemony of frontier masculinity, the gains women have made in the oil sector are unlikely to have lasting impact beyond the labour shortage.

Women working in the social and community services sector further articulated their outsider position relative to ideal neoliberal workers by emphasizing the 'privilege' of their work. Although they are employed, the difficulty of earning a living wage maintains the core characteristic of women in the discourse of frontier masculinity: dependency on men. Rather than understanding employment as a site of financial reward, it is a site of what Murphy refers to as 'maternal politics' (1995, cf Reed 2003), a legitimization of women's public sphere activities by framing them as a natural extension of their normative gender roles.

A fragmented engagement with neoliberal subjectivity is strongly reflected in the participants' overt criticism of the mobile oil workforce—the population that most readily espouses a 'true' neoliberal subjectivity. This population was characterized by the interview participants as 'only there for the money', entirely freed of community/place attachment, and able to transcend class barriers easily. Ironically, the most palatable tension in participants' narratives emerged from the shared sense of individual financial benefit and the open landscape of work opportunities, and their desire to maintain an identity rooted in collective wellbeing and moral commitment to making a difference in one's community and family.

This contradictory tension between the absolute belief in individualized capacity to secure a good life in Fort McMurray through income-earning opportunities, and disdain for those who pursue these opportunities through mobile work reflects the fact that community wellbeing and social reproduction are still morally inscribed as women's gendered responsibility in many rural regions (Marshall 2001; Bryant and Pini 2009). Negative perceptions of Fort McMurray, whether from the outside world or other community members, were deeply internalized by participants in this study. There is a palatable sense among participants that they carry the collective weight for Fort McMurray's positive community and family-friendly image, and that adopting an attitude of 'just here for the money' is morally problematic.

In fact, many of the challenges women in this study faced emerged at a collective or community level, yet neither frontier masculinity nor neoliberalism provides an adequate vocabulary for identifying and articulating such collective experiences. A key example in this study is the frustration experienced by those working in industries with extremely high turnover rates and resultant inability to develop institutional capacity to make long-term, well planned investments into human capital and program building. While participants drew on frontier masculinity and neoliberal discourses to explain the positive opportunities afforded by the rapid turnover, they struggled to clearly identify their frustration. Similarly, discussions of the inadequate social services and infrastructure—ranging from child- and elder-care services to grocery store lineups—which create additional obstacles for women entering the workforce, intersected uncomfortably with more forceful discussions of endless work opportunities.

It is notable that the challenges associated with living and working in Fort McMurray were most readily identified by participants who were in relatively disadvantaged positions, including single individuals who were not financially supported by another household member, recent immigrants and other minorities, and young workers newly entering the workforce. Scholars of gender and class in rural and resource-based regions have argued that upward mobility can have a silencing effect with respect to recognition of social barriers and challenges (Wells 2002). In Fort McMurray, where discourses of neoliberalism and frontier

masculinity promote a notion of endless economic opportunity, this silencing effect is magnified.

Ultimately, this study supports the findings by scholars of gender in resource communities which suggest that moments of social change, such as policy developments (Reed 2003), mine closures (Scott 2007), or in this case rapid resource development, do not necessarily result in transformative moments of gender equality. More often, such change can result in circumstances, wherein "women contribute to their own marginality by their adherence to discourses and practices that reinforce stereotypes about the industry and consequently exclude them from participating more fully" (Reed 2003, 375) and trivialize the challenges they face. More research is needed on the long-term consequences to constructions of gendered identities, opportunities and quality of life in communities that have experienced such dramatic change.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study suggest that, while the oil boom in Fort McMurray has increased overall employment opportunities for all residents, it is not, to date, transformative with respect to frontier masculinity. Instead, participants in this study demonstrate a fragmented and contradictory engagement with neoliberal subjectivity in which they simultaneously espouse an individualist discourse of opportunity based on abundant employment opportunities, yet position themselves as outsiders temporarily drawn into the workforce and minimize their

identities as individually responsible and successful ‘workers’. The individualization of success inherent within neoliberalism, in particular, presents a major tension with the boom-related challenges women in Fort McMurray face, which are largely constructed as a matter of community wellbeing. As a result, participants in this study struggled to articulate a coherent narrative of their collective interests and experiences with the oil boom.

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CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION

As the title of this dissertation suggests, the interrogation of change—both real and imagined—lies at the heart of this study. Resource extraction in Canada is haunted by the cycle of change: environmental, social, demographic, cultural, political, and economic. Resource projects are commissioned and decommissioned, jobs are created and made redundant, rural landscapes are repurposed and revalued with the promise of reclamation. Yet, some forces are immutable, recalcitrant toward change. As history has undoubtedly demonstrated time and again, gendered relations and divisions of labour have been one of the most enduring features of resource communities (Egan and Klausen 1998; Reed 2003; Scott 2007; Sherman 2009).

When the neoliberal floodgates opened up women's mass entry into the waged labour market in North America during the later part of the 20th Century, the practice of marking social reproductive work as women's work proved indelible (England 2010), particularly in rural and resource based communities (Gibson-Graham 1993; Heather et al 2005; Petrzelka and Mannon 2006). Women continue to be underrepresented in science, technology and trades-based occupations (England 2010), which are central to resource industries. Yet, the resource boom and labour demand in Fort McMurray, AB, have come to symbolize the possibility of opportunity and change for women: the end of gender inequalities and divisions of labour, and an unencumbered opportunity to succeed in any career they desire. Central to this dissertation is the question of whether

such momentous change has actually occurred, or whether Fort McMurray's promise of change has been derailed at the precipice.

To understand whether the curious material reality of Fort McMurray's complex economic and labour arrangements has paved the way for a dramatic reconfiguring of the gendered division of labour, it is fundamental to interrogate such change at a material and discursive level. The dialectical interplay of material and discursive dimensions of change provides important insight into the substance of change. Even where material practices create the conditions of possibility for social change, as Foucault contends, a concomitant rupture of episteme is equally necessary (2003). Conversely, social theorist Fairclough (1989) argues that discourses only take on constructive weight when they align with material changes. Are social discourses of women's capacities to perform work historically rooted in frontier masculinity amenable to the changing labour demand? Have material practices around social reproduction developed in conjunction with new discourses of women's employment opportunities?

In the first paper of this dissertation (Chapter 2), I outline a novel analytical framework for engaging with material and discursive dimensions gender and natural resource extraction. This framework promotes a temporally and spatially situated investigation of gendered divisions of labour and normative conceptions of femininity and masculinity, while emphasizing the local and extra-local forces that contradict these practices on material and discursive levels.

Placing analytical emphasis on contradictions in gendered experiences permits an understanding of social change in resource communities as having regressive and progressive impacts while recognizing the multiplicity of gendered identities and interests. A secondary, but equally important, contribution of this paper is an increase in dialogue between feminist and rural sociological theory. The contradictions of interest in this paper are those that emerge when a feminist lens is applied to resource extraction projects, exposing important concerns and interests that are frequently ignored in policy decisions and ideological justifications for resource projects. At the same time, the incorporation of feminist theory facilitates an investigation of gendered impacts of resource extraction that does not rely on simplistic, universalized categories of 'women' or 'men'.

The following two papers in this dissertation (Chapters 3 and 4) are explicitly guided by the preceding paper's analytical framework. Chapter 3 examines the discursive contradictions emerging in media coverage of women's identities in Fort McMurray during the height of the boom, and ways in which women adopt and resist these constructions as they negotiate their identities. This study finds that print media from local and extra-local sources draw on the frame of frontier masculinity to categorize women, resulting in polarized and atavistic subject positions of over-sexualized gold diggers, devoted wives and mothers, and renegade lady truck drivers. The intensity with which these subject positions are reproduced in media and local rumours, stereotypes and urban legends renders them inescapable in the identity negotiation process. In addition to shedding light

on the discursive contradictions that operate around gendered identities, an important contribution of this study is the exploration of emphasized femininities within frontier masculinity. Although Connell (1987) insists that recognition of emphasized femininities are critical to understanding how certain forms of masculinity attain hegemonic status, studies of frontier masculinity have largely ignored women's experiences and identities.

The final paper (Chapter 4) in this dissertation engages most directly with the concept of change in Fort McMurray. While maintaining an emphasis on the discursive and material practices of frontier masculinity, this paper looks to the ways neoliberal underpinnings of resource extraction are contributing to opportunities and challenges in women's lives. This paper concludes that the transformations in gendered labour practices in Fort McMurray are rooted in a neoliberal conception of work, and individualized responsibility for success, creating a break with the discursive frame of frontier masculinity that served to exclude women from may workplace opportunities. For many women, the new language of neoliberalism provides a source of resistance to marginalization. Yet, the opportunities afforded by a neoliberal frame are contingent on the material conditions of boom, and suppress capacity to address lingering challenges for women. As a result, the transformative capacity of neoliberalism with respect to gendered divisions of labour and discourses of appropriate gender performances is greatly limited.

Collectively, these three papers provide a comprehensive narrative of women's diverse experiences living and working in Fort McMurray as the community undergoes one of the most notable resource booms in recent history. This narrative is neither stable, nor indissoluble, reflecting the multiple contradictory experiences and interests of the participants in this study. Instead, this dissertation sheds light on the extent to which women's experiences and interests have be neglected in most discussions and debates around resource extraction, or appropriated and over-simplified where convenient. The fragmented discourses of women in Fort McMurray oscillate between women as beneficiaries of resource development—unshackled from traditional gender roles and stereotypes—or women as anomalous figures on the oil frontier, existing only through their dependency on men.

I argue that it is in the slippery spaces in between these competing discourses where most women's experiences actually lie. This dissertation exposes the ways that multiple realities of women are not adequately considered in the support for the rapid expanding resource mega-project that is permeating Fort McMurray's community identity. The discourse of women benefiting in terms of job creation in the resource sector neglects the fact that the majority of women in this community are not employed in this sector, nor earning the similar financial rewards in other occupational sectors. The challenges of sustaining community wellbeing and the interests that lie beyond income earning opportunities remain marginalized from these discourses. Moreover, this

dissertation insists that any transformative gender changes that might occur will not be an incidental outcome of development that is not explicitly accompanied by policies and programs seeking to reduce gender inequalities and shift the discourse regarding women's capacities.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study contributes to a more in-depth understanding of women's gendered experiences in rapidly developing resource communities in northern Canada, the scope of the project has a few limitations worth noting. First, by focusing primarily on women, this study does not address all aspects of gender in the selected communities, most notably the production of competing hegemonic and dependent masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Women represent but one of the multiple disadvantaged and marginalized groups within resource communities. In Fort McMurray, as suggested in this dissertation, class and ethnicity are central axes of inequality and difference that intersect with gender. While this dissertation is cognizant of and sensitive to the interplay of these intersections, it does not allot the space and attention necessary to do justice to the particular challenges and constraints tied to class and ethnicity differences. While the research sample did include participants from a variety of ethnic and class backgrounds, the use of occupational fields as selection criteria did limit the diversity of participants.

Second, the main data collection strategy of this study focuses on women, excluding male participants. Although this seemingly presents a limitation in the study of contextualized gender relations (Banerjee and Bell 2007), in adopting Smith's everyday world as problematic methodology (1987, 1999), the experiences as articulated by women present a gateway to an understanding of the larger social practices relevant to their lives, including hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell 1987).

A third limitation of this study results from the temporal context of the research. Resource booms tend to unfold cyclically, yet this study provides only a snapshot of the multiple processes, forces and experiences occurring in Fort McMurray. Specifically, the research took place shortly after Fort McMurray's economy experienced a relative slowdown. As a result, the intensity of the labour demand, population growth, and expectations for financial success in the participants' accounts was tempered. Interestingly, a benefit of undertaking research at this particular juncture was the opportunity to access participants' critical reflections on the boom and the longer-term costs and benefits.

Given that this study focuses on questions of gendered identity and experiences from a hybridized materialist feminist/feminist poststructuralist approach, the potential policy implications of this research are limited. In contrast with other epistemological approaches to research, poststructuralist approaches generally do not provide cause-and-effect explanations, abstractions, or

predictions upon which to base policy directives. Rather, the emphasis is on deconstructing dominant discourses and practices in their historical and spatial contexts. All accounts and conclusions reached within poststructuralist research are necessarily partial and situated. As a result, poststructuralist approaches have been widely critiqued as a-political and incompatible with policy research (Smith 1999). Feminist poststructuralist researchers have responded to this criticism by arguing that this research can make a vital contribution to policy by illuminating

> the ways in which power operates through policy by drawing attention to hidden assumptions or policy silences and unintended consequences of policy practices… feminist policy analysts have pointed to policy silences about women's experiences and assumptions about gender roles that are implicit in the framing of policy problems and solutions. (Allan et al 2010, 24)

Thus, while this project does not generate any direct resource extraction or community development policies, it seeks to contribute to policy discussions and debates in the manner proposed by Allen et al (2010). Specifically, this dissertation exposes the widespread tendency to neglect women's widespread interests and concerns in decisions around resource extraction, and privilege masculine-coded values and interests. For instance, this dissertation emphasizes the importance of developing strategies to meet social reproduction needs in communities undergoing rapid booms in order to assure women are afforded

access to the employment and income earning benefits that justify resource extraction projects.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As this dissertation critically questions the transformative capacity of resource booms with respect to gendered opportunities and challenges, a number of additional questions arose over the course of the study that could not be addressed within the particular research context. This dissertation explores resource booms as a catalyst for change in gendered divisions of labour and gendered identities, and suggests that such changes may unfold as tenuously and cyclically as resource boom-bust cycles. A crucial next-step in this broader research interest is to examine how women's identities are shifting in relation to traditional notions of the public and private sphere in resource-dependent communities that have recently experienced a collapse of their primary industry.

In comparison with literature on resource booms, gendered relations following resource busts have been relatively forthcoming (e.g. Nelson and Smith 1998; Davis 2000; Dunk 2003, Scott 2007; Sherman 2009). Specifically, the impact of job loss on masculine identities and intra-household dynamics has received a considerable degree of attention. However, it has not been asked whether women are more likely to experience gender-based antagonism or discrimination at their worksites as resource projects are decommissioned and labour demands are constricted. Similarly, it is important to question how

women's experiences in other dimensions of the public sphere, including local politics and resource management, are influenced by economic collapse. Are women likely to be further marginalized from participation in these important community positions? To what extent does the reconfiguration of public- and private-sphere boundaries resulting from a mill or mine closure provide an entry point for women to take on leadership roles in their communities? These as-yet unanswered research questions are a vital part of the broader story of gender and resource extraction across spatial and temporal contexts.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation ultimately contributes an additional voice insisting gender issues deserve a more central position in environmental, natural resource and resource sociological scholarship. An increased attention to gender must be accompanied by an ongoing dialogue with critical feminist theory, and transgress outmoded notions that women's and men's interests are respectively confined to the private and public spheres. A fuller exploration of gender can give insight not only on the experiences of individuals in various communities and industries, but can also reveal, as Salzinger articulates, "how gendered understandings, assumptions and subjectivities structure global production itself" (2004, 44).

This dissertation draws on a case study of one of the most captivating and extreme examples of rapid resource extraction to explore how resource development impacts women's lives and how conceptions of gender influence the

process itself. Gendered discourses of women's opportunities and challenges in Fort McMurray have been used to ideologically reinforce resource extraction expansion. While women's lived experiences—including the challenges and opportunities they face—are considerably more diverse than insinuated in these discourses, these discourses nevertheless create the frame in which participants in this study negotiated and understood their identities and experiences. The perception of boundless opportunity to work and gain personal wealth, rooted in neoliberal discourses of individualism and meritocracy, widely underscored the sense of benefit among participants in this study. Yet, these perceived opportunities are inhibited by lingering discourses of women's appropriate roles and identities within frontier masculinity that insist women are inherently dependent and anomalous on the resource frontier. Moreover, this neoliberal discourse of opportunity does not provide a language to make sense of the multiple challenges women face, ranging from workplace discrimination to prohibitive costs of living to a lack of social support. However, the experiences of women in this case study have a wider significance: they point to the wider challenges of maintaining community wellbeing and capacity, and developing the necessary social learning to ensure that future developments are more responsive to the multiple needs of an increasingly diverse population. The largely hidden material and discursive challenges that are uncovered in this study do not negate opportunities and benefits that some individuals have received from the boom. Instead, they point to the need for a more comprehensive and critical examination of the complex ways gender intersects with resource development.

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APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW GUIDES

DRAFT INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FORT MCMURRAY SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS

1. **Professional Experiences/Challenges**
    a. Why did you enter into this line of work?
    b. Can you describe for me a typical day at work?
    c. Did you have another career before this one?
        i. If yes, why did you switch jobs?
    d. Do you think you will continue in your current occupation? Have you ever considered switching jobs?
        i. Why/Why not?
        ii. Is there a lot of opportunity for advancement in your job?
        iii. Is there a lot of opportunity for lateral movement in your career?
        iv. Where do you see yourself working five years from now?
    e. What is a typical work-shift at your job?
    f. What are some of the biggest challenges you face at work right now?
        i. Do you think any of these challenges are related to the boom/bust?
    g. Do you have a difficult time separating your work life from your non-work life?

h. Do you feel you have adequate resources and training to do your job?
    i. What changes would you like to see in your workplace?
i. Tell me what you like about your job.
j. What do you not like about your job?
k. Do you get a lot of satisfaction from your job?
l. Is your job a source of stress in your life?
    i. How do you cope with work-related stress?
m. What are you most proud of with respect to your career?
n. How do your family/friends feel about your work?

2. Personal Experiences/Challenges

a. What do you like about living in your community?
b. What are some of the negative aspects of life in your community?
c. How important is a sense of community to your quality of life?
    i. Do you have a strong sense of community in your community?
    ii. Why do you think that is?
d. Do you think your community has been significantly impacted by the resource boom/bust?
e. In what ways has your personal quality of life been affected by the resource boom/bust?
f. In what ways have you had to adapt to the resource boom/bust?

g. Can you describe for me what a typical day is like for you?

3. Male vs. Female-Dominated Jobs

a. Resource industries are often seen as very male-dominated. How do you feel about that perception? Is it accurate for your experience?
    i. Why/Why not?
    ii. [If yes] How do you, as a woman, see yourself fitting into this male-dominated environment?
b. You are employed in a traditionally female-dominated job. Do you think being a woman is an advantage?
    i. A disadvantage?
c. Do you think men and women have the same opportunities with respect to employment and career advancement in your field?
d. Do you think gender equality is an important issue in your industry?
e. There have been a lot of negative stereotypes about women in Fort McMurray in the news over the past few years [show photocopies of news clips]. How does this affect you?
    i. Do you think these stereotypes affect the type of work available to men and women in and around Fort McMurray?

f. Do you think the resource boom and bust have affected men and women in the same ways in your community?
    i. In what ways?
g. What do you think are the biggest challenges for women in your community?

4. Environmental Issues

a. What do you like to do for recreation?
b. Fort McMurray is a beautiful area. Do you like to get outside in nature on your time off?
c. How important is the state of the surrounding environment to you?
d. How do you feel about the media coverage and political commentary about the environmental impacts of resource development in Fort McMurray oil patch?

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5. Professional Experiences/Challenges

a. Why did you enter into this line of work?
b. Can you describe for me a typical day at work?
c. Did you have another career before this one?
    i. If yes, why did you switch jobs?
d. Do you think you will continue in your current occupation? Have you ever considered switching jobs?

i. Why/Why not?

ii. Is there a lot of opportunity for advancement in your job?

iii. Is there a lot of opportunity for lateral movement in your career?

iv. Where do you see yourself working five years from now?

e. What is a typical work-shift at your job?

f. What are some of the biggest challenges you face at work right now?

i. Do you think any of these challenges are related to the boom/bust?

g. Do you have a difficult time separating your work life from your non-work life?

h. Do you feel you have adequate resources and training to do your job?

i. What changes would you like to see in your workplace?

i. Tell me what you like about your job.

j. What do you not like about your job?

k. Do you get a lot of satisfaction from your job?

l. Is your job a source of stress in your life?

i. How do you cope with work-related stress?

m. What are you most proud of with respect to your career?

n. How do your family/friends feel about your work?

6. **Personal Experiences/Challenges**
    a. What do you like about living in your community/ the place where you work?
    b. What are some of the negative aspects of life in your community?
    c. How important is a sense of community to your quality of life?
        i. Do you have a strong sense of community in your community?
        ii. Why do you think that is?
    d. Do you think your community has been significantly impacted by the resource boom/bust?
    e. In what ways has your personal quality of life been affected by the resource boom/bust?
    f. In what ways have you had to adapt to the resource boom/bust?
    g. Can you describe for me what a typical day is like for you?

7. **Male vs. Female-Dominated Jobs**
    a. Resource industries are often seen as very male-dominated. How do you feel about that perception? Is it accurate for your experience?
        i. Why/Why not?
        ii. [If yes] How do you, as a woman, see yourself fitting into this male-dominated environment?

b. You are employed in a traditionally male-dominated job. Do you think being a woman is an advantage?
    i. A disadvantage?
c. Do you think men and women have the same opportunities with respect to employment and career advancement in your field?
d. Do you think gender equality is an important issue in your industry?
e. There have been a lot of negative stereotypes about women in Fort McMurray in the news over the past few years [show photocopies of news clips]. How does this affect you?
    i. Do you think these stereotypes affect the type of work available to men and women in and around Fort McMurray?
f. Do you think the resource boom and bust have affected men and women in the same ways in your community?
    i. In what ways?
g. What do you think are the biggest challenges for women in your community?

8. Environmental Issues

a. What do you like to do for recreation?
b. Fort McMurray is a beautiful area. Do you like to get outside in nature on your time off?

c. How important is the state of the surrounding environment to you?

d. How do you feel about the media coverage and political commentary about the environmental impacts of resource development in Fort McMurray oil patch?

APPENDIX B – PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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Women's Experiences of Natural Resource Development in the Canadian North

Information Sheet

As part of a research project looking at women's experiences with rapid resource development (i.e. mining, oil and gas), we are interviewing women employed in both the social services and the primary resource sectors. We hope that this research will help to identify key opportunities and challenges specific to women in communities experiencing rapid resource development in order to make recommendations to policy processes governing social impact assessment in Fort McMurray andYellowknife.

We are asking for an hour or two of your time for an interview on this topic. With your consent, we would like to audio record our interview as well as take notes. Only the researchers in this study will have access to the audiotapes from the interview. All of the data associated with this study will be stored in a locked cabinet, and only myself and my supervisor, Dr. Naomi Krogman, will have access to the data. The information from the interviews will be used as part of my PhD thesis at the University of Alberta, as well in other publications and presentations that may result from the research. With your permission, the data collected during this study may also be used as part of a longer-term study on the social impacts of resource development in Canada, and you may be contacted at a later date by Dr. Krogman to ask you if you would be willing to participate in another interview.

After the interview, you will be referred to by a pseudonym to ensure your anonymity and confidentiality. Your name will not appear in any publications and you will only be referred to by your occupational sector (e.g. social services or primary resource sector). I will not use direct quotes containing identifying information in any publication or presentation. In addition, you may decline to answer any of our questions and are free to stop the interview at any time. You may also withdraw from the study until January 31st, 2010 by notifying either of the primary researchers. Upon receiving your written or verbal request to withdraw, all information associated with your interview will be removed from the study. If you would like to receive an executive summary of our research findings, we would be happy to provide one upon your request.

If you have any questions regarding the interview or this study, please contact either of the primary researchers listed below:

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Should you have any concerns about this study, you may contact Dr. Wendy Rodgers, Chair of the PER-ALES Research Ethics Board, at 780-492-8126. Dr. Rodgers has no direct involvement with this project.

We sincerely thank you for your consideration in participating in this study, and we look forward to your response.

APPENDIX C – LIST OF INCLUDED PRINT MEDIA DATA

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