

Women in a Transitioning Canadian Resource Town

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Abstract

This paper builds on previous studies of women's roles in and experiences of natural resource-dependent communities in Canada by investigating women's spaces of employment and experiences of everyday life in High Level, Alberta. Insights reveal that formal employment opportunities for women are increasing in both number and variety, and women's experiences in this community are overwhelmingly positive. Further, women are fostering positive connections to place through their multiple roles in employment, personal, and civic realms. These findings challenge and broaden conceptualizations of resource towns as "male spaces," and build on a growing body of literature that highlights women's multifaceted roles and fundamental contributions to the socioeconomic fabric of these towns.

Keywords: Canada, resource towns, women

1.0 Introduction

Natural resource-dependent communities are fundamental fixtures across Canada and have become central to Canadian economic and sociocultural identity. Resource towns generate primary and secondary activities that contribute to the Gross Domestic Product with limited service provisioning. They reflect efforts of Canadians over many decades to harness the abundance and diversity of natural resources that are the heart of many traditional, commercial, and recreational land uses. Often situated in remote and isolated northern environments, resource towns tend to have small populations, high labour turnover and resident transience (Altmeyer, 1995; Bradbury, 1979; Evans and Cooperstock, 1983; Gibson, 1992; Gill, 1986; Gill, 1990a; Gill, 1990b; Gill, 1991; Halseth, 1999; Halseth and Lo, 1999; Johnston, Lorch, and Challen, 2004; Larsen, 2004; Marshall, 2001; Moen, 1981; Parkins, 1999; Rhodes, n.d.).

This characterization of Canadian natural resource-dependent communities stems primarily from what may be termed 'company towns' or 'single-industry communities.' More recently, however, many Canadian resource towns are

experiencing economic transition and restructuring. They are no longer solely dependent on natural resources, given the need for more flexible and technologically advanced modes of production and accumulation, increasing the need for skilled workers albeit in generally lesser numbers (Fitzgerald, Taylor, and McClintock, 2002; Gill and Reed, 1997). For some towns this has caused company and/or community closure as operation of primary or secondary sector activities are no longer economically viable; other towns have diversified, providing new opportunities for employees, particularly in the tertiary or services sector (Fitzgerald, Taylor, and McClintock, 2002; Gill and Reed, 1997; Johnston, Lorch, and Challen, 2004). Broader discussion of economic restructuring, while beyond the scope of this paper, is provided in significant detail elsewhere (e.g., Hayter, 2000a, 2000b; Hayter and Barnes, 2001).

It is well documented that resource towns are characteristically “male spaces,” dominated by the interests, issues, and needs specific to the male population (Evans and Cooperstock, 1983; Gibson, 1992; Gill, 1986; Gill, 1990b; Marshall, 2001; Moen, 1981). Women in resource towns have typically been associated with the domestic realm, with little opportunity to access formal (waged) employment or otherwise experiencing ill treatment in such work spaces. Moreover, there has been little acknowledgment of women’s presence (indeed their population has tended to be much lower than men’s) or social, economic or political contribution to resource towns. Such male bias has generated feelings of disconnectedness and lack of belonging for many women in these towns. The broad economic restructuring of Canadian resource towns, however, raises the question of whether or not gendered divisions within and experiences of these communities are also changing. Building on previous studies of women’s roles in and experiences of natural resource-dependent communities in Canada, this paper explores women’s work spaces and their general experiences of resource towns in transition in order to establish the potential of such traditionally male environments in providing new and positive opportunities for women.

2.0 Women’s Work Spaces and Experiences in Resource Towns

Rural women have long been associated with family life and the domestic realm, an association that “has endured with little questioning or change” through images, myths, and processes embedded within the ‘rural idyll’ (Little and Austin, 1996, p. 103). Rural women are valued for their traditional roles as wife and mother, as well as their ability to connect the private and public sphere, particularly through their informal labour in civic/voluntary sectors (Midgley, 2006). The activities that women perform are often “trivialised except where they are seen to relate directly to the provisioning of men and the sustenance of the male headed household” (Little and Austin, 1996, p. 103). Through this same gender dynamic, spaces of productive labour in rural regions have taken on a male character, as have rural development initiatives, which tend to favour masculine working practices, values (Little and Jones, 2000), and activities in predominantly primary and secondary sectors. Women’s contributions are deemed supportive in terms of their reproductive nature in primarily the tertiary realm.

Within the resource town literature, feminist investigations reveal how spaces of employment are delineated by gender such that women have access to only particular kinds of physical locales as sites of employment (e.g., Brandth and Haugen, 2000; Moen, 1981; Miller, 2004; Teske and Beedle, 2001). Women are

hindered in their efforts to access paid labour, particularly in resource-related activities, given deeply entrenched hierarchical and paternalistic structures within communities and organizations (Evans and Cooperstock, 1983; Fenwick, 2004; Gibson-Graham, 1994; Gill, 1986; Gill, 1990b; Halseth and Lo, 1999; Miller, 2004; Rhodes, n.d.). Barriers exist in a number of key sectors, such as mining, logging and forestry, and oil drilling (Halseth and Lo, 1999; Reed, 2003). These occupations are deemed difficult and dangerous and to require physical strength and technical know-how not thought to be the purview of women (Brandth and Haugen, 2000; Miller, 2004; Reed, 2003). Further, women's ability to access formal work spaces may be constrained by their husbands' shift work schedules, causing them either to have to arrange their own shifts so as not to overlap with their partners, or even preventing them from obtaining employment outside the home altogether (Gibson, 1992; Gill, 1990a; Preston, Rose, Norcliffe, and Holmes, 2000). As such, women's formal work spaces in resource towns tend to be concentrated in the tertiary sector, such as in waitressing, clerical work, retail sales, and service (Evans and Cooperstock, 1983; Gibson, 1992; Gill, 1986; Gill, 1990b; Halseth and Lo, 1999; Teske and Beedle, 2001; Rhodes, n.d.). Those women actually employed in resource-based sectors often experience a masculinist culture of "condescending chivalry" or are treated as a novelty (Miller, 2004, p. 49). Women are generally paid less than men and are more vulnerable to job losses during times of downsizing (Fenwick, 2004; Halseth and Lo, 1999; Reed, 2003). The majority of women in resource towns perform unpaid domestic labour, given women's perceived role as primary caregiver (Reed, 2003), either to the exclusion of participation in the formal sector or while juggling both productive and reproductive roles.

Feminist investigations also reveal that this gendered economic landscape has significant implications for women's experiences of resource towns in Canada. Because resource towns display male predominance numerically, economically, politically, and socially, creating a "traditionally male-dominated environment [where] the needs of women and children have been frequently overlooked," women's experiences of place are largely negative (Gill, 1986, p. 21). Women experience feelings of physical isolation given their confinement to the domestic sphere (and the home itself), resulting in depression, "cabin fever," and emotional disconnectedness (Evans and Cooperstock, 1983; Moen, 1981). In some instances, women's participation in activist and volunteer activities has enabled them to establish more positive experiences in natural-resource communities (e.g., Gibson, 1992; Halseth and Lo, 1999; Reed, 2000; Reed, 2003). In general, however, the role of women's contributions to the socioeconomic fabric of resource towns remains marginalized. The lack of resulting infrastructure to support the specific needs of women, for example, a high-quality education system or full range of retail services (Gill, 1990b), further generates a place in which women are less likely than men to have positive experiences (Halseth and Lo, 1999).

Increasingly, academic research has revealed that women's opportunities and roles in natural-resource towns may not be as limited and negative as initially conceptualized or evidenced. Maureen Reed's work in forestry communities on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, in particular, illuminates the range of roles and experiences of Canadian women across occupational categories, including those working for forestry companies, and to different extents of community- or occupationally based activism around forest issues (Reed, 2000). She notes that feminist preoccupations with marginality have produced a collective, largely

negative characterization of women's roles and experiences, stemming from a "genuine and appropriate desire to engage and support people in understanding and overcoming unjust social relations" (Reed, 2000, p. 365). At the same time, however, Reed (2007, p. 10) alludes to specific academic tendencies to perpetuate underestimates and misrepresentations of women in natural-resource towns "[b]y relying on basic census data and by simply referencing one another." In a similar vein, investigation of household economies in forestry-dependent McKenzie, British Columbia and mining-dependent Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia, found that the traditional role of males in the workforce and women in the homestead no longer prevailed when downturns in resource sectors occurred (Halseth and Ryser, 2004; Halseth and Sullivan, 2002). Rather the authors unearthed the complexity of such gender stereotypes whereby women played key roles in intensifying their labour, offering support during industry strikes, and forming support groups rather than remaining in supportive roles for men through household labour and community involvement. This study of High Level, Alberta, builds on such insights to reveal a broader range of women's roles and experiences in Canadian resource towns.

3.0 Methods

High Level, Alberta, was chosen as a study site to explore women's work spaces and their general experiences of resource towns in transition. High Level is a semi-isolated resource-dependent community located in northwestern Alberta. The population is approximately 3,887 persons (Statistics Canada, 2007); it is a growing population, as evidenced by statistics detailing a population increase of roughly 73% in the past 15 years (Statistics Canada, 2007; Statistics Canada, n.d.). High Level was chosen as the study site after census data and conversations with local town officials revealed that High Level may be unique compared to a number of other Canadian resource towns that are or have been the focus of media attention because of their (imminent) collapse. Not only is it resource dependent, but it is experiencing an economic transition in which *growth*, particularly of secondary and tertiary sectors, is prevalent, leading to increasing demand for labourers. What is also compelling is that while a number of past studies of more traditionally conceptualized resource towns have demonstrated that women in particular appear to be or perceive themselves to be marginalized in terms of employment, labour force statistics for High Level do not seem to suggest similar trends. Within the male labour force in High Level, participation is 88.9% for males over the age of fifteen years, the employment rate is 87.2%, and the unemployment rate is 2.0%. Within the female labour force, participation is 73.2%, the employment rate is 70.4%, and the unemployment rate is 3.4% (Statistics Canada, 2007). Though statistics such as these may suggest a relative equality between men and women in the work force, town officials voiced an interest in the *experiences* of women in particular, expressing concerns about potential gender dynamics that may be detrimental to community development and people's sense of belonging. One other factor aiding in the decision to focus on High Level as a study site was that initial contacts were easily established with community members, thereby facilitating access to the town and its population.

Data collection and preliminary analysis took place in High Level, Alberta, from May through July 2005. Key informant interviews, secondary documents, and participant observation were used to illuminate broad social and economic trends

to establish the structural context and characteristics of High Level as a resource town in transition. The research engaged a qualitative approach to understanding the socioeconomic context of High Level, women's access to work spaces, and women's experiences of place. Qualitative methods were deemed well suited to uncover meaning, concepts, characteristics, and descriptions since they allowed us to gain an understanding of how people situated themselves in their social settings (Berg, 2001). Qualitative methods can help decrease the distance between the researcher and the researched, creating a more trusting relationship and opening the lines of communication (Cotteril, 1992; Pini, 2002).

Twenty-six women participated in focus groups used to document women's circumstances and experiences in High Level. The focus groups consisted of from three to five members. Participant recruitment involved purposive, snowball sampling to ensure a cross-section of female residents in High Level, thus capturing a range of women's circumstances and experiences. The sample included a range in terms of age (from 22 to 52 years of age), marital status (includes never legally married, legally married and not separated, divorced, and common-law), number of children (range from no children to four children), length of residence in High Level (range from 6 months to 44 years), residential mobility prior to residence in High Level (range from one move to over 10 moves), personal annual income (range from \$5,000 to \$120,000), and education level (range from less than high school to university graduate degree), among other identifying factors. Table 1 shows the medians for a number of these characteristics.

Table 1. *Medians of a Number of Identifying Characteristics of Participants*

Median Age	40 Years Old
Median Number of Children	2
Median Number of Years Spent Living in High Level	11
Median Personal Annual Income	\$45,000.00
Median Education Level	One College Degree

Women who participated in focus groups were administered an open-ended questionnaire, which asked them to record their responses to a number of questions regarding their everyday lives in High Level. The questionnaire asked women to reflect on their spaces of employment, as well as their experiences of daily life in High Level.

Focus groups were selected as the most effective and efficient research technique for eliciting both individual and negotiated inputs from participants. While individual responses were collected through questionnaire surveys, group discussions allowed the women to reflect on their experiences and further develop their personal understandings of their role and place in High Level through shared thoughts (Berg, 2001; Neuman, 2000; Pini, 2002). Power differentials, which can lead to discussions dominated by a powerful few, were minimal and participants were candid and forthcoming throughout the focus group sessions. The use of focus groups proved to be a highly efficient technique given time and financial constraints. Follow-up individual interviews took place with specific participants

after sessions were completed (at a later date) and further mitigated the risks of silencing individuals within group dynamics. These interviews also allowed some women who could not take part in focus groups, but were eager to do so, to participate in the research. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality where requested.

Data analysis engaged both manifest and latent content analysis. Manifest content analysis aided in providing statistical counts relating to the demographic spread and character of the participants, and was used primarily in analysis of the questionnaire surveys. Latent content analysis, used in conjunction with open coding, allowed for a more qualitative interpretation of the data which emerged from the focus groups and interviews (Berg, 2001). Open coding was used to explore transcripts and identify key similarities and differences among the participants. From this process emerged the key themes of people's sense of place within different spatial contexts; specifically, data were coded in terms of employment spaces, home spaces, and civic spaces, and further in terms of broadly defined positive and negative experiences within these spatial contexts.

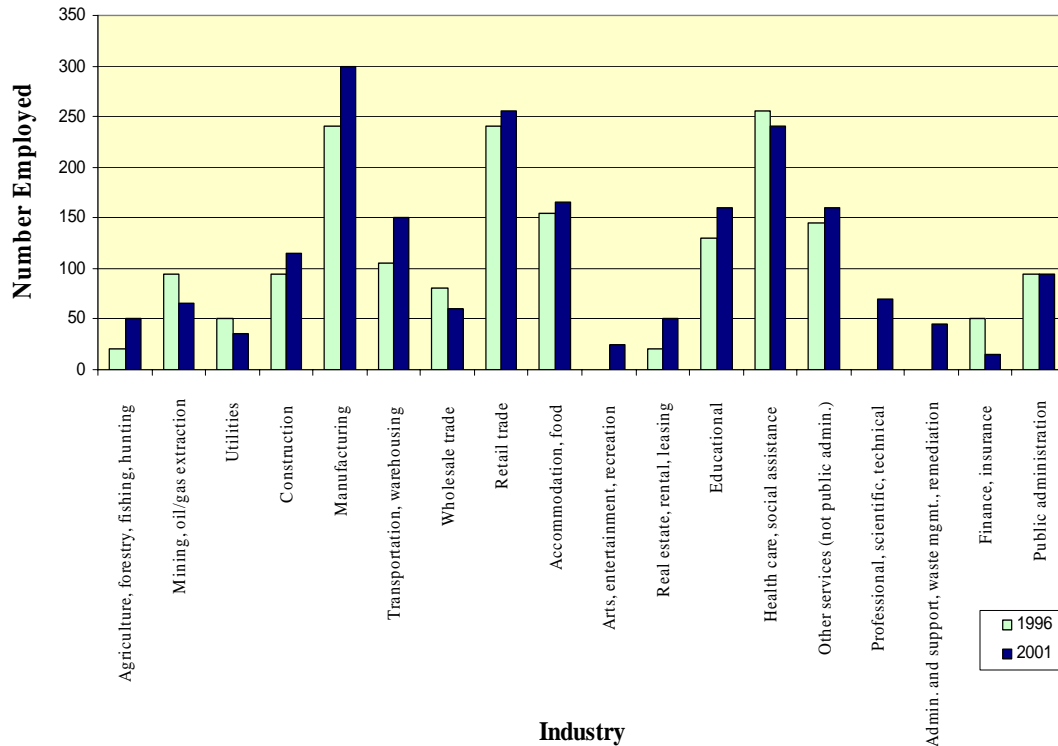
4.0 Results

The empirical investigation revealed that women living in High Level, Alberta, a natural resource-dependent community in transition, were not marginalized to the same extent as documented earlier by researchers focusing on more traditional company towns or single-industry communities.¹ Specifically, this study illuminates three key results: (1) formal employment opportunities for women, particularly in the tertiary sector, are perceived to be plentiful and varied by the women in this study, resulting in many of the women classifying High Level as a “land of employment opportunity”; (2) the women who partook in this study described their experiences in formal work spaces as overwhelmingly positive, meaning that they derived pleasure and satisfaction from their economic roles in the town; (3) the women of this study conveyed the idea that access to and positive experiences in work spaces combine with women's other roles and activities in personal and civic spaces, resulting in fulfilling contributions to the community both economically and socially. The remainder of this section details each of these results in turn.

First, there are opportunities for women in varied and well-paid jobs, particularly in the tertiary sector. The current economic transition in High Level has brought about an increase in secondary and tertiary sector employment, as depicted in Figure 1. This shift may be attributed to the growth of diamond mining and mineral extraction activities in the Northwest Territories, increased oil and gas extraction industries in Alberta and the Northwest Territories, highway construction and new infrastructure developments in the region generally, and

¹ These studies used a variety of sampling techniques that tended to yield similar results. For example, Reed (2000, 2003) used purposive sampling for interviews and focus groups together with analysis of policy documents and census data in regards to the forestry sector; Teske & Beedle (2001) similarly used purposive strategies to identify women in senior and influential positions in forestry-related industries; Gill (1990a, 1990b) used both random (via phonebooks) and purposive sampling while Halseth (1999) and Johnston et al. (2004) used random sampling via mailout surveys on which to base their claims.

Figure 1. Labour Force Comparison by Industry for 1996 and 2001, High Level, Alberta.



Note. From Statistics Canada. (2005a). Profile of Census Divisions and Subdivisions, 1996 Census – High Level, Alberta. Retrieved March 27, 2006, from <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census96/data/profiles/DataTable.cfm?YEAR=1996&LANG=E&PID=35782&S=A&GID=204492>; Statistics Canada. (2005b). Profile of Labour Force Activity, High Level, Alberta. Retrieved April 19, 2006 from <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/profiles/RetrieveProfile.cfm?Temporal=2001&PID=56178&METH=1&APATH=1&IPS=95F0490XCB2001001&PTYPE=0&THEME=0&FREE=0&AID=0&FOCUS=0&VID=0&GC=0&GK=0&SC=1&CPP=99&SR=1&RL=3&RPP=9999&D1=0&D2=0&D3=0&D4=0&D5=0&D6=0&GID=430490>.

increased tourism and recreation (D. Hunter, personal communication, June 6, 2005; Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development, Government of the Northwest Territories, 2001; Sylvester Publications, n.d.; the Town of High Level, n.d.). These trends have multiplier effects in the local economy, since High Level has traditionally acted as a major regional service provider. As regional economic growth occurs, the demand for services from High Level also increases. Subsequently, while the population of High Level increases, the demand for labourers outstrips the current supply, a trend that may impede the ability of the community to sustain such economic transition and growth (D. Hunter, personal communication, June 6, 2005; Sylvester Publications, n.d.).

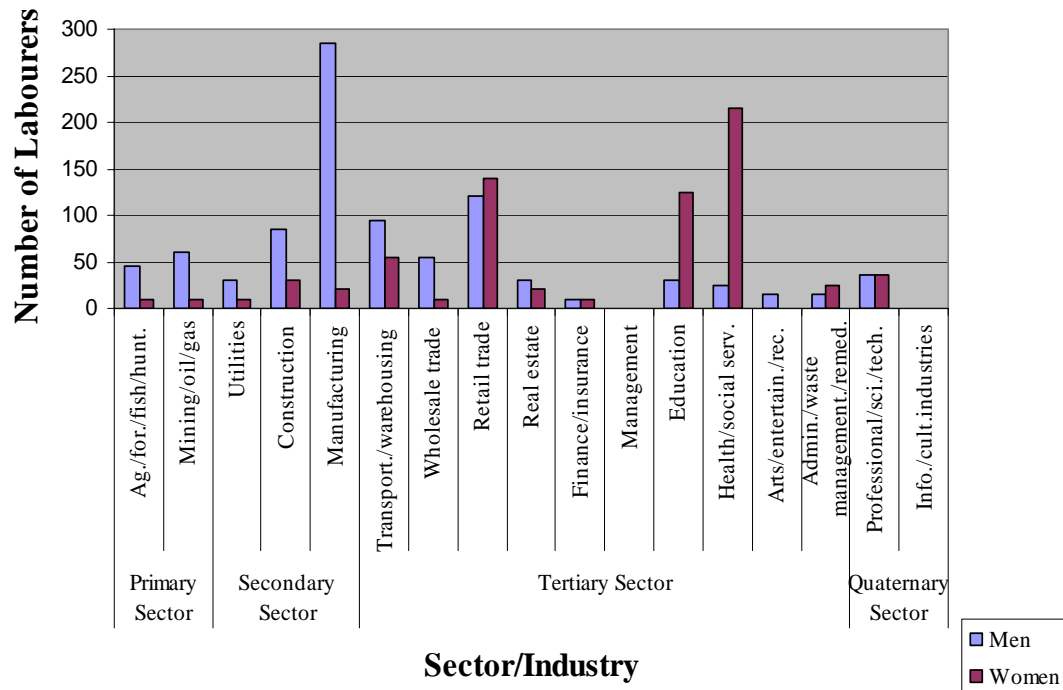
This economic transition to tertiary activities seems to have brought about opportunities for women’s employment in industries often deemed “reproductive”

(e.g., retail trade, education, health and social services, and administration), while their participation in “productive” industries (e.g., agriculture-/forestry-/fishing-/hunting-related industries, mining-/oil-/gas- related industries, utility trades, construction, manufacturing, and transportation/warehousing) remains limited, as depicted in Figure 2. Correspondingly, of those women interviewed for this study, 92% hold formal jobs (8% of whom are self-employed) in tertiary sector industries and female-dominated jobs such as wholesale, retail trade, health, and education. These jobs reflect a variety of employment opportunities: participants included a rural mail carrier, two administrative assistants, an owner/manager/clerk in the hotel and food and beverage services industry, two sales associates in goods and service industries, a human resources manager in a financial institution, two real estate brokers, a professional picture framer, a loans officer, a library director, a social service coordinator, and a school administrator. The study also reveals that the women’s annual incomes are substantially higher than documented previously for resource towns. Specifically, female participants earned a wide range of incomes (between \$5,000 and \$120,000) and the majority of women (77%) earned more than \$30,000. The average personal annual income of the women in the sample is \$48,462 (higher than the 2001 average for both High Level’s female population [\$24,234] and male population [\$41,407]) (Statistics Canada, 2007).

Women participating in focus group interviews collectively spoke of High Level as a “land of employment opportunity.” For instance, Cecilia described the community as “booming” and noted that since she moved to High Level she had had many more job opportunities than she had had in other communities, including Edmonton, Camrose, Lougheed, and Wainwright in Alberta.² According to Cecilia, High Level is “a good place to try out different jobs.” Monica, a recent immigrant, expressed a similar sentiment. She had numerous job opportunities to choose from because of growth in the economy, high demand for labour, and looser requirements for previous job experience specifically within Canada. Other women, such as Pam, commented on the ease with which they were able to establish a home-based business; High Level was perceived by some as “a town of opportunity—a place for people with entrepreneurial spirit.” Mandy and Cecilia experienced firsthand the variety of jobs available to women. Mandy had worked as a secretary, a clerk in goods and service industries, a member of a construction crew, and a mill worker, while Cecilia had found employment variously as an airline manager, a health educator, and a health and safety auditor. Rose’s job experiences were similarly varied, which led her to believe that High Level was “a great place to figure out what you want to do in life.” Participants were also enthusiastic about the income-generating potential for women in High Level. As one woman remarked, “If you seize the opportunities in High Level, there’s a lot of money to be made.” According to Chrissy, who holds a full-time, permanent job in the vehicle sales industry earning \$68,000, and characterizes her employment situation as being quite satisfying, “You don’t need to work your way up the ladder as much as you would elsewhere—here it’s easy to walk right into a good job.” She said that the highest positions in the community were easily attainable for women; it was just a matter of whether they wanted the jobs or not. Another issue

² Names of participants have been changed and what is deemed the most intimate and identifying characteristics and experiences have been left out to protect the identity of the participants as much as possible.

Figure 2. Gender Division of Labour, 2001, High Level, Alberta.



Note. From Statistics Canada. (2005b). Profile of Labour Force Activity, High Level, Alberta. Retrieved April 19, 2006 from <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/profiles/RetrieveProfile.cfm?Temporal=2001&PID=56178&METH=1&APATH=1&IPS=95F0490XCB2001001&PTYPE=0&THEME=0&FREE=0&AID=0&FOCUS=0&VID=0&GC=0&GK=0&SC=1&CPP=99&SR=1&RL=3&RPP=9999&D1=0&D2=0&D3=0&D4=0&D5=0&D6=0&GID=430490>.

raised by focus group participants concerned the placement and advancement of women in formal employment; some participants perceived High level as “a training ground, especially for women in teaching and nursing.” A number of women agreed that High Level was a good community for people finishing school and wanting to acquire work experience, or even for those without a relatively great deal of education, such as those lacking a post-secondary degree or certificate.

Second, beyond having access to a variety of well-paid jobs, study participants generally reported positive experiences in formal work spaces in High Level,³ which allowed them to derive pleasure and satisfaction from their economic

³ Two women noted that their experiences in male-dominated industries of the primary and secondary sectors were negative in some instances. For example, Toni, a certified general accountant and controller at a local forest-product mill, and Mandy, a former mill floor worker and construction worker, both spoke of being treated as inferior to male co-workers and assigned non-physically taxing tasks because of male perceptions of their being “helpless women.”

positions in the community. The women's positive work experiences take several forms and relate to a range of issues. For example, women reported feeling respected and valued by the community, even if working in male-dominated sectors. When asked to discuss her favorite places in High Level, Chrissy answered, "Work. I do a good job, am successful and respected; I feel pride." She said she had never felt subordinate in terms of her employment despite working in a male-dominated profession. Missy said she, too, felt respected and valued in her work space. She said that the realty industry and the public in High Level were more accepting than other communities of women working in realty. "I would not have the success in my job in another community," she said. "I believe this is due to the fact that ... my being a woman is seen as a positive qualification." Bridget is also in a typically male-dominated job. She reported that the community supported her and valued her contributions in her role as golf course superintendent. The community donates equipment, time, expertise, and funds so that she can accomplish the projects she initiates, allowing her both to excel on the job and to gain satisfaction through her work. She said, "Everyone seems quite happy with my work. Anyone can be a critic. But they are all very supportive and helpful."

The issue of community support was also central to Maryanne's positive experiences of her work in real estate, as well as her community service activities. She noted a highlight of her career was "gaining the respect of the 'male' business community in the region, once they realized I was an 'intelligent' woman" and having been awarded Citizen of the Year, which for her was a "tremendous honour." She said it symbolized the community's support for not only the programs and projects she had involved herself in, but for herself as an active and visible woman in the community. Furthermore, many women spoke of positive work experiences on account of their relationships with coworkers. For example, Tyna, a working mother, spoke of her boss's recognition of her needs as a worker and a mother, allowing her summers off to spend time with family. Vanessa also valued her workplace relations and particularly the support and social cohesion of her workplace community, describing her coworkers as being "like a posse, family, and friends." The strength of her workplace relations enabled her to excel on the job and contribute to her independence as a young woman, leading her to conclude that work was one of her favorite places: "I know everyone there and I feel comfortable." Most of the study participants, then, reported positively experiencing their jobs in a variety of ways: through the value and respect they received on the job, the community support they received on the job, and the relationships they had with their coworkers. In turn, these circumstances enabled them to derive pleasure and satisfaction from their economic positions.

Third, study participants reported that employment opportunities, positive work experiences, and volunteerism helped them feel fulfilled and connected to High Level. Focus groups and interviews revealed the central importance of sense of place, as well as feelings of being active, visible, and contributing members of the community through both formal (waged) and informal (volunteer) work. For example, Maryanne described how over time her attachment to High Level had grown as a result of her success as a businesswoman and participation in numerous boards and volunteer committees, including the Chamber of Commerce, the local health board, the Northern Alberta Development Council, the Northwest Corridor Development Corporation, the Regional Economic Development Initiative, and the High Level Golf and Country Club board. This community involvement "gives such a good feeling of accomplishment ... working towards the future and growth

of High Level,” she said. Blanche made an explicit link between work and contribution to the community at large. If she were not a working woman, she noted, she would not feel such an attachment, because she would not be as involved with the town’s development as she has been. “It gives you a good feeling to contribute to the community,” she said. She said she was proud to live in High Level, which feels like home to her; she turned down a prospective job transfer to remain in the town. Similarly, Pam developed a “real sense of community” on account of her economic role and social activism in the community, as did Toni, who said she felt like a valued contributor through both her full-time and part-time employment and volunteer work, including her involvement with the parent’s committee at her children’s school, the Chamber of Commerce, Ladies’ Night at the golf club, the local Pathfinders Organization, and the local Cadets branch. Tyna spoke of suffering from serious depression when she first arrived in High Level because she had confined herself to the home and was not working or participating in the community. After having acquired formal employment, she reported feeling much more at home and identifying with the culture of High Level.

5.0 Conclusion

Findings from High Level, Alberta, suggest that contemporary resource-dependent communities in Canada, specifically those that are diversifying economically, may offer different opportunities and more positive experiences for women than traditional company towns or single-industry communities. Specifically, women who participated in the study have access to varied and well-paid employment opportunities, particularly in the tertiary sector. Their positive work experiences have fostered a sense of belonging in High Level, as have their active involvement in and contribution to both economic and social realms. These findings challenge and broaden conceptualizations of resource towns in general as necessarily “male spaces,” dominated by interests, issues, and needs of male residents. They also extend the range of possibilities of women’s roles and experiences in resource towns such that they are not always and only associated with the domestic realm, shut out of formal employment, or faced with negative workspace scenarios. Feelings of connectedness and belonging are definite possibilities for women in these towns. Such insights contribute to a growing body of academic research which reveals that women’s opportunities and positions in natural- resource towns may not be as limited or as negative as earlier documented. Women’s multifaceted occupational, family, and civic roles contribute to the socioeconomic fabric of natural-resource towns. This study of High Level, Alberta, then is a further step toward better understandings and representations of women’s lives in Canada’s natural-resource towns.

6.0 Acknowledgments

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