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“Court from Away but Marry Close to Home”
Women, Marriage and Interpersonal Relations in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland

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Article abstract

Belonging is important in Newfoundland and Labrador but with its long history of patrilocality, where and to whom have women belonged? Here we consider how women who married into new families and communities in the Placentia Bay area of the province over a fifty year period (1943-1993) negotiated a place for themselves. The women, sometimes in complicity with their mothers-in-law, managed to create physical and social space through a variety of informal strategies, from managing gossip to creating a separate living space in their in-laws’ home. Some wives eventually developed a sense of belonging while others were never able to shake off their status as strangers and always felt like outsiders.

"Court from Away but Marry Close to Home":

Women, Marriage and Interpersonal Relations in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland

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Being able to get along with one's neighbours was a quality highly valued by earlier generations of rural Newfoundlanders. This is not surprising given Newfoundland's history of small fishing settlements scattered along a large coastline, where extended families worked together to catch and salt cod, and depended on each other's reciprocity to survive. Nonetheless, it was a predominant aspect of outport life that struck the first generation of ethnographers conducting fieldwork throughout rural Newfoundland in the 1960s. Their findings, published by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) established in 1961 to undertake and encourage social and economic research in the province, reflect the importance outport residents in all parts of the island placed on civility. In this article, we return to these early studies in an effort to extend the important discussion they began on interpersonal relations. Completed nearly fifty years ago, the ISER ethnographies of Newfoundland rural communities largely neglected women's experiences, either subsuming them in men's experiences or overlooking them almost entirely (see Faris 1972: 119). In light of subsequent feminist work on women's roles (see Davis 1986, Allison *et al* 1989; Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988; Neis 1988, Porter 1995), we reflect here on relations among women, especially mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, as we focus our discussion on the concept of belonging and its intersections with issues of place and power.

In the second publication of the ISER book series titled, *Private Cultures and Public Imagery: Interpersonal Relations in a Newfoundland Peasant Society* (1966), anthropologist John Szwed draws on fieldwork undertaken in 1962-1964 to highlight "the high degree of exposure

of the self to community evaluation and comment" present in the face-to-face social environment of the parish he studied in the Codroy Valley (1966: 98). Szwed explores various strategies adopted by residents to maintain harmonious interpersonal relations and positively influence public impressions of themselves. Similarly, James Faris' fieldwork, carried out in a rural fishing community on Newfoundland's northeast coast in 1964-1965, led him to stress "the premium placed on the avoidance of conflict in Cat Harbour" (1972: 141), while Louis J. Chiaramonte's analysis of craftsman-client contracts, based on two years of field research (1962-1964) in a community on Newfoundland's south coast, demonstrates how residents relied on forms of indirect communication to prevent any discord. Finally, Melvin M. Firestone's ethnography of a community on the Great Northern Peninsula carried out in the mid 1960s (1963-1965) interprets folk culture practices, such as mummering, as a displacement of hostility and other negative emotions that would otherwise disrupt interpersonal relationships. Firestone observes that "Harmony, or at least lack of conflict, is what people attempt to maintain, not as an ideal striven for but as a working arrangement in everyday life" (Firestone 1967: 113).[1] He argues that residents achieve this by being "tolerant" of the excesses of others and that "An avoidance of directness and a lack of commitment are also mechanisms which operate to avoid embarrassing confrontation in relationships. In such techniques, again, lack of explicitness is a form of tolerance, here of ambiguity, coupled with self-possession in terms of not stating intentions" (Firestone 1967: 125). He continues, "Just as tolerance plus reserve serves personal ends and social tranquility by ameliorating interpersonal relationships, so co-operation maintains an individual's 'social capital' among his neighbors" (Firestone 1967: 125). What did this cultural priority on good interpersonal relationships mean for women? We explore this question by drawing on Powers' ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Baccalaos Cove over a thirty-five year period beginning in 1976 (see Powers 1984). We also

1. In her study of witch beliefs, Barbara Rieti also emphasizes the importance Newfoundlanders placed on maintaining a conflict-free exterior. She concludes that vigilante witch-bashing could not have happened often, if at all, in Newfoundland: "Magical attacks were enacted precisely because real ones were out of the question…It was cathartic theatre as much as belief. Meanwhile, on the surface all remained calm" (Rieti 2008: 42).

rely on interviews we carried out together in 2007 with eight women who "married into" new families, or "crowds," during the fifty-year period, 1943 to 1993.

Placentia Bay

Our research is set in three communities located along the Burin and Avalon peninsulas bordering Placentia Bay on Newfoundland's southeast coast. For the purposes of this article, they are named Baccalaos Cove, Caplin Harbour and Little Harbour. Placentia Bay was recognized as a rich fishing ground by at least the time of European settlement in the sixteenth century. France controlled the bay until the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, when it was ceded to Britain, and settlement spread through Placentia Bay's many harbors and islands. Local tradition has Baccalaos Cove as the site of an early seasonal fishery by fishers from France, Portugal, Spain and England and permanently settled by the arrival of a family from County Cork, Ireland in the late eighteenth century. By the time of the first official census in 1836, the community had a population of approximately one hundred. Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s it became one of the best inshore fishing harbors on the Burin Peninsula. In addition to cod and capelin fisheries, a salmon fishery was carried on and in the 1890s a lobster factory employed eight workers. By 1874, the population had grown to nearly three hundred.

The more remote settlements of Little Harbour and Caplin Harbour were settled in the mid 1800s by English and Irish fishers. By the first census in 1836 the thirty residents in Little Harbour were employed in the shore fishery and in small-scale farming. All were Roman Catholic. The population grew while the community engaged in a prosperous lobster fishery (1890-1920) and several factories were built there. By 1945, however, both the lobster and cod fisheries had declined and only fifty inhabitants remained. Caplin Harbour was probably established a few decades after Little Harbour; it had a population of approximately one hundred by 1891. Some fished for cod locally while others returned to the nearby offshore islands during the summer fishing season or fished offshore at Cape St. Mary's, Oderin and the Merasheen Banks. The nearby forest was also important to the community and the population doubled

in the winter when people came from the islands to collect wood. In 1896 a sawmill was operating. Although originally a mix of Roman Catholic and Methodist, most residents in Caplin Harbour converted to Salvation Army after a 1901 visit by an Army band. The population peaked in 1956 at one hundred sixty-four; by 1986 it was approximately ninety.

Located closer to larger centers (such as Marystown and St. Lawrence) than either Little Harbour or Caplin Harbour, Baccalaos Cove was more directly affected by regional developments. Its population rose to five hundred between 1921 and 1935 when a fluorspar mine opened in St. Lawrence. In the early 1950s a fish plant was constructed and it operated sporadically for several years before being renovated into a meat-processing plant. During World War II the United States established a military base at Argentia that brought with it some employment for residents of many Placentia Bay communities.

By the 1950s and 1960s changes in the fishing industry, including the move to fresh-frozen rather than salt fish, meant that the government saw remote settlements as less viable. More than thirty of them in Placentia Bay were abandoned as part of government resettlement programs that relocated over 300 communities and nearly 30,000 people province wide between 1954 and 1976[2] Baccalaos Cove was a designated growth center for resettled residents of the islands of Placentia Bay and the population increased to more than 1000 by 1971. By the 1990s, however, many residents worked in the fish plant in Marystown or on offshore draggers; only sixty to seventy were still involved in the inshore fishery. In Little Harbour some families resettled to the Placentia area but others remained and were joined by a few families when nearby communities were abandoned. The approximately thirty-five remaining fishers in the early 1980s continued to rely on the shore fishery and the community maintained a school, church and government wharf. Despite its relative isolation, Caplin Harbour also survived resettlement.

The more recent collapse of the cod fishery and the ensuring moratorium in 1991 has brought with it bigger changes to all three communities and the surrounding region. The inshore fishery has

2. ("Resettlement," http://www.mun.ca/mha/resettlement/rs_intro.php).

virtually disappeared and, as in other outport settlements, the communities have been deeply affected. The new economy that resulted in out-migration and an increasing dependence on tourism has radically transformed rural life. Today, Newfoundland's rural communities are shadows of their former selves and face a very uncertain future. Although some of the dynamics described by the women we interviewed continue to characterize small town life, it is important to note that their experiences predate the period of massive social change that began in 1991 and are set in the time when Placentia Bay was still dotted by small, but viable, fishing communities. It is also important to remember that the eight women we interviewed in 2007 were sharing memories of their first years of marriage, all of which were at least two decades ago, and some much earlier. That they are looking back on their lives as young women from the standpoint of middle age or beyond undoubtedly shapes their interpretations of marrying into Placentia Bay communities.

"Court from Away but Marry Close to Home"[3]

Until the early 1990s, Newfoundland's nearly five hundred years of settlement were characterized by a patrilineal ideology that was evidenced by an emphasis on patronymic surnames, male inheritance and patrilocal residency (Firestone, 1967; Faris 1972; Powers 1984). Upon marriage, women generally relocated to their husband's place of residence, while men usually remained in the place where they grew up. For example, in the 1960's, James Faris estimated that in Cat Harbour, on the northeast coast, 65% of the women had "married in" (1972: 79). This did not mean that women came from remote

3. Memorial University Folklore and Language Survey Card 71-8a/37. This proverbial expression was recorded in 1971 by a student from Freshwater, Placentia Bay, as part of the requirements of an undergraduate course in Folklore at Memorial University. The student described it as "an expression used by many Newfoundlanders and in particular in our community. It means or implies to most of the older folk that you can date as many foreigners as you like but it is much better to marry someone you know – whose background you know. This expression was used frequently when referring to Newfoundland girls going with U. S. Naval men, a practice, which was and still is quite common in our area." Folklorist Martin Lovelace has documented similar proverbs in both Ireland and Dorset England, the two regions that supplied the majority of Newfoundland's settlers (Lovelace 2012, 4).

locations, however. In fact, often, the reverse was true. Faris noted that Cat Harbour men preferred to marry local women, "Fathers in former times admonished their sons, 'You don't want to marry too far away. You can't trust them" (Faris 1972: 79). John Szwed wrote of the Codroy Valley that the requirement was only that "marriage partners are sought outside of the section" (1966: 70). In Savage Cove, in the Strait of Belle Isle, Firestone explained "As men tend to remain in the communities in which they were born and work with their agnates they form patrilocal extended families which are often connected by marriage to similar families in other communities" (Firestone 1967: 39). There was also a strong preference to marry a local girl in communities in Placentia Bay although exogamic restrictions meant this was not always possible (see Powers 1984). Even if they came from close by, however, wives were structural outsiders. This was reflected in land ownership where inheritance and division of land was organized along patrilineal lines of descent. The spatial and residency arrangements of the extended family in Placentia Bay looked something like the branch family pattern in parts of Ireland where brothers lived along an adjacent path (see Arensberg *et al.* 1968) and theoretically, if women had any rights to the land, it was use rights only. This raises deeper issues of belonging in a province where "Where do you belong to?" is one of the most common questions in the local vernacular (*Dictionary of Newfoundland English* 1990: 39). Since space and place are intricately linked to family, the query "Where do you belong to?" is usually followed by "Who do you belong to?" Being able to "place" people – socially and culturally – has been as important as knowing one's physical surroundings: where to find the best berry picking grounds or where men should place their cod traps. Knowing how to place others helps you place yourself. But, on an island with a long history of patrilocality and a strong patrilineal ideology, where and to whom have women belonged? How did women who married into new families and communities make space for themselves without sharing the blood ties that connected men with each other and the life-long knowledge that tied them to a physical place?

Belonging

Belong: 1. To be related by blood (Dictionary of Newfoundland English)

When women married, their new identity was captured in local naming traditions. Placentia Bay communities adopted a patronymic pattern like the one folklorist Gerald Pocius describes from Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula: "Combined with their newly acquired marriage surnames, women's names sometimes duplicate the names of those already in their new community. Distinctions have to be made, and in these cases women are referred to by both their own first name and that of their husband. Thus Kitty Larry Sullivan can be distinguished from Kitty Vincent Sullivan when conversation takes place" (2000: 99).

From the outside, naming patterns suggested that a married woman became inextricably one of her husband's family or "crowd." However, the kinship and territorial designation "crowd" had myriad meanings. Primarily it referred to a group of people who shared the same locale and surname and ideally included in marrying men and women (see Faris 1972; Szwed 1966; Firestone 1967; Powers 1984). In terms of kinship, crowd had much the same meaning as the English word, "family," but because the term was amorphous it was generally used contextually. For example, one might refer to "the crowd up the shore." It could mean all of one's kin or simply members of a nuclear family. In terms of space and kinship, crowd was a group of people who occupied one or more adjoining gardens (Powers 1984: 60-62). A garden was designated as any piece of land surrounded by a fence with each garden being associated with a group of people who owned the land and had the right to build on it. For analytical purposes, Faris designated this as a "general crowd," which he distinguished from an "effective crowd," those members of the general crowd and others with them who were joined in a common economic endeavor, such as a fishing crew (1972: 65-6). Although the crowd as a local descent group seemingly incorporated spouses who married in, membership was not automatic. Land, waterfront rights, surname and residency provided the basis of membership.

Notwithstanding that "crowd" has many meanings – some general and others more specific – the term was in common usage during Powers' fieldwork in the 1970s and everyone seemed to know its precise meaning in any given context. At that time locals in Baccalaos Cove usually distinguished women who married in from others in their husband's family or crowd: "You can't blame her. After all, she's not really part of their crowd" or "She's away from her crowd." When women were referred to as being part of their husband's crowd, the term was one of inclusion and was used to express equality. However, it also masked the reality that in-laws were effectively placed in a separate category in matters of inheritance, crew composition and accusations of wrongdoing. The term "crowd" could also effectively disguise underlying familial tensions. In its presentation of a unified front to the rest of the community, "crowd" hid any discord.

Belong: 2. To be a native of; to come from (Dictionary of Newfoundland English)

Several women we interviewed stressed that they were treated like strangers when they first moved to their husband's community. When Anne arrived as a war bride in Baccalaos Cove in 1946, she created a stir: "And then we walked up over the hill to Mrs. Margaret's house and I said, 'Well, I'm like the pied piper here, you know, with all the big string of people com[ing behind us].'" Marilyn, arriving in Little Harbour nearly forty years later, similarly noted, "Everybody had to come and see me… Everybody had to come and look at Paul's new woman and ask me questions and check me out." As these brief descriptions suggest, the place and people were as strange to the women marrying in as they were to their new community. Anne shared her first impression of reaching Baccalaos Cove after more than two weeks of travel, "And my God, we were coming up over that road from St. Vincent… 'My God,' I said, 'Did I join the cowboys or what? [laughs]… Oh my God', I said, 'where did I end up at?'" Even women who grew up in close proximity to their husband's community sometimes encountered significant differences to their own upbringing. When Julie moved from a Catholic family and community to one dominated by the Salvation Army, nothing was familiar: "It was like going to a foreign country. Living in Caplin Harbour was like going to a foreign country."

One of the challenges the women faced was learning the landscape of their new home. Gerald Pocius notes, "For people in Calvert, on the Avalon Peninsula, belonging is still tied to a series of spaces that make up the place, spaces that extend both throughout the community and back in time" (2000: 25). Pocius found that knowledge of Calvert's landscape was shaped by gender (2000: 91); while men knew the woods and water, women's space was the home (2000: 93). He writes, "Women master a space that of necessity must easily transfer to any community: they learn how to create an intensely focused decorative space that can take shape in any domestic context, no matter what the community" (2000: 99). Women's knowledge could be complex, however: Andrea O'Brien, who grew up in a neighboring community to the one where Pocius conducted his fieldwork, argues that women did gain knowledge of the land through activities such as berry picking (1999: 81) but as we indicate below, women's transfer of domestic knowledge was sometimes problematic.

The Stranger

Women marrying in who assumed the role of stranger could be regarded by others as liminal and therefore dangerous. (see Simmel 1980: 237). As Ronald Frankenberg emphasized in his exploration of social life in a Welsh village, strangers do not have to be outsiders (1957: 18). Often they are group members who are "near and far *at the same time*" (Simmel 1980: 240). Characterized by both proximity and remoteness, s/he is "an element of the group itself" (Simmel 1980:235). As one person in Baccalaos Cove commented concerning a woman from the west coast who married in: "She's a black, you know....a jack-o-tar.[4] There's no telling how she was reared." Like the stranger, women who married in were ambiguous because they were in the group, but not of it. They were near and far, neither here nor there (see Turner 1974). While they might be the subject of gossip, they could also be the ones in whom people confided. For

4. A *Dictionary for Newfoundland English* offers several definitions of "black," including "In designations of Protestants (cp BLACK n): atrocious, disliked (as belonging to an opposing or conflicting group); in phr black stranger: not of or 'belonging to' a community." The *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* gives one meaning of "Jackatar" (also Jackie tar, jackitar, jack-o-tar, jackotaw, jackytar) as "a Newfoundlander of mixed French and Micmac Indian descent."

example, the woman who was labeled a "jack-o-tar" used a deck of playing cards to read people's fortunes. During a reading, a person might end up disclosing confidences to her about their life that they would never mention to anyone else. Both feared and revered, this woman maintained a liminal status for the thirty-five years she lived in her husband's community. Her experience supports the findings of Jaworski and Coupland who argue that, while the individual who is othered through gossip may be denied status and authority by misrepresentation and/or stereotyping, they can also be "accorded sacred power, knowledge or qualities....and are therefore simultaneously despised and revered" (2005: 691).

It is important to stress, however, that tensions created by women who married in were more often rooted in their position as someone who was not related by blood rather than in their individual personalities. Although not usually applied to women who marry in, the notion of liminality helps to clarify the complexity of the social relationships that were constructed through such marriages.[5] As reflected in the comment of one person in Baccalaos Cove who claimed of a local's wife, "She was nothing to him" (meaning she was not related by blood to her husband or his family), some women existed in a liminal state. Their position was characterized by what Victor Turner (1974) described as being "betwixt and between" (Turner 1969: 95). Sometimes women were accepted; over time they developed deep roots. Others were not so lucky. As one woman reflected on her twenty-five year marriage, "I've never fit into their family at all."

Ambiguity created a space where a woman's status could be used to disguise disagreements among brothers or among male members of a family so that the working relationships (fishing, hunting, etc.) could

5. According to Turner, those who are in a liminal role are ambiguous. Although women who married in may not have been outside the positions assigned by normative rules, they were often relegated to such a status and could remain indefinitely "neither here nor there" (Turner 1969: 95). Like initiands in most rituals, they were sometimes treated as if invisible, having no position in the kinship system, and little status in the public realm. They may have shared comradeship with others in the same position but unlike formal initiation ceremonies where the initiands are all together as a group, women marrying in were often removed from one another so that there were not always opportunities for the creation of "communitas."

continue, despite differences. Holding the woman responsible enabled the egalitarian-based social life to continue. In 1977 in Baccalaos Cove, one man decided his sons were old enough to go fishing with him, so he told his own father and brother who he had fished with for years that he would be leaving the crew to start his own. As was customary, his father gave him (the eldest son) his share of the gear. His wife was not happy with the amount he was given, however, and she complained to his brother's wife. Shortly thereafter, a fence was erected to separate the eldest son's house from his father's and his brother's. The strained relations were blamed on the eldest son's wife who was criticized as thinking "herself better than everyone else."

To be considered a stranger in rural Newfoundland must have been daunting for some young brides. During his 1960s fieldwork on the Northern Peninsula, Melvin Firestone noted a correlation between the relative absence of strangers in an isolated area where everyone knows everyone else well and a heightened, but somewhat covert, fear of them (1967).[6] Not surprising, then, fear of strangers emerges as a powerful and pervasive theme in provincial folklore; for example, research on witchcraft beliefs identifies a displaced mistrust of outsiders.[7] Significantly, William Faris observed that oftentimes women suspected of being witches were those who married in from other communities (1972: 135) and while Barbara Rieti did not find this to hold true in all parts of the province (2008: 24), two of the three sample portraits of witches in her full-length study of witching traditions in Newfoundland feature women who married in. Most disturbing for women is that the stranger status could be a permanent one. As Faris concluded, "once a stranger, always a stranger" (1972: 83).

6. Firestone wrote, "The antithesis of the member of local society is the stranger. This is a person who has no place in local society, and because he is unknown, his behaviour is unpredictable" (Firestone 1967: 36). Firestone argued that Christmas mummering allowed residents to temporarily dress and act as strangers. Furthermore, he believed that mummers and strangers served as functional equivalents in that "They both provide individuals with socially approved means of displacing hostility" (Firestone 1967: 73). For children this sometimes meant being disciplined by adults who used both mummers and strangers as threatening figures; for adults, mummering allowed a license that led to unpredictable behavior in the form of either play or violence.
7. "Others" – for example Mi'kmaq people (Rieti 1995) or men from the Island of Jersey (Rieti 2008: 54-62) – were often identified as witches.

Constructing liminality through gossip

"In Newfoundland generally, you do not live in a town, you 'belong to' a place; you are not asked where you live, but rather, where you belong to. Belonging, then, is directly tied both linguistically and experientially to place..." (Pocius 2000: 3).

Informal talk or gossip, that Haviland describes as "a conversation about absent third parties" (1977: 28), was one means through which the acceptance or belonging of a woman who married in was constructed, maintained and negotiated. Because of its "interpretive ambiguity" (Stewart and Strathern 2004), gossip can have a positive impact for some and a negative one for others. On the one hand, it is a way of circulating information that can solidify social networks (Gluckman 1963; Paine 1967). On the other, inaccurate or harmful gossip and rumors can create tensions, factionalize groups and ostracize individuals by alleging infractions of accepted communal norms. Influential gossip (Rosnow 1977) can also be used to manipulate social relationships and to further one's relational goals. As Jaworski and Coupland write, "Sharing gossip is a little ritual, a liminal state in which the participants bond in a state of communitas, casting a gossipee as an 'other'"(2005: 691). The gossipers enter a liminal space of transgressive talk which denies the gossippee status and authority, but also accords them sacred power (Turner 1974).

Although everyone in a small community was a potential subject of talk, women who married in could be targeted. Those who had not integrated smoothly into their new home were held up as exemplars of how not to act.[8] Claudette, a war bride who arrived in Baccalaos Cove around the same time as Anne, was frequently mentioned in interviews and her striking inability to adjust to outport life promoted both criticism and sympathy, sometimes simultaneously. Claudette's refusal to do housework or her decision to retreat upstairs to her room at mealtimes rather than feed her children became community

8. As mentioned above, women who failed to integrate into their new communities were sometimes labeled witches (see Faris 1972). And, as Barbara Rieti suggests, some of these women capitalized on this designation to turn it to their benefit. As she notes, "witching was not just about material things: getting respect was important too" (Rieti 2008: 25).

markers of female incompetence that even the compensatory efforts of her husband, as well as his mother and sisters, could not hide. Her criticism of other women in the community to those outside of Baccalaos Cove stood was an example of her inability to get along with others and to build a support network. Interviewees treated Claudette as they would a local character whose acts of minor nonconformity helped to clarify commonly held norms and expectations (see Tye 1987). They used Claudette as a springboard to discuss the traits she did not display but those that they valued and tried to enact, including responsibility, hard work, devotion to one's children and loyalty.

Like witchcraft accusations, "...rumor and gossip tend to form networks of communication in which fears and uncertainties emerge..." (Stewart and Strathern 2004: xi). Gossip often centers on people who share a close social relationship; to be the butt of gossip may be an indication of social importance (Haviland 1977) but women who married in did not always see that. One recalled: "For a long time after I came, I never went out at all. Sometimes I went across the road to the shop or up to the office (post office), but that was all. I was some miserable, I tells you. Not that people were mean; they just didn't talk to me. I figured people were talking about me, but I didn't want to give them anything to talk about." Silence helped maintain the appearance of unity among community members even if divisive tensions lay right beneath the surface.

Getting along

That women who married in were sometimes regarded as strangers and made the subject of witchcraft accusations or gossip, reflects their ambiguous position. Rather than allow dynamics surrounding them to disrupt interpersonal relations within their new community – something that early ethnographers identified as being so important to rural Newfoundlanders – they often tried to minimize the impact of gossip by not attracting attention to themselves. To borrow Erving Goffman's classic terminology, they managed the impression they gave off, often with the help of performance teams (Goffman 1959). Some women gained agency by finding support in their husbands who facilitated their integration into a new family and community and helped them minimize the risk of becoming the subject of gossip.

But not everyone was so fortunate. A husband could add to his wife's stress by siding with his mother or creating other problems. While women sometimes indicated that both their husband and his father mediated between them and the rest of the family and/or community, as well as modeled ways of coping with/managing their mother-in-law's personality, if this was an issue, historically men had limited influence within the domestic sphere (see Porter 1995). As Firestone noted, "Men... use the home more as a base camp from which they go forth to either the sea or the woods, as the exigencies of making a living demand" (Firestone 1967: 73). Husbands and fathers-in-law could act as steam valves that helped women cope but they were secondary to other women as members of a performance team.

Frequently, women who married in looked to others in their position for support. Wives who had married in earlier helped them manage positive talk in the community and some alliances developed into lifelong friendships. It was mothers-in-law, however, who stood out in our interviews as those who most significantly affected a young wife's impression management and her ability to minimize the effects of community gossip. Although none of the women we spoke to sought emotional support from their mothers-in-law, and in fact several told of being criticized by them, they all relied on their husband's mother for mentoring in gender performativity in a new setting (see Butler 1999). For each of the eight women we interviewed, mothers-in-law figured prominently in this educational process, often acting as primary representatives of what Judith Butler terms "regulative discourses." They showed their daughters-in-law how a good wife and mother should act as defined by her new family and community. For example, Anne's mother-in-law offered needed help as she learned new ways of doing things, including cooking regional foods, as a young war bride in the 1940s. More than forty years later, Marilyn turned to her mother-in-law for assistance when her first child developed diaper rash. Mrs. O'Brien taught her how to treat the rash with an application of burnt flour.[9] Julie received more

9. According to Hilda Chaulk Murray's breakdown of responsibilities among women in interagenerational households, "Lucky indeed was the housewife whose mother, mother-in-law, or other elderly relative, would help with the family mending. Apparently this often did happen for according to Aunt Hilda: 'Old women always did the mending, knitting, making quilts. Took a lot of work off the young wife'" (Murray 1979: 117).

instruction than any of the others we interviewed. At seventeen she was forced to relearn how to perform every household task under her mother-in-law's watchful eye.[10] This extended from sweeping a floor to hanging out clothes:

> I did everything. [laughs]. It was like Cinderella. It really was... I didn't know to do anything right and I had to do everything.... I couldn't sweep the floor right, I couldn't do the dishes right, I couldn't wash the laundry right, I couldn't hang it on the clothesline right...It was just whatever was her way was the right. And all of this was always done without nastiness, you know...she wasn't mean to me or anything. It was always like, "Now come here, I'll show you how to do that ma dear. This is how you're supposed to do this. This is how you're supposed to wring out your mop. This is how you're supposed.... But I mean I had been looking after my mother's house, because she fished with my father, so I'd be in charge all summer long, you know from the time I was you know, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. I knew how to sweep a floor. I knew how to make bread. I knew how to do it all but I didn't do it the way she wanted.

Julie never felt that she measured up to her mother-in-law's expectations, and Mrs. Green compensated for what she identified as Julie's inadequacies by taking over tasks like laundry when she felt that Julie was not performing to her standard. Ensuring that her daughter-in-law's wash appeared on the line in the manner and at the early hour she considered necessary, she tried to ensure that Julie would not become the subject of community talk.

In some families frictions were minimized or avoided by designating a separate space for the new wife that was apart from her in-laws. Creation of her own physical and economic space significantly contributed to a woman's sense of belonging. Customarily couples started off married life by living with the husband's parents and some intragenerational families sought a solution to this arrangement in temporarily dividing a single family dwelling to create separate space and cooking arrangements for the two families. Anne recalls how her in-laws split their house so that she and her husband lived separately

10. It was common for girls to be taught how to perform household task by their mothers so that at seventeen Julie was accomplished at domestic work (See Murray 1979).

from her husband's parents and his six siblings: "They had the big long porch out to Mrs. Mary's so we put the stove out in the porch and we had a table out there and then you could go upstairs and go to your own bed.... We used the back door and they used the front door." In Gladys's case, the renovations were more extensive. Her mother-in-law's home, where she lived for seven years, was divided in two: Gladys, her husband and four children lived in the front section of the house consisting of a pantry, porch and two bedrooms while her in-laws lived in the rest of the building; each part of the family had their own cooking arrangements.

The seemingly drastic measure of physically altering space within the house to create two hearths[11] recognizes the links with space that Elspeth Robson identified as pervasive in feminist analyses of gender, space and culture: space and social relations (Harvey 1973), space and social control (Lefebvre 1991) and space as a reflection of power inequalities (e.g. Rose 1993; Katz 1993; Robson 2006: 669). In her own work on women in northern Nigerian households, Robson discovered the kitchen to be a place of confinement and empowerment for married Muslim women. Co-wives use food preparation and distribution as currency to negotiate status and express co-operation as well as jealousy and destructive competition.[12] The creation of a separate kitchen was an important step towards placing a daughter-in-law on equal footing with her mother-in-law.

11. Of course the decision to create a home with two kitchens is "drastic" only in some cultural contexts. As Lara Pascali indicates, many Italian North American homes have two kitchens (2006). It should be noted as well that creating a second kitchen was not considered unusual among the women we interviewed and Firestone notes this practice in his work as well (1967).

12. Other authors echo these findings. For example, Kathleen Schroeder talks about community kitchens in Peru and Bolivia as complex spaces with the potential to empower and subjugate women(2006) and Joan Wardrop characterizes food preparation spaces – kitchens – in South Durban as "sites where gender identities are negotiated, established and performed" (2006: 677). In the United States, Marjorie DeVault's classic study (1991) identifies the kitchen as a powerful site of women's performativity of femininity. Finally, Diane Tye's earlier work (2010) explores some of these identity and power issues in a Canadian context.

In addition to relying on others, women who married in tried to minimize the risks of gossip on their own, addressing it indirectly though forms of what Joan Radner and Susan Lanser define as "implicit feminist coding": "a set of signals – words, forms, behaviors, signifiers of some kind – that protect the creator from the consequences of openly expressing particular messages" critical to some aspect of women's subordination (3).[13] Maud, now in her eighties, described how she indirectly expressed disapproval of her mother-in-law's gossiping:

> When I'd see her [Aunt Nora] coming, I'd take [my infant daughter] Ruth and go upstairs and I'd stay until she went...There was Aunt Margaret and Aunt Nora and Mrs. Leila and all those people used to come to Nan and ... they'd stick to you and talk and talk and talk. And talk about other people. That I didn't like, because I wasn't used to it. That's one thing we didn't do where I came from. Now we didn't have much education but I tell you, you talked about nobody else.

All the women we interviewed reported relying on indirection and silence when tensions ran high within their husband's family. Research on silence has shown it to be a complicated strategy that sometimes signals strength and at other times domination (see Deek 1994; Lawless 2001). With varying degrees of effectiveness, women used silence to create a space for themselves. Although Maud had been warned against living with her outspoken mother-in-law for the first few months of her marriage, she managed to keep peace with her silence: "Well you all know that Nan had her say [laughs] and she wouldn't mind telling anyone off [but] well I don't know, I was a very naive sort of person you know and I don't have much to say

13. The women we interviewed shared examples of all six forms of implicit coding as identified by Radner and Lanser: appropriation, juxtaposition, distraction, indirection, trivialization and incompetence. It should be noted, as well, that Claudette's refusal to look after her house and children might be read as feminist coding as well in that it was "claiming or demonstrating incompetence at conventionally feminine activities" (1993: 20). However, it was so far reaching that it seemed to extend beyond coded resistance. There are also clues that subtexts in forms of folklore, like folksongs, might have provided women who married with coded instructions on how to integrate and offered warning about who they could trust (see Lovelace 2012; Tye 1995; Stewart 1993).

anyway." Decades later, Julie dealt with the stresses of living with her mother-in-law similarly: "Oh I just let her tell me. I don't argue and fight much, you know. I'm pretty easy going and at that point I was an eighteen-year-old petrified child...living in someone else's house." Marilyn recalled, "I'd go up to my room and cry.... I mean, at that time, when I think about that time of my life, I had entered into an environment that was unfamiliar in every possible way, a new relationship, children, an isolated community...everything was so different."

Some found life lonely. Julie recalls that there was not one other women her age living in Caplin Harbour when she was there and she made no friends in the several years she called it home. She and others we interviewed described turning to their own female kin for emotional support. Here, consistent with what has been written about the emotional world of nineteenth century women, their mother and sisters were primary (see Smith-Rosenberg 1975). Most times, of course, they lived at a distance. Although women did not return regularly to their birth communities, hampered by transportation challenges (some communities were accessible only by boat) and tied down by growing families, several of those we spoke to told of their younger sisters coming to visit.

Conclusions

The women we interviewed who married into Placentia Bay communities shared experiences that support the findings of early ISER anthropologists who identified good interpersonal relations as a priority for members of rural Newfoundland communities. They illustrate how, as Melvin Firestone observed, community members maintained an impassive front that served as a buffer against the aggressions and assertiveness of others and prevented these from escalating into conflict (Firestone 113). From mothers-in-law who "covered" for their daughters-in-law's perceived failings such as an inability to complete household chores like hanging out the clothes properly, to fathers-in-law and sons who modeled ways for a daughter-in-law to cajole or humor her difficult mother-in-law, the husband's family and community encouraged "civility," even if tensions ran

high at times. They helped a young woman avoid becoming the subject of community talk and collectively helped manage her positive reputation. These individual, familial and community strategies described by the women we interviewed recognize power as a relationship that is experienced by individuals, but shaped by economic and social structures and cultures (see Thompson 1985: 21; Ortner 2006).[14]

Some women did successfully negotiate their stranger status in ways that strengthened the extended family as an economically functioning unit. They assumed a reciprocal role in family and community without direct conflict, although their status was never 'fixed'. In these cases, women and their new families saw it in the best interest of extended family and community that the daughter-in-law succeed, that she not become the subject of unwelcome talk, and that the family reproduce itself. Despite differences that separated some of the women we interviewed from the families they married into, they shared fundamental values. Some of them also grew to appreciate the freedom that accompanied their stranger status. For example, Marilyn, a talented traditional singer, took advantage of being an outsider. She had been singing publically in her new community for some time before she realized that only man sang and her participation violated local norms. After discovering her faux pas, she decided to feign ignorance and continued to perform.[15]

But the women's experiences indicate that prioritizing the family and avoiding conflict in interpersonal relations was sometimes

14. Based on her work in South India, Vera-Sanso argues that "social and economic positioning in conjunction with family demographics, rather than culture, has the primary role in shaping mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relations" (1999: 578). "It is not cultural differences, but social and economic positioning in conjunction with family demographics which shapes mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relations" (1999: 583).

15. Gerald Pocius explored similar dynamics in his study of a Newfoundland folk singer whose wife, it turned out, was also an accomplished singer but did not perform: "Mrs. Mon became a member of the community which had already designated her husband a singer. Social conventions would probably not permit an outsider to automatically achieve the status of singer, especially if it might produce conflict with her husband's status and her own duties at home" (1976: 112). In this case, Mrs. Mon did not perform publically after she married.

achieved at their personal expense. Women shared with us their memories of feeling isolated, lonely and invisible. Acceptance sometimes took a long time and its dynamics could be complex. A sense of belonging might or might not follow. In 2007, Anne, the war bride, boasted that she was now considered a fixture at local card parties so that she was told it would not be the same unless she attended. Conversely, Johanna described still being asked where she was *really* from. After more than twenty years, she saw herself as belonging to Baccalaos Cove but others were not so sure. Unhappily, those like Julie and Maud never found contentment in the families and communities they joined. Informal means for avoiding gossip and getting along with one's in-laws on the surface made it appear as if wives seamlessly became part of their new family's or husband's "crowd" but this was not a true picture for everyone. The narratives we collected reveal that the priority rural Newfoundlanders placed on getting along and working together was privileged over women's individual happiness. While some women who married in eventually integrated into their husband's family and community, others felt like lifelong strangers.

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