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Experiences of Female Long-Distance Labour Commuters from Kelowna to the Oil Fields of Alberta

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores some of the challenges faced by female long distance commuters from Kelowna, British Columbia, when working in the oilfields of Wood Buffalo, Alberta—specifically, how they reinforce, resist, or reconcile tensions of gender within the male-dominated resource extraction workforce. The data, based on self-report questionnaires from nine female resource extraction workers and semi-structured interviews with a subset of five women, indicate that high wages motivated them to take up long distance commuting while social ties, homeownership and environmental attractions tethered them to Kelowna and the Okanagan area. The most apparent barrier for women is the almost insurmountable challenge of accommodating motherhood with long distance commuting. As workers, the study participants faced disparaging judgments about their knowledge and competence, even in cases where the participant held a higher-rank and had extensive work experience. The women used various avoidant strategies to minimize exposure to sexist comments or behavior that made them uncomfortable. The paper focuses on how the discourses of neoliberal ideology and hegemonic masculinities influenced women's perceptions of gender-related tensions at work. Individualism, competition and concerns over job security all affected women's assessments of workplace-related harm and views of each other as well as their male co-workers. The women simultaneously experienced and reinforced marginalization at work through gender stereotypes of both men and women; they revealed a seemingly perplexing combination of sensitivity to sexist treatment and strong reluctance to complain about harassment or gender discrimination. Recommendations to ameliorate women's working conditions and thus their integration into the labour force are noted.

Keywords: female mobile workers, oil industry, long-distance labour commuting, resource extraction industry, Kelowna

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1.0 Introduction

About 18,000 commuter workers travelled from Kelowna, British Columbia, to work in resource extraction in Alberta in 2015, typical of most years (Kelowna International Airport, 2016. Little is known about this army of workers, even less about the women among them despite their growing number. Most of the research

on long-distance labour commuting (LDLC) and resource extraction work has focused on women's experiences as wives (partners) and mothers remaining in the home community while their husbands (partners) work away. LDLC or fly-in/fly-out commuting refers to isolated worksites that require employer-provided food and accommodation, and a rotational schedule of a fixed number of days at the site, followed by a fixed number of days at home (Storey & Shrimpton, 1989). Previous studies have focused on workers from the Maritime provinces of Canada (Ryser, Schwamborn, Halseth, & Markey, 2011; Sandow, 2014; Walsh & Ramsey, 2012; Whalen, 2013; Whalen & Schmidt, 2016; Wray, 2012) and, outside of Canada, workers in Australia (Bailey-Kruger, 2012; Mayes & Pini, 2014; Pirotta, 2009; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009).

The work culture in Alberta's resource extraction industry has been defined mainly through historical associations of frontier masculinities, romanticized cowboy stereotypes, and economic prosperity (Dorow & O'Shaughnessy, 2013; Miller, 2004; O'Shaughnessy, 2011; Reed, 2003). Male-dominance in the resource sector is fortified by the implementation of neoliberal policies and practices, along with the gendered division of labour (Dorow, 2015; Fraser, Mannani & Stefanick, 2015). The male-centric stereotypes of oilfield workers serve to narrow the range of employment opportunities that are deemed suitable for women, creating barriers for their acceptance because it deviates from their prescribed 'appropriate' role. This paper explores the challenges faced by female workers from Kelowna and how they negotiate their sense of belonging and reinforce, resist, reject, and/or reconcile tensions of gender within the male-dominated resource extraction workforce in Wood Buffalo, Alberta.

1.1 Context

Ranked as the 6th fastest growing Census metropolitan area in Canada, Kelowna is a mid-size-city of 127,380 residents (Statistics Canada, 2017a) situated in the Central Okanagan Valley of British Columbia (Statistics Canada, 2017b). Kelowna was also ranked as the fourth least affordable place to live in Canada, behind Vancouver, Victoria, and Toronto (Demographia, 2015), largely due to its high housing costs and being the 'worst city' in Canada to find a job (Tencer, 2016), with a rising unemployment rate that reached 7.8 percent by 2017 (Kavcic, 2016; MacNaull, 2017). More than four in ten local employers have admitted their inability to provide competitive wages and/or benefits when compared to employers in Northern British Columbia and Alberta (Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission [COEDC], 2014).

Fly-in/fly-out commuting is common within the resource-based extractive industries in Canada, including oil–bitumen and gas extraction (Angel, 2014; Sharpe, Ershow & Arsenault, 2007; Whalen, 2013; Whalen & Schmidt, 2016). Long-distance commuting to resource-based jobs requires workers to spend extended time living in accommodations away from home—typically a rotation of two weeks of 12-hour days, followed by two weeks back home—usually in communal work camps. It offers a broadening of prospective employment opportunities without having to relocate permanently, but it has significant drawbacks for all workers, but particularly women.

The largest proportion of Canada's oil reserves and subsequent oil industry is located in Northern Alberta's Wood Buffalo Regional Municipality, which includes the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray, and spans approximately 68,454 square kilometers; Wood Buffalo is one of the largest regional municipalities in North

America (Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo [RMWB], 2011), with boundaries formulated strategically to encompass the total resource extraction industry located within Alberta. Mobile workers account for 30.9% of the total population of Wood Buffalo (RMWB, 2012a), with the largest portion of workers coming from British Columbia (RMWB, 2012c).

Resource extraction activity subsists on a series of booms and busts that are influenced by the market economy and international oil price fluctuations, and the recent prognosis for recovery is weak (Ebner, 2018). These fluctuations can have major impacts on the lives of resource extraction workers, and long-distance rotational workers. During downturns, it is likely that out-of-province rotational workers are among the first to be laid off. Women often occupy low-skilled positions which are laid-off first during downturns. The unpredictable, at times volatile, nature of the oil and gas industry has a profound impact on workers' overall quality of life. For instance, laid-off LDLCs who return home to Kelowna struggle with the change in lifestyle and must compete for comparatively low wage jobs (Husain & Matheson, 2017).

While male workers make up the majority of resource extraction industry employees in Canada at 82.9% (RMWB, 2012b), the number of women is growing. In 2014, approximately 38,800 women were employed in oil, mining, and gas, making up 22.7% of the total primary labour force (Alis, n.d.), up from 21.3% in 2011 (Petroleum Labour Market Information, 2014). Female mobile workers constitute 17.1% of resource extraction workers in Wood Buffalo (RMWB, 2012b). The minority status of women staying in project accommodation sites or oil camps underscores the notion of mobility itself—in this case, long-distance commuting—as a gendered activity.

Companies have started to recognize that women are an 'under-utilized talent pool' and their skills are necessary in resource extraction work (Petroleum Labour Market Information, 2014, p. 6). The experiences of female long-distance labour commuters may differ in significant ways from that of males and understanding these differences can be useful for companies looking to achieve greater diversity, and those looking to attract and retain more female workers.

2.0 Literature

Globalization of the world's economy, along with advances in technology leading to rapid diffusion of information, has facilitated an increase in overall levels of labour mobility. The spatial scale at which individuals around the world commute for work has dramatically increased in the last half century and people are becoming less reliant on spatial proximity when it comes to decisions regarding where to live and work. Fly-in/fly-out commuting—also known as long distance commuting, or long-distance rotational commuting, mobile work, and transitory labour migration—in which an individual regularly travels to and from a resource-based job (Angel, 2014) is an extreme example of this kind of labour flexibility (Sharpe, Ershov, & Arsenault, 2007; Whalen & Schmidt, 2016). It requires workers to spend extended time living in accommodations away from home, usually in work camps. Originating in the 1950s with offshore oil and gas companies located in the Gulf of Mexico (Jones, 2014; Storey, 2010), this type of labour is now seen throughout the world, particularly in Australia and Canada (Austin, 2006; Burke, Matthieson, Einarsen, Fiskenbaum, Soiland, 2007; Öfner & Ramsey, 2014) due to their large resource extraction industries.

Women's gendered experiences within resource extractive industries are influenced, determined, and reinforced at diverse interactions of material and discursive practices (O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2011). Material practices can be understood as "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" (O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2011, p. 137). Discursive practices "are the production and reproduction of subject positions, ideologies, stereotypes, cultural beliefs and other forms of negotiated meanings around gender and resource extraction [which] may be place-specific or have more global resonance" (O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2011, p. 137). These practices interact on varying scales of the resource extraction industry and reveal deeper dialectical tensions regarding notions of women's 'roles' related to their gender. Additionally, these practices influence women's own interpretations of their gender and role relative to men as they construct their identities within male-dominated industry contexts. The hegemonic masculine culture that underlies the social, structural, and systemic characteristics of resource extractive industries governs how they function, and become critical areas where women find the greatest barriers and challenges (Angel, 2014; Dorow, 2015; Dorow & O'Shaugnessy, 2013; McLeod & Hovorka, 2008; O'Shaugnessy & Krogman, 2011).

Due to the masculine culture that pervades resource extractive industries, women have had to find ways in which to successfully integrate into the dominant culture in order to be accepted and successful among 'the guys'. One of these ways is through assimilative coping strategies such as downplaying their 'femininity' (Miller, 2004; Pirrota, 2009), as one women in the oil field industry detailed with regard to her attire: "When you go to the field, you don't take a purse because you're really rubbing that female helplessness thing in, and you put all your junk—the feminine hygiene stuff—in your little pockets" (Miller, 2004, p. 54). This woman altered her discursive style to match that of a stereotypical male voice when making reference to feminine hygiene articles as 'junk' and to her pockets as 'little'. The notion of conformity is a common strategy utilized by women in order to achieve integration and overall acceptance within the dominant masculine culture. The success of women's integration is determined based on how well they follow socially constructed rules of behaving within resource extraction: "If you don't adapt to the rules, it is harder to be accepted" (Miller, 2004, p.56).

> They dressed in a masculine fashion, stopped attending to their hair, stopped wearing makeup, stifled any signs of emotion, restricted "girlie" topics of conversation, and were careful about expressing any discomfort regarding aspects of the male environment in which they worked and lived (Pirotta, 2009, p. 49).

The theme of women reinforcing their own marginalization through concerted efforts to fit into and ultimately succeed in resource-based industries is common in the literature on women workers in resource extraction (Miller, 2004; O'Shaughnessy, 2011; O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2011; Reed, 2003). Incidents of patronizing behaviour or condescending paternalism, overt chivalry, and lowered expectations regarding perceptions of women's competence, skills and abilities are all forms of implicit sexism that reflect women's position as secondary relative to their male colleagues (McLeod & Hovorka, 2008; Miller, 2004).

Capitulating to the status quo through conformity as a way for women to integrate into working in a male-dominated resource extraction industry is not a strategy universally adopted by female workers. The novel presence of women in resource extraction creates tensions regarding living and working in a man's world that women must reconcile. If the taken for granted understanding of resource extraction is that women do not belong in the primary sectors, which are instead dedicated to men, what rationale is provided for the presence of women in those sectors? More to the point, how do women facing barriers within the industry reconcile this existing tension? One reaction is simply to make an exception of women who work in resource extraction, view them as an 'oddity', or 'not normal' (Miller, 2004). Women who are hired in primary sector positions must reconcile dualities surrounding their gender and identity as a resource worker, for example between that of 'female' and 'engineer'. For some women, the methods of resolving this tension is simply to remove the title 'woman' or 'female', which commonly acts as a prefix, from their unofficial title or label. Instead of being referred to as a 'woman geologist' or a 'female engineer', for instance, they simply prefer to be referred to as simply a geologist or an engineer, thereby not having to make any emphasis on gender specifications (Miller, 2004). However, this only works on a discursive level, because aspects of their gender that are observable are not as easy to erase (Dorrow, 2015; Dorrow & O'Shaughnessy, 2013; Fenwick, 2004; McLeod & Hovorka, 2008; Ranson, 2005; Reed, 2003).

Women have reported an overall improvement in the working environment of the oil sands since the 1970s (Costa, Silva, & Hui, 2006; McLeod & Hovorka, 2008; Miller, 2004), alongside their greater access to such employment (Alis, n.d.; Angel, 2014; Petroleum Labour Market Information, 2014). As a result, more women are turning to resource extraction sites for work when other opportunities are scarce (Husain & Matheson, 2017; McLeod & Hovorka, 2008). Women also report some advantages associated with their gender position due to paternalism, notably the ability to freely ask for help or assistance without the repercussion of mockery (McLeod & Hovorka, 2008; Miller, 2004). A participant in Miller's study explained that "because I'm a woman, they [the men] give me more leeway […] which may not be good, but it makes me more comfortable asking questions. If a man asked them, they might think less of him (Miller, 2004, p. 50). The exception made of women in this regard is consistent with hegemonic understandings by which men are viewed as being more competent and self-reliant than women. The woman quoted above acknowledged the dilemma of accepting the patronizing treatment of women in her workplace ("which may not be good") but accepts this status quo of male superiority as a coping strategy even though it reinforces her own marginalization.

Few studies have addressed the experiences of female resource extraction workers in Canada, especially long-distance labour commuter workers (Anger, Cake, & Fuchs, 1988; Costa et al., 2006; Dorow, 2015; Fenwick, 2004; McLeod & Hovorka, 2008; Miller, 2004; O'Shaughnessy, 2011; O'Shaughnessy, & Krogman, 2011; Reed, 2003). Even fewer investigations focus on the impacts of material and discursive practices these women use to negotiate their sense of belonging and position as workers in this male-dominated industrial sector, where they continue to represent a minority population (O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2011).

3.0 Theoretical Framework and Method

This study draws on principles of poststructuralist feminist geography as a guiding framework for applying critical discourse analysis to topics of gender, power, labour and mobility (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006; Harrison, 2006; Wyile, 2006; Moss, 2005). It examines various material and discursive practices women use that reinforce, reject, resist, and/or reconcile tensions regarding gender in relation to long distance commuting and employment in resource extraction (Orlikowski & Scott, 2015; O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2011).

Poststructuralism accounts for perspectives that are often neglected, left out, 'othered', or concealed through dominant discourses, and are exposed and deconstructed often by those texts that are different or deferred of meaning (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p.90). A critical discourse analysis of narrative data from interviews focuses on tensions of gender that are problematic for women and further marginalize them in resource extraction work (Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Lazar, 2007; Moss, 2005; van Dijk, 2015; Wodak & Mayer, 2001).

We initially planned to employ a sequential mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2014; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), with a survey of 30 female LDLCs who reside in Kelowna and have engaged on long distance commuting work in Wood Buffalo, followed by a smaller set of individual interviews to further probe women's experiences of working in resource extraction, but several barriers to this arose. A major, lengthy oil industry downturn—employee layoffs, oil camps being shut down—followed by the disastrous wildfire in May 2016 that forced 80,000 residents to flee Fort McMurray and surrounding area, led to significant difficulties in recruiting study participants. Other challenges were due to the study being conducted in Kelowna and not the RMWB, outsider status, and many work camps shutting down.

Thirty oil camps, seven unions, five human resources companies, and 16 other related organizations, including Kelowna and Fort McMurray airports, were contacted for help with outreach and recruitment. All these companies received an initial contact letter informing them about the study, a copy of the consent form, and recruitment posters; this was followed by repeated requests. The first author also personally met with the lead recruiter of a major oil company in a head office in downtown Calgary. These initial strategies were ignored or met with resistance and elaborate, time-consuming steps to obtain corporate permission. More effective recruitment was accomplished through the personal contacts of the first author. The first two participants provided names and contact information for other eligible female mobile workers. Thus, a small sample of nine participants was recruited through a purposive snowball sampling technique (Babbie, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

The study design and ethical considerations were reviewed and approved by the University of British Columbia Okanagan Office of Research Services. The questionnaire was designed to collect information on (a) what attracted the women to resource extraction work and long-distance commuting, (b) perceived stereotypes of female and male workers in resource extraction, (c) experiences with issues of sexism and discrimination, (d) coping strategies, and (e) suggestions for improving conditions for women. Eligible participants were given a choice to respond online via a University of British Columbia-hosted Fluid Survey/Survey Monkey, or to complete a paper version that was mailed to their home.

Nine women completed self-reported questionnaires, and a subset of five women were interviewed. From April to September 2016, the lead author conducted all the

semi-structured interviews which lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours and averaged about an hour and a half.

Open-ended questions were used to delve deeper into issues raised by the survey results and allowed participants to raise topics they felt were relevant to their experiences. The participants were asked to elaborate on their responses to the open-ended survey questions and on the main themes covered by the survey. As a token of appreciation for their time, they were given a $10 gift card to a coffee shop of choice for completing the questionnaire, and another $10 gift card for being interviewed.

All the participants lived in Kelowna—where they were interviewed—and had at least six months experience long distance commuting for resource extraction-based work in Wood Buffalo within the past five years. The type of job they performed was not a criterion for eligibility, as long as the participant had lived in a camp while employed at the work site.

Analysis of the interview data was informed by two pertinent concepts: hegemonic masculinities and neoliberalism. Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practices, which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p. 77). Associations of femininity are determined and evaluated in contrast to associations of masculinity (and vice versa). Hegemonic masculinities position those traits associated with femininity as being other, lesser and subordinate. Thus, hegemonic masculinities and male-dominance create a culture of male privilege that simultaneously creates certain barriers for female workers—barriers that stem mainly from stereotypes imposed onto female workers both inside and outside the resource extraction industry.

For the purpose of this study neoliberalism refers broadly to a set of policies constituted on, and enforcing unfettered market centrism, laissez-faire economics, pro-globalization, increased privatization, deregulation, and subsequently precarious employment, work intensification, and high levels of competition enhanced through increased modes of individualism (Brown, 2015; Chomsky, 1999; Evans, 2015; Harvey, 2005; Herod & Lambert, 2016). Consequential to this is an inherent assumption that the procurement of success is solely the outcome of an individual's level of hard work. Additionally, that 'failure' is solely the result of an individual's shortcoming, or failure to work hard (Burchell, 1993; Rose, 1992). This way of thinking eliminates any potential responsibility that may be constituted at the organizational, or government level, or operating within existing systemic structures that privilege some workers–individuals over others, such that individuals already facing barriers through marginalization based on their ethnicity, gender, race, Socioeconomic Status mother tongue, nationality, ability, mental health, sexual orientation, and so on, are left further in the margins and at a competitive disadvantage (Braedley & Luxton, 2010).

All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo11 qualitative data analysis and were analyzed using thematic content analysis which involved multiple readings of the transcripts. Coding of data and theme creation was based on the major research questions and a discourse analysis of both material and discursive practices used by the study participants.

Multiple categories were created during the first phase of analysis to ensure that all possible themes could be captured. Through subsequent readings, parent nodes were created and previous categories were combined and refined into broader themes. These themes were further analyzed through a reading acknowledging how values of neoliberalism and existing hegemonic forms of masculinities were embedded in the ways female participants discussed their experiences. This level of analysis revealed systemic and structural factors that influenced and affected the women's experiences.

As an exploratory case study, there are limitations associated with the results. First, the sample was chosen utilizing a purposive snowball technique and therefore may contain a self-selection bias. The relatively small sample size, together with the exploratory nature of this study, means that the results do not support generalizations and must be interpreted with some caution. Another limitation of this study is that all the participants were English speakers and Canadian citizens—or had permanent resident status. All of the interviewees appeared to be white; none of them raised any issues regarding racism.

4.0 Experiences of Female LDLCs

Most of the respondents were primary wage-earners: four were divorced or separated; the remaining five were single. Their ages ranged from 68 to 23 years—born between 1948 and 1993—with an average age of 41 years. Four participants had a college diploma, two had completed some college courses or an apprenticeship, and one woman had taken some university courses. The remaining two did not respond to the education question.

The participants held a variety of different positions within resource extraction. All nine survey respondents had worked on a resource extraction site: three worked in administration as a site administrator, payroll administrator, and a document controller; the remaining six had positions as (a) a water and wastewater treatment plant lead operator, (b) lead HSE (health, safety and environment) advisor, (c) shipper and receiver, (d) warehouse worker, and (e) train movement specialist. One woman had previously worked as a heavy machine operator. Therefore, the women mainly held jobs in administration, management, or another specialized area, not in construction work or trades. This occupational distribution of the participants reflects the gendered pattern of work in resource extraction. Some of the participants had previously worked in other sectors, such as hospital, government, and service industries.

On average, the women had been working in resource extraction for five years, with a combined 41 years of experience in resource extraction as a whole. The income of respondents ranged from between $20,000–30,000 (two) to over $75,000 (six). Five of the women had relatives who worked in resource extraction and so were familiar with its demands and rewards. Financial reasons held more sway as motivation for entering resource extraction work than did opportunities for advancement, skills training, or personal fulfillment (rated in descending order). The women usually flew to and from their worksite. Seven women commuted more than 12 times a year, and two commuted between six and 12 times per year. During their stay in a resource extraction community, all but one woman stayed in an oil camp, and the remaining one rented.

4.1 Pull Forces: Residing in Kelowna while Commuting to Work in Wood Buffalo

One method or framework for understanding factors that determine individuals' migration choices at any spatial scale is by determining the influencing push/pull forces (Passaris, 1989). Push/pull models identify "economic, environmental, and demographic factors which are assumed to push people out of places of origin and pull them into destination places" (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014, p. 28).

A primary reason for retaining their home in Kelowna was proximity to their social networks. Most of the women had family and close friends living in Kelowna, and consequently did not want to relocate. One woman said,

> I have many friends and immediate family that live in the Okanagan. My life is here. I will not move to a place just for work. I love the area and have made it my home. The valley is beautiful and a great place to come back to.

Participants also mentioned feeling lonely while away in Wood Buffalo, a disadvantage that is commonly identified by mobile workers in resource extraction (Angel, 2014). Loneliness reflects workers' attachment to their home life, their social networks, and where they feel they belong. Appreciation of the beauty and temperate climate of the Okanagan Valley was also part of the draw:

> The Okanagan is beautiful. It was never a consideration to move to Fort McMurray, nor would I have ever done so. The reason I would never move there is it is filthy, and there is no sense of community, as every[one] is mostly transient.

Another woman had previously lived in Fort McMurray with her family, then moved with her family to Kelowna and commuted, which she preferred, but only because her family ties were primary:

> Originally, I resided in Fort McMurray because it was a move my entire family made from Ontario. When my parent's house was built [in Kelowna] in 2014, we all moved there, and my parents and I all commuted to Fort McMurray for work. So, for me, it wasn't about me not wanting to live in Wood Buffalo. I would have continued living there because it was home for me since 2009, but once the house in Kelowna was built it gave me the opportunity to begin commuting.

Homeownership was another indicator of local ties and a reason to stay in Kelowna, especially since housing costs are even higher in Wood Buffalo (Dorow, 2015; Ryser & Halseth, 2011).

A sense of belonging, related to but distinct from social ties, was also identified by participants as a reason to stay in Kelowna, and was contrasted with the air of transience in Wood Buffalo where two-thirds of the population had lived outside the region 5 years prior (Statistics Canada, 2013). The presence of so many long-distance commuters promotes the maintenance of a landscape defined by pervasive transience which limits attachment to place and diminishes a sense of community

(Krahn & Gartrell, 1983; O'Faircheallaigh, 1995; Pirotta 2009). This is a topical issue for other regions as well, where high volumes of migration take place and questions regarding local attachments, regional nationalism, and local identities are concerned.

4.2 Push Forces: High Cost of Living, Few Decent Paying Jobs

The women's decisions to work outside Kelowna, or the Okanagan region, were associated with several push forces, but primarily the high cost of living and lack of well-paying jobs locally. Yet, the cost of living in Wood Buffalo exceeds that in Kelowna, so a permanent move is not appealing.

> It is expensive to live here [Kelowna] without a good paying job or [being] part of a couple. I am single (which does have something to do with the fact that I work out of town). I have worked in the government field (city, regional district, etc.), and as a single mother I found it very difficult to get by without taking a part-time service industry job in the evenings and weekends.

Another participant stressed the level of pay difference between Wood Buffalo and Kelowna:

> The negative aspects [of Kelowna] are: very expensive, from housing, food, cost of living. The wages are below average, so if you want the nine-to-five job, you won't be able to survive on one income in a household. For example, I would make over $100,000 in less than a year, and once you have Fort McMurray on your resume none of the local companies will hire you.

Both of these respondents emphasized the added pressure that exists for lone parent mothers when it comes to income. Kelowna's status as a retirement community and heavy tourist area means that much of the local employment, especially for low-skilled workers, is low paying service jobs and healthcare jobs. Unequivocally, the main factor pushing workers outside of Kelowna is the high cost of living and lack of competitive wages and benefits, mentioned by all of the participants in this study.

4.3 Discourse on Gender and Success

Material practices conducted within the resource extraction industry are maintained not only through existing corporate policies, but also through iterative discourses between workers. These material and discursive practices promote neoliberal values and have multiple consequences for female workers. One such consequence concerns how these values interact with hegemonic norms in ways that affect perceptions of gender relating specifically to competence. Throughout the interviews, the women referred to experiencing constant negative judgments about their level of competency or knowledge about their work.

Several stereotypes about women workers in oil field jobs were identified by the participants as barriers or challenges they faced. These may be subsumed under three categories: (a) denigration of female workers' competency; (b) women's appearance or behavior judged as not sufficiently, or inappropriately, feminine; (c) and sexualization of women.

Regarding dim views of women's competence as workers, two of the participants gave examples of comments they'd heard: "Most females cannot handle the demanding lifestyle physically and emotionally"; and "Most females do not last long in the industry". Low expectations of the skill or tenacity of female workers may be related to another claim that, "You're ostracized and ignored until they get to know you". At root, the women said, "Your work ethic is questioned," and "You have to always prove yourself at a new site, no matter your credentials or experience".

The participants felt that they had to self-monitor their appearance and behavior or risk censure for being considered unfeminine or 'overly' feminine. On the one hand, being 'large', 'loud', 'slovenly', or a woman 'who smokes and drinks' would be considered violations of gender norms of feminine modesty and containment, while wearing athleisure clothing would be interpreted as distracting to men and welcoming inappropriate sexual attention: "You can't wear Lulu Lemons [tight yoga pants] to work and a crop top [and not expect hassle]". On the other hand being 'too girly' or 'a prissy woman'—who 'can't take a joke', for instance—would be considered inappropriately or excessively feminine and denigrated.

Whether or not the women were effective at regulating their own performance of femininity, a pervasive sexualization of women was apparent to them. The participants repeated comments they had heard or beliefs to the effect that "[Women] are a [disruptive] problem in a male work force," and "Females only work in the oil industry for male attention". Some men exhibited "suspicions that women use their bodies to get promoted". The participants were attuned to avoid any potential conflict, for instance by declining any sexual invitations in a diplomatic manner that respected the man's dignity. One participant advised that, "You must be able to politely deflect unwanted advances".

These prejudices and stereotypes are consistent with findings from other studies on gender and workplace (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014), including studies on female resource extractions workers (Britton, 2003; Dorow, 2015; Miller, 2004; Pacholock, 2013). In response to these challenges, the participants ignored and deflected the annoying comments and disturbing behaviour of their male co-workers. Five of the survey respondents had experienced or knew someone personally who had experienced sexual harassment or discrimination, but none reported it. While some published research suggests an overall improvement in women's working experience in the oil fields (Costa et al., 2006; McLeod & Hovorka, 2018), sexual harassment or discrimination clearly still occurs, particularly in male-dominated industries such as mining, resource extraction, and construction (Anderson & Taylor, 2006; Botha, 2016; Helbert, 2018). The sexual objectification of women workers reinforces the notion that they are an oddity and contributes to women's sense of alienation, to the point that they "run to their room and hide", as a participant described:

> I was in a camp once where there was 10,000 people, and…probably 9,500 of them were men—it can be just extremely creepy. All these guys are looking at [my friend] and she doesn't even notice. Because you have to either…turn it off or it would just drive you…it would just make you crazy cause, like, you walk down the hallway and it's just like being, you know, on display…. I would say probably the dining halls or just in the hallways is the worst place for any kind of objectification. Like there's been times

> where I walked down the hallway and I've just felt…physically sick…. Or
> you stop in the hallway and talk to someone and see the men how they just
> about break their necks looking at women. It sounds exaggerated, but it's really
> the truth! […] I've worked with women where…they do their job, they might
> have dinner with somebody, and they literally run to their rooms and hide out.

These subtle daily experiences symbolize how the work environment is gendered in ways that privilege men and represent women as 'other', or as problematic. This finding is similar to that of Wright (2016) on female construction workers.

In a summation of advice, one woman said it was important to have "strong skills in your field, self-esteem and high morals, and the ability to remain a lady, as in "don't use profanity, and don't bed hop in camp". This comment reflects a discourse of 'decent' femininity, addressing what successful women 'ought' to be like, which is a lady, and meant to be protective. The emphasis on having high self-esteem and strong skills could be interpreted as ways to deflect or resist negative stereotypes of female workers and are also typically attributed to notions of masculinity. Another woman addressed the demanding aspect of the work with a cautionary tone: "Long hours—12-hour workday; camp life is tough, and it gets lonely". Both of these women focused on delivering a warning about the difficulties of this type of work situation, to ensure that future female workers know what they are signing up for. In other words, they have accepted the reality of what it is to work in resource extraction and perhaps view success in the industry as knowing what to expect and then finding a way to adapt. A third woman was specific about the risks of being unwary about sexual involvement with co-workers, as well as the likelihood of feeling lonely, and therefore vulnerable:

> Dress appropriately—as it is a male-dominated industry and the
> objectification is huge—so not to draw any further unwanted attention to
> yourself. Surround yourself with like-minded individuals. Refrain from
> engaging in relationships or sexual activity as most people are married and
> lead a double life. Further, the talk and judgments are huge and can lead to
> jeopardy in your employment. Have a hobby or interest to keep you busy
> after the workday is over as it can be a very lonely place.

Again, the issue of women's attire is linked to unwanted male attention. The advice to avoid sexual relationships or 'bed hopping' suggests a risk of slut-shaming—being gossiped about, judged, and ultimately risking their job, based on a double standard regarding sexuality and gender.

Having to self-regulate one's social relations so carefully makes the pervasiveness of loneliness more of a burden. As one woman said:

> It's not for everyone. I mean, I've had to send people home in a couple of
> days because they were suicidal. I've had to send people home because they

> just…they were so lonely that they just…. They've never been away from
> their family, and so it's not for everybody.

4.4 Precarious Employment and Competition

Intersecting any gendered conflicts among workers is the context of labour in general. Precarious employment, evidenced by fewer long-term, secure positions, and increases in short-term contract positions, enhances competition between workers. Contract work makes up the majority of work in resource extraction. In times of recession, job shortages are further increased. High volumes of workers automatically lose their jobs when a contract is complete.

One participant noted the consequences of the strong downturn in the oil industry:

> Everybody got laid off, so in this last November there was 80,000 people
> that were laid off. I was one of those 80,000. Well, our job was completed,
> so we all knew we were going to be laid off. But to find another job with
> 80,000 others out of work....And then [the value of] oil dropped down to
> $26 a barrel…its lowest level, and yeah...no jobs!

A competitive work atmosphere operates to alienate workers from each other and contribute to individualism. One participant claimed that women were the worst perpetrators of bullying and hoarding their knowledge to gain an edge over colleagues:

> The strange part is that usually I found the women are bullies. They are
> really very clever, but they do not want to share their knowledge with you.
> They just want to make your life miserable so they can go run and tell
> somebody, 'Hey, she doesn't know what she is doing,' instead of teaching
> you, which is actually their job. It's just craziness.

Another way that women can 'turn on each other' is through expressing unflattering, suspicious perceptions of interactions with male colleagues. One participant expressed her disapproval of what she deemed objectionable behaviour of a minority of female colleagues who identify and associate with the 'trades guys':

> There's one in two dozen that would be like that—obnoxious, a filthy mouth
> sloppy, slovenly, disheveled. And they're in the office, they like to feel like
> they're a part of the trades guys. They identify with the guys. And every
> time you see one like that, they'll be out in the smoking pit, and they'll
> be catching rides with [the men] in the mornings in their pickups
> instead of taking the bus like everyone else.

In this case, gender norm violations are used to criticize and denigrate their colleague's behavior (filthy mouth, disheveled, smoking), which is not 'like everyone else'. This stance ultimately divides female workers and implies an allegiance to men and against women. Another woman's comment reflects the

resentment involved: "I find working with guys much easier than women. Just because, like, women can get catty and bitchy." Individualism, competition, and feelings of loneliness can combine to further alienate women from each other.

4.5 Mother, Wife, and Career

Mothers of young children constitute the smallest sub-group of workers in resource extraction industries; it is taken for granted that this sort of work is incongruent with motherhood (Ranson, 2005). While achieving an effective work–family balance also creates challenges for fly-in/fly-out fathers, it is more pronounced for mothers of young children who report strong feelings of helplessness and guilt when they cannot leave work to respond to caregiving issues at home, unless serious (Costa et al., 2006). Mothers engaged in fly-in/fly-out work are torn between emotionally and financially providing for their children.

The ability to retain women workers is hampered by this tension between productive and reproductive labour (Costa et al., 2006). Women with long, successful careers in the oil industry, once they had children, put childcare needs ahead of their work careers by refusing promotions that require longer hours or leaving the familiarity of their current position, or leaving the industry altogether (Ranson, 2005).

Seven of the nine women surveyed agreed that motherhood is a barrier for working in resource extraction. Only two of the participants have children—now adults—and only one had worked in the oil fields while her child was under 18, made possible by the support of her parents: "As a single parent myself, my parents helped me out quite a bit when it came to sitting and things like that, so, you know, there's times I'd work when that is all I did was work". Considerable social and instrumental support from family and social networks is required to allow a mother with young children to commute long distance. While this participant struggled with being away and missing moments with her child, she stressed her determination to earn enough to support her family:

> You try to provide in the long run, and hopefully the child understands that,
>
> you know, I'm working away because I'm making both incomes here. And
>
> if you're going to get ahead and you want all those things, this is what it's
>
> going to take…. I was going to go out and make a good living.

Motherhood as a barrier is consistent with findings from previous studies of women's experiences in resource extraction in both Canada and Australia, which found a lack of priority given to family-friendly policies (Dorow, 2015; Ranson, 2005; 2001; 1998). Clearly this limits the opportunities for females to work in resource extraction, or, alternatively, limits women's options to have children. It also reinforces a hegemonic gendered division of labour, with support from discourses on 'good' mothers being those who stay home and raise children (Zimmerman, Aberle, Krafchick, & Harvey, 2008).

The participants ranked having a family—children and spouse—as a primary barrier to taking employment in the oil fields; and being away from family, in general, was considered a serious drawback. For women planning on having children, resource extraction jobs may offer at most a short-term opportunity. The participants discussed the strain over maintaining social ties and families as a definite challenge while engaged in long-distance commuting. While these barriers are not limited to

resource extraction work and exist for women in diverse fields (see Pirotta, 2009; Smith & Rosenstein 2017; Terrill, 2016), they are more pronounced in cases of long distance commuting (Costa et al., 2006; McKenzie, McKenzie & Hoath, 2014; Storey, 2010).

4.6 Putting Up with It: Strength & Endurance

The other barriers that participants listed referred to dealing with the challenges of the work environment, stressing the need for women to have strong self-esteem and confidence to work in a male-dominated environment and deal with a "fair amount of harassment of all kinds", based on "stigma from old stereotypes that working in remote areas is for men only". These comments stress how important it is for female long distance labour commuters to be resilient.

The necessity for women to be strong and able to withstand insult was repeatedly mentioned by the participants: "You have to be strong, and you have to have some big shoulders—and let me tell you, they yell, they do everything possible…and you have to withstand that." Perseverance seems to be the predominant requirement; the participants made no reference to efforts to resist or oppose the existing social structure. Instead, talk of maintaining a "stiff upper lip" and "tied up bootstraps" was prevalent, both associated with hegemonic perceptions of masculine toughness. A participant with a lengthy history of working in the oil fields noted changes she'd observed over time:

> So, I would say, back in the day, it would take a very strong, independent woman to do it. Nowadays, it's a lot different, it's like, way different, especially the [women's trade organizations that prepare and support women in trades] coming in. We have a lot of younger...staff coming in, and they kind of place them in [collectives] where…you got the gentleness [supports]. For me, [I] was thrown right in to sink or swim…. 'Cause I'm a type A personality, very strong, so that's why I fit in so well. I had to take a lot of crap as well. And I had to fight for everything I got till now. So, it's changed, you have a lot more women now getting into the field as trades...and they're being successful at that.

This woman clarified that "taking a lot of crap" and "fighting for everything" refers to the fact that as a woman, "You're going to be heckled…. You have to be able to joke, you have to be able to stand your ground". As a coping strategy, the requirement to be 'strong' was necessary because the work is demanding, with a fierce pace—and not for everyone. Strength as a coping strategy was tied to broader experiences of the industry overall, which was described as extremely demanding due to the pace and the type of work. The preoccupation on strength, both as a barrier and a coping strategy, is consistent with the expectations of hegemonic masculinities and echoes the findings of previous studies on female workers in resource extraction (Costa et al., 2006; Dorow, 2015; Dorow & O'Shaughnesse, 2013; Miller, 2004).

4.7 *Working Hard & Proving Abilities*

Without a doubt, the work schedule is rigorous: "You work 12 hours, and you go back to camp, and most of the time you're too tired to even eat, so you go to bed." Another participant reiterated how tiring the work is: "You would just get enough time to shower, throw something on…half the time you didn't want something to eat because you were so exhausted—go to bed and get up again and do it again."

A commonly mentioned strategy that pervaded much of the interviews is the notion of having to work hard and prove one's abilities. The participants faced repeated challenges as to the adequacy of their knowledge, competence, and abilities. To counteract these perceptions, participants emphasized discourses of hard work, having skills and knowledge, and being focused on work exclusively: "Our work ethic is, like, we're there to work, head down, and you're working 12 hours." The repeated emphasis on work exclusivity was marked and suggests a deep sensitivity to perceptions regarding women's abilities and competence, as well as the authority given men to judge. Moreover, a focus on work and a professional attitude is presented as a strategy against harassment on the work site:

> I have always had the attitude that I go there for work and work only…. So,
>
> you just, you go in, you have to have that attitude, right? And you have to
>
> have the attitude [that] 'this is work' and try to separate yourself.

Presumably, to separate from yourself as a woman, from femininity—to avoid hassle, to avoid risky situations such as this:

> So, you'll be sitting at your desk and you'll have a guy come sneaking in and
>
> ask you for your cell number, and here is the trick: [He says,] 'Do you want
>
> to come over to my room and play cards?' Well, that means a hook up.

In such cases, women may become victims of negative gossip, an outcome that is not extended to their male colleagues, even though they are 'mostly married'.

That having to prove one's competence and abilities is both a barrier and a coping strategy is consistent with findings from other studies on female workers in male-dominated fields such as construction (Agapiou, 2002), firefighting (Perrott, 2016; Pacholok, 2013), and policing (Brown 2015; Veldman, Meeussen, Van Laar, Phalet, 2017). Participants did engage in varying levels of social interaction but limited these to communal interactions such as group lunches and barbeques meant for the entire team or group.

Another strategy was 'keeping eyes on the prize', meaning a focus on the workplace as simply a place to make money, and ignoring patronizing behavior from male co-workers, such as being given the simplest menial tasks:

> The first time I went up there I was with all these guys that were just
>
> miserable and…I think they maybe thought that I could do less because I
>
> was a female. Cuz, they would always give me super easy jobs…. I don't
>
> know why I'm complaining, because I got paid a lot to do it, but's it's just….
>
> I don't even know if they were actually jobs…just like stupid stuff.

Women may accept patronizing 'assistance' or chivalry for pragmatic reasons, but they recognize the dilemma inherent in doing so: "Some guys don't see women for, like, two months; they would be willing to help [a woman], they would be doing everything for [her]. OK, I don't really think I want that."

Keeping job security and the comparatively high wage foremost becomes an understandable reason to avoid confronting forms of sexism; other aspects of one's experience are reduced in importance. Accordingly, inequities are evident only in so far as women have the opportunity to secure a position in the industry; any efforts to challenge social relations in the work environment may result in diminished or lost opportunities. This was apparent in a participant's comment regarding what issues are worth contesting:

> It's horrible, like, some of the things that go on up there, and a lot of times…it just goes unreported because people don't want to lose their jobs. They know what the repercussions would be, like, you'll be shamed, you know. Because the guys will be, like, 'Oh yeah, you know, she's just nothing but a bitch, or she's nothing but a whore, you know, blah, blah, blah…. So, a lot of times it just goes unreported.

Thus, women's efforts to avoid conflict and maintain their role as worker involves ignoring paternalistic treatment and avoiding sexual inferences or activity, or risk being harmed by harsh negative stereotypes.

4.8 Invisibility Through Avoidance and/or Disengagement

Trying to deter maltreatment through practices of disengagement or avoidance was another strategy related to maintaining a strict focus on work. One participant described how she withdrew to avoid hearing the offensive comments about women made by her male colleagues.

> I was the only female in our lunch trailer, and nobody ever really said anything that was overly offensive, or whatever. Like, I don't really take things personally, and a lot of times when they do say something stupid, they're joking, it's nothing serious. But I don't know, I guess just listening to them talking about women, or their girlfriends at home…. I don't know, it was a bunch of stuff like that…. I'm like [facial expression of irritation], for a few days I eat my lunch in peace and quiet in the warehouse. Like, I do not want to listen to these fucking guys right now.

Similar avoidant strategies were also identified in a study of the experiences of female police officers (Haarr & Morash, 2013).

In some cases, female participants used cognitive strategies of reframing and downplaying sexism, even shifting the responsibility to the women experiencing harassment.

> Like I said, there are going to be some women that take things a little too far—they want to entice. But then when the man [responds], then all of a sudden…[it's a problem]. So, I always say, dress professionally.

The participant who ate lunch alone to avoid hearing the derogatory comments about women made by male colleagues later downplayed the seriousness and severity of the incident. Other examples of diminishing the impact of incidents were evident in comparisons between long past and current behavior—worse versus relatively mild—thereby minimizing current forms of sexism.

5.0 Recommendations

Resource extraction industries continue to shape and impact the socio-political and economic fabric of Canada, playing a vital role on local, national, and international scales; therefore the impacts of resource extraction industries on workers, local residents, and the environment are of great importance (Addison & Roe, 2018; Shrivastava & Stefanick, 2015).

Most LDLCs are employed on a contract basis and do not have the same benefits as direct staff; they are less able to maintain secure employment and lack access to alternative work schedules such as part-time work and job sharing. This is compounded by the strains of extended work shifts, being far from home, isolation form social support and networks, living in community camps, and operating in high-risk areas where use of cell phones and other devices is frequently not safe or practical. Female LDLCs face barriers to employment and promotion and tend to be relegated to jobs that pay less; in short, women are barred "from participating equitably and advancing within petroleum industries" (Fraser, Mannani & Stefanick, 2015, p. 175).

There is currently greater recognition of social injustice in the form of sexism, discrimination, and sexual misconduct against women in the workplace (Botha, 2016; Helbert, 2018; Heilman, & Caleo, 2015; Jones, Arena, Nittrouter, Alonso, & Lindsey, 2017; Rader, Larson, McKay, & Moss, 2016;). The need for transformative change is undeniable.

Based on the findings and the study participants' own suggestions, a number of changes could be implemented to improve the situation for female workers and have a long-term transformative effect on gender relations while stabilizing the resource extraction workforce. The first involves greater flexibility for women with children and families, which has been recommended in previous studies (Eftimie, Heller, & Strongman, 2009; Ranson, 2005). While policies are currently in place for parental leave, more efforts should be directed at implementing family policies that would improve female workers access to and retention within the oil industry. This includes providing greater work flexibility in case of family emergencies to leave during a rotation, and for opportunities to communicate home during work hours—by phone, text, skype, and so forth. These types of policies have been successfully implemented by mining companies in Australia (Misan & Rudnik, 2015). Broader government-supported policies that lessen domestic burdens and improve access to markets (Eftimie et al., 2009) such as assurance of job security after parental leave, is also needed.

Changing male-centric attitudes on gender in resource extraction education is key (Laplonge, 2016a; Macdonald, 2018; Shrivastava & Stefanick, 2015). One way to accomplish this may be to include information on harassment and other issues in the

assessment forms used to identify oil sand safety awareness and daily field level hazards (FLHA) and related meetings. This can be carried out and supported by health, safety and environment supervisors, can take no more than a couple minutes each day, should involve identifying issues and implementing strategies to improve or ameliorate problems, and can include information on protection from harassment and other violations and on provisions in the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Even when complaint processes are available, workers will be hesitant to use them if, as our study participants feared, there is no protection against retaliation. Despite efforts to improve the situation for women in the oil industry, it remains dominated by men. Onsite programs are needed as part of training and orientation to promote inclusive attitudes help workers and managers better understand and identify implicit and explicit discrimination or hegemonic gender roles. Harassment management should also be integrated into the curriculums of trades programs and disciplines such as engineering. Effective opportunities for reporting of discriminatory incidents require sensitivity to women's situations. Our study participants indicated that they had little to no recourse when it came to reporting harassment or other negative experiences. Registering complaints is discouraged by prevalent stereotypes about female workers as being troublemakers. While most of the women had positive experiences with male colleagues, most of them also identified at least one distressing incident that was not reported, or was reported but not satisfactorily handled, that is, with little assistance or recourse provided. Implementation of a system for anonymous reporting is required, with clear procedures and responsible officials who are located in proximity to workers in remote sites—not in downtown Calgary, for instance—so that individuals feel comfortable approaching them and reporting, and the service is accessible. Having more women in supervisory and leadership roles would assist by re-balancing the distribution of power. Oil-rich Alberta which has a reputation as a socially regressive regime which has historically resisted attempts to promote equality of minority groups. Improving relations between women and men in the oil industry will require more trust than currently exists (Fraser, Mannani & Stefanick, 2015; Shrivastava & Stefanick, 2015).

With more women working in oilfields, it should be feasible to provide more social support for female workers, which can reduce social coercion such as bullying. Mentoring programs that pair experienced and novice workers have been suggested (Eftimie et al., 2009). More direct social support would involve opportunities for more interactions among workers, such as barbeques and lunch. Most participants referred to having 'working' lunches, or skipping lunch altogether due to work intensification. Organized meal sharing would foster a greater sense of community and possibly mitigate the alienation and individualism associated with neoliberal conditions. Greater social supports and interactions have been identified as increasing positive associations with work in resource extraction and long-distance commuting (Misan & Rudnik, 2015), and by a study on female police officers facing workplace harassment (Brown, 2015). Changing the workplace culture can involve occupational strategies to build and promote solidarity among workers, and resist individualism by increasing opportunities and activities for social interaction and creating more shared communal spaces, for example by providing a lounge space with hydration and snack stations available in every work trailer.

6.0 Conclusion

This is the first study to look at the experiences of female long-distance labour commuters from Kelowna, a mid-size city in the interior of British Columbia, to the oil fields of Alberta. High wages in resource extraction work in comparison to the local labour market are clearly a primary draw. Similar motivations for well-paid employment have driven workers in Newfoundland to commute long distance (Keough, 2012).

The demands of mothering young children are a widely-recognized barrier to working in the oil fields. Smith & Rosenstein (2017) similarly found that motherhood keeps the military from recruiting and retaining women. This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of women's position to address in relation to employment that requires long stretches of time away from home.

At work, the study participants faced disparaging judgments about their knowledge and competence, even in cases where the participant held a higher-rank and had extensive work experience. The pressure on women to prove their competence and abilities as workers is a finding consistent with results from studies on female workers in other male-dominated fields such as construction (Agapiou, 2002), firefighting (Perrott, 2016; Pacholok, 2013), and policing (Brown 2015; Veldman et al., 2017). Practising avoidant strategies to minimize exposure to sexist comments or behavior that made the participants uncomfortable was also identified in a study of the experiences of female police officers (Haarr & Morash, 2013). The strategies that participants used to deal with the barriers and challenges they encountered in the oil fields corroborates the results of other studies female workers in 'dirty work' (see, e.g., Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014; Simpson, Slutskaya, Lewis, & Hopfl, 2012).

A key finding of this study was the ways in which the systematic nature and social constructs of discourses of neoliberal ideology and hegemonic masculinities influenced the perceptions of participants' experience, and the way participants reconciled existing tensions of gender in resource extraction. Individualism, high levels of competition, and concerns over job security all affected women's assessments of workplace-related harm and views of each other as well as their male co-workers. The women simultaneously experienced and reinforced marginalization at work through gender stereotypes of both men and women, contributing to competition among women, and a seemingly perplexing combination of sensitivity to sexist behaviour and strong reluctance to complain about harassment or gender discrimination. Thus, while participants acknowledged the existence of negative, sexist stereotypes and identified many examples, they also applied these stereotypes to female colleagues whose behavior violated the rules of suspending their femininity but exempted themselves through careful self-regulation. Previous studies have shown that male workers make an exception of female co-workers in resource extraction as an oddity (Miller, 2004; Reed, 2003). The participants managed the tension of gender exclusion by being the proper sort of female oilfield worker; this does not confront the gender status quo but assimilates women while they hope for gradual improvements. Reed (2003) similarly found that female workers conform to a male-dominated work culture through practices of assimilation.

The pervasiveness of hegemonic forms of masculinity in resource extraction work sites creates an environment where female workers' successes are in some ways contingent on their having to reproduce hegemonic masculine behaviour. Feminist researchers must be clear about women's agency regarding this, as Nunn (2013) clarifies:

> [W]omen's involvement in reproducing hegemonic masculinity [in this
> analysis] does not attempt to shift accountability toward women for their
> subordinate position (as I recognize the social processes which produce
> masculine domination to be much more complex than this). Women's roles
> in reproducing masculine narratives are more a reflection of the strength and
> pervasiveness of hegemonic forms of masculinity than the involvement and
> complicity of women. (p. 806).

Nuanced compromises with hegemonic gender norms is intertwined with women's coping strategies for maintaining their position within the industry. Understanding how these dominant discursive and material practices are produced and reproduced is crucial for overcoming their marginalizing consequences and cultivating transformative change.

While the study participants did not challenge the practices that marginalize women in resource extraction worksites, or the structures that separate work and family spheres and lack of family-friendly policies, they were highly cognizant of how to avoid or minimize gender-related disadvantages in the workplace, and impatient over the slowness of progressive change in gender relations.

Based on these findings, amendments are required at corporate and government levels to achieve transformative change. Women are over-represented in the secondary and tertiary sectors of the oil industry (Government of Alberta, 2014), reflecting traditional patterns of the gendered division of labour. Concerted efforts such as federally-funded initiatives and programs to encourage greater numbers of women to enter into trades, mathematics, sciences, and engineering are required to alter this pattern (Smart, 2016).

This exploratory study also points to the need for more comparative studies in mid-sized cities on women's (working) 'migratory trajectories', including the forces leading to female long-distance labour commuters–migration and its resultant social and economic impacts, as well as the barriers and challenges they encounter which may affect their integration into the labour force, particularly in specific sectors of the Canadian economy.

Many small and mid-size cities in Canada, like Kelowna, are struggling to attract and retain newcomers, including immigrants and qualified people to fill labour force gaps and to 'rejuvenate' their aging population. It is important that the City of Kelowna proactively plan, in cooperation with local industries and local housing market actors, to address their residents' issues of adequate incomes and affordable housing, and thus better integrate its residents into the local society.

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