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[See table of contents](#)

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### Article abstract

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# The Family and Social Change in the Newfoundland Outport

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Studies of the changing outport family have emphasized the role of modern fishing technology in undermining the traditional patrilocal extended family and have overlooked the tenacity of traditional family values, identification with the fishery and sense of community in everyday life. This paper focuses on a southwest coastal outport village and describes the variety of women's attitudes towards family concerns such as courtship and marriage, birth control, child-rearing, male and female work roles. Cultural continuity and the integrity of the family have been maintained through the mechanisms of strong female networks, a powerful egalitarian ethic, and pride in the past.

*Les études sur les changements familiaux dans les agglomérations portuaires ont mis l'accent sur la déstabilisation des structures de la famille étendue patrilocale traditionnelle qu'entraîne l'usage de techniques modernes de pêche, et laissé dans l'ombre à la fois l'attachement tenace aux valeurs familiales, l'identification de la famille aux activités de pêche et enfin, l'intérêt quotidien à la vie communautaire. Cette communication porte sur une agglomération villageoise de la côte sud-ouest et décrit les différentes attitudes des femmes face aux questions d'ordre familial telles que la cour et le mariage, le contrôle des naissances, l'éducation des enfants, et la division des tâches entre hommes et femmes. La continuité culturelle et l'intégrité familiale ont pu être maintenues au moyen de solides réseaux de relations féminines, grâce à une puissante éthique égalitaire, et une fierté du passé.*

The Newfoundland outport<sup>1</sup> communities have long been viewed in the academic literature as prototypes of an exploited and disadvantaged minority group in Canada. However, since Confederation with Canada in 1949, rural outport communities have been the target of economic development. Once poor, isolated and struggling for minimal subsistence in a harsh and erratically rewarding and punishing fishery-dependent environment, contemporary middle-aged and older outporters have witnessed extensive social and material change during their lifetimes.

Recent interpretations of how economic development has affected the institution of the family are reviewed in this paper. Critical attention is focused on the tendency of researchers to emphasize the structural, agnatic components of the outport family. In the large majority of anthropological studies of the Newfoundland family, women and children are viewed as theoretically important only as they relate to the overall agnatic structure. A corollary of this agnatic bias is the implicit assumption, on the behalf of ethnographers, that the change from a so-called traditional extended family structure to a more modern nuclear family structure has been accompanied by a decline in the quality of life for contemporary rural Newfoundland families.

## *Background*

Newfoundland studies of family and social change appear to be preoccupied with structural analysis. Emphasis is placed on the role of the family in social organization and the relationship of the family structure to the nature of the productive effort. Attention is focused on how postconfederation social change has undermined the function of the patrilineal, patrilocal extended family as the major institution for kin-based crew recruitment in the traditional Newfoundland fishery (Breton, 1973 ; Britan, 1978, 1979 ; Byron, 1975 ; Faris, 1977 ; Firestone, 1978 ; Nemeč, 1972). The theme of familial crew recruitment is so often reported in the literature that other aspects of family life go unexamined. Especially neglected are those areas of family life that are relevant to the everyday activities of women and children and those aspects of family life that reflect attitudes, beliefs and values rather than social structure and function.

Also present in the outport family research is the implicit assumption that modernization and the decline of the traditional extended family and the emergence of the more nuclear family forms have somehow undermined the quality of life, especially family life, for contemporary Newfoundlanders. This is somewhat reflective of what Howard and Scott (1980) label a special kind of academic, "middle class bias". According to Howard and Scott (1980 : 113), social science studies of minority groups in complex societies often suffer from an inherent middle class bias which has resulted in a body of research findings that tend to focus on alleged deficiencies in minority groups. Deficiency formulations may result from either an over-emphasis on traits valued by the mainstream groups but absent among the minority (e.g., individual initiative and social mobility), or a focus on traits devalued by the mainstream and present in the minority group (e.g., oppression of women, fighting and violence, or a sense of fatalism). This type of deficiency formulation can also be said to characterize much of the Newfoundland social science literature, such as works by Antler (1980), Britan (1979), Chiaramonte (1982), Faris (1977), and Queen and Habenstein (1974). However, rather than focus on the deficits of the minority group, these Newfoundland studies focus on the defects of the present as contrasted with the assets of the past. This "crisis of change" approach stems from an analytic focus on the dramatic social changes, from the 1940's through the 1960's, that accompanied the early stages of the postconfederation era, and tends to ignore the more mundane changes which have occurred during the 1970's and early 1980's.

In this paper I will briefly and critically review the literature on the decline of the patrilocal extended family in Newfoundland to show how over-reliance on a single model of social change can obscure both the variability and adaptability characteristics of outport families. The second section of the paper deals with those studies which have addressed the changing family in a less structurally and agnatically biased frame of analysis. Included are studies that deal with changing attitudes and values and that pay particular attention to the role of women. Although these women-oriented studies do emphasize values and psychological aspects of family life, they are liable to the same criticism as the more structural studies since they also stress the maladaptive facets of family change. Although women rather than men are the focus of attention, women are still viewed as victims of the changes in the traditional family structure. Taking into account critical comments from the family literature review, I will attempt to present a more balanced description of family life in one particular outport community. The focus will be on ongoing current-day changes of selected areas of family life which effect women and children. Special attention will be focused on how the locals, themselves, view these changes. The concluding section will deal with those forces effecting continuity in outport life.

## *The Decline of the Patrilocal Extended Family*

The sociocultural patterns of outport communities have remained relatively unchanged from generation to generation until postconfederation changes began to take hold in the 1950's and 1960's. (Britan, 1979 : 74, 79). Many of the most well-known and classic Newfoundland fishing outport ethnographic studies were based on fieldwork conducted during these two decades of dramatic modernization and social change (Britan, 1978 ; Byron, 1975 ; Chiaramonte, 1970 ; Faris, 1977 ; Firestone, 1978 ; Nemeč, 1972).

The primary focus of outport family studies of the 1960's was to reconstruct and describe the nature of agnatic bonds and the division of labor between men in the traditional fishery. The multi-generational, patrilineal, patrilocal extended family was viewed as a product of a high risk/low yield environment. As a corporate group, the patrilocal extended family regulated crew formation, and the distribution and inheritance of gear, berths and boats through time. This function was crucial to the fishing effort since boats and gear were far too expensive for individual ownership and maintenance

(Britan, 1978 ; Byron, 1975 ; Faris, 1977 ; Firestone, 1978 ; Nemec, 1972 ; Queen and Habenstein, 1974).

The patrilocal extended family, as a structural/economic adaptation for crew recruitment and equipment sharing in a traditional family-oriented fishery, became the basic framework on which all subsequent analysis of interpersonal and community-wide interaction was based. Detailed analyses of fishery-related kin terms such as "crews", "crowds", "gardens", and "skippers" further emphasized the salience of extended kin networks and the economic interdependency of households in outport society. "Crews" are composed of two or more men who fish together and share equipment. Ideally, according to Faris (1977 : 91), a man begins fishing with his sons. The father holds all the fishing property, making it impossible for the sons to fish for themselves until the father relinquishes his property. When the father dies or retires, sons gain equivalent portions of the father's property. The sons must then continue to fish together until each can accumulate his own gear, which is usually accomplished about the time their own sons can start fishing. The term "crowd" is both a residence and kinship term and refers to a patrilocal unit or a given neighborhood of agnatically related males (Stiles, 1979 : 198). A "garden" is a core neighborhood of related crowds with a common patronym which live within a common fence (Chiaromonte, 1970 : 10).

The significance of the patrilocal, patrilineal extended family in traditional outport social organization provides the baseline against which to measure family change. Postconfederation availability of wage labor, government fishing benefits, resettlement programs and out-migration are portrayed as effectively undermining the more traditional family forms, leading to progressively more nucleated families. One has the impression that many of these authors do not see the crisis of change as well met. Britan speaks of the "harmony of adaptation" which was disrupted and of the older generation that lacks both purpose and possibilities (1979 : 74, 80). Faris refers to the proletarianization of the workers (Antler and Faris, 1979 : 130). Chiaromonte prefers to call the changes in sense of community identity resulting from nucleating families as "collapse rather than change" (1982 : 1). Queen and Habenstein less analytically but more eloquently bemoan the pragmatic discarding of the traditional values which have long been characteristic of the "heritage of the sea" (1974 : 399).

The patrilocal extended family has been dealt with in a fair amount of detail because it is the generally accepted model of the typical, traditional, Newfoundland outport family (Queen and Habenstein,

1974). However, this is not true for all of Newfoundland. Gaffney (1972 : 14) and Stiles (1979 : 193) question the assumption of the primacy of agnatic crew recruitment on the southwest coast. Their studies demonstrate that in the southwest coast communities patrilineal form of crew recruitment is weak or just one pattern among many. Gaffney (1972 : 4-5) attributes the difference to the nature of the fishery on the southwest coast where fish are available year round and easily caught with hooks or hand lines rather than with expensive trap gear or nets. The point here is not to go into a long discussion of ecology and social structure, but to show that accounts of family change based on settings where the patrilocal extended family structure is dominant may dramatize the effect of social change on family adaptation to a degree not evidenced in other settings where nuclear families and contractual crew recruitment have long been the norm.

Besides misrepresenting the variations in family structure that may occur in Newfoundland fishing villages and overstating the notion of decline in family structure, the emphasis placed on explicating family dynamics in terms of agnatic relationships has resulted in a relative lack of data on women. The few studies which primarily deal with women are attempts to reconstruct the traditional family lifestyles (Murray, 1979 ; Szala, 1977 ; and Weatherburn, 1977). Each of these studies is concerned with gathering extensive life histories from older women so that the everyday lifestyles and work roles of the past may be reconstructed. They do not focus on the process of social change as it is affecting the family in the present or in the more immediate post-confederation past.

### *Family Change and the Quality of Life, The Outsider's View*

The focus on the adaptive qualities of the traditional, patrilocal extended family, with its emphasis on male roles and the organization of the productive effort, tends to view the family from a structural, functional, male-oriented perspective. The privatization of households as a consequence of the postconfederation influx of government benefit payments is viewed in a negative fashion as the loss of a stabilizing tradition. The implication is that social change and adaptation to more modern mainstream family forms are somehow bad, debilitating or undesirable. As distinguished from the traditional family, the modern family is nuclear rather than extended and is a unit of consumption rather than a unit of production.

The effect of change in the productive effort on the majority of family members, women and children, has been largely ignored. An exception is the work of Ellen Antler (1977 ; 1980 ; Antler and Faris, 1979). Antler (1977 ; 1980) is an articulate spokeswoman on the theme of family breakdown and directly addresses the effect of change on women's roles in the family, from confederation to present. Antler describes how structural changes in the mode of production have not only changed women's roles but have also negatively affected women's sense of well-being.

Antler's major concern is how the breakdown of the patrilocal extended family and its concomitant reorganization of male and female roles of production in the fishery have affected a progressive deterioration of the position of women in the family. Antler argues that in the traditional fishery women were active in salt cod production, curing and processing the cod while their husbands continued to fish. For women this was a meaningful role, a skill-requiring task, a remunerative endeavor which underscored their importance in the family. Women's traditional labor contributed about 40 percent to the value of the fishing voyage (Antler and Faris, 1979 : 150). The advent of a modern fishery, fish plants, and frozen fish processing have undermined the traditional productive roles of women. Women's status in the family changed from that of co-producer in a producer-owned and controlled fishery to that of wage laborer in capitalist-owned fish plants and non-wage laborers in their own homes. According to Antler, social change in Newfoundland has undermined women's sense of self-importance, has led to disorganization of the family (1980 : 4) and has left women with the same "isolation, alienation and sense of powerlessness that plague women in urban industrial centers" (1977 : 112). From a current-day perspective Antler (1980 : 4) criticizes the present education system for teaching young girls consumerism under the guise of home economics courses. According to Antler, this curriculum has amplified the housewifely aspects of home decoration and waiting upon other family members. In Antler's judgement, women's withdrawal from the fishery has left them "ornamental and useless... attractive accessories to their own households" (1980 : 4).

Antler denigrates the present and idealizes the past. Aside from reference to low wages<sup>2</sup>, Antler gives no evidence on which to justify her conclusions about the prevalence of alienation, apathy and depression among outport women. She characterizes the outport women as fatalistic and unwilling to attack their own problems. These problems are an

odd mixture of statistically verifiable health and welfare phenomena—high incidences of hypertension, tooth decay, high fatality rates for women from ovarian and uterine cancer, and the fact that Newfoundlanders have the lowest incomes but pay the highest prices in Canada (1980 : 4). Antler implies that there is a pathology in the system ; social change has undermined the role of women, and alienation and drinking are symptoms of the pathology (Antler and Faris, 1979 : 151). If we are to accept Antler's model of change, we would be forced to view outporters as helpless victims of over twenty years of progressive sociocultural deterioration. The problem with her model is that, while it does point out that the Provincial government's policy of industrial development places liabilities on the traditional outport adaptation, it ignores the fact, emphasized by Howard and Scott (1980 : 114), that in any given situation people can organize and reorganize their activities in ways that are meaningful both to themselves and to those with whom they associate.

The selective interpretation of evidence, the tendency to overlook local views and the emphasis on the structural and intergenerational changes in the outport family of the earlier studies have tended to obscure the actual tenacity of family values, the enduring family identification with the fishery, and the continuing importance of a sense of community in everyday life. A more balanced analysis of adjustment to social change comes from Ralph Matthews (1976). Matthews describes how three outport Newfoundland communities resisted the government's efforts to resettle them into more urban areas. However, these communities' refusal to resettle does not imply an unwillingness to accept change. Most importantly, Matthews points out that "there can be no doubt that most Newfoundlanders are no longer content to live the peasant existence of their forefathers" (1976 : 10). Although outport Newfoundlanders do not want an urban lifestyle they do demand all the amenities of modern life and are committed to meshing the best of the old with the new.

Matthews adds a new dimension to studies of social change in rural Newfoundland. He is concerned with two aspects of social life, the social structure and the attitudes and values of the people who live in these communities (1976 : 10). Matthews' central focus is the process by which the traditional, subsistence-based, outport family structure has adapted to increased government benefit payments and changes in the occupational structure. Values are only important as they relate to a family member's choice to avoid resettlement. Matthews'

analysis of the dynamics of change and the continuity of values within the family is very general. It rests on questionnaire data collected about highly generalized values such as how to ascertain the relative importance of: the family, the work, the people, the availability of fresh game and produce, the freedom and the way of life in an outporter's decision to stay in the community. Although Matthews is not explicitly concerned with family life, he does take into account the importance of considering both non-structural factors and local viewpoints in a study of change.

Based on a critical appraisal of the aforementioned accounts of family life in outport Newfoundland, any further study of family life should take into account several factors. It should be recognized that not all outports are characterized by a uniform structural and productive adaptation. There is variability in fishing patterns both among communities and within a single community. Attention should be given to the roles of women and children in both the subsistence and other relational spheres. Rather than purport to pass judgement on the nature of change, particular attention should be addressed to the local views of change and its implications for the quality of life, along with an analysis of the change in family values in a non-structural context. Ethnographies of family change should rely on contemporary observations as well as historical and life history data. Although dramatic changes occurred in the 1950's and 1960's, this should not obscure the fact that the communities are still undergoing change. Rather than emphasize the differences between successive generations, a discussion of family change should show how all generations, together, are meeting the challenge of integrating the old with the new.

### *Family Life in Grey Rock Harbour*

The research on which this study is based took place in the Newfoundland southwest coast community of Grey Rock Harbour (a pseudonym)<sup>3</sup>. Grey Rock Harbour is an Anglican community of approximately 800 residents with a viable inshore fishery. Post office records indicate that, of the male heads of households, 40 percent are employed as fishermen and an additional 34 percent work at the fishplant. Research was conducted in the traditional anthropological method of participant observation from October, 1977, to December, 1978. Short return visits were made in 1979 and 1980. The following is an account of family life and change in a single community. Some of the areas of change may be characteristic of Newfoundland

outports in general, but others may be unique to Grey Rock Harbour. I make no attempt to separate the specific from the general.

There is no institution of the patrilocal extended family in Grey Rock Harbour that dominates the entire social structure and productive effort. The nuclear family structure which is characteristic of the village is not a recent by-product of modernization. As in other communities on the southwest coast (Stiles, 1972 ; 1979 ; Gaffney, 1972), there is, and traditionally has been, very little economic interdependence of households—agnatically related or otherwise. Men have fished and continue to fish, either singlehandedly, in two-man dories, or on company-owned offshore bankers. Crew structures are/were numerous and an individual might pursue several different fishing strategies during his career, alternately fishing with neighbors, relatives (agnatic or affinal), friends and/or strangers on dories, longliners or druggers as the situation warranted (Stiles, 1979 : 193-96).

Because of the lack of uniformity and historic variability in fishing patterns and the existence of traditional nuclear family forms, social change on the southwest coast appears to be less dramatic than for outports dominated by the patrilocal extended family structure. Instead, in Grey Rock Harbour from the 1950's to present, there has been a very gradual change from the predominance of an offshore/trip fishery—where the husband/father/fisherman would be absent for days, weeks, or months at a time—to an inshore day fishery where the man comes home every night.

From the viewpoint of locals, the construction of a dirt road into the previously isolated village is the hallmark of modernization and culture change. When asked what was the greatest change they had witnessed in their lifetimes, locals of all ages instantly responded "the road". Adults of all ages chronicle their own life histories with reference to the road, e.g., "before the road/after the road." More than anything else, the road symbolically marks the transition from traditional lifeways to more modern lifestyles. Yet today the road is over twenty years old. Its impact on social change often seems more symbolic than substantive. Villagers refer to "When we got electricity, after the road." However, for years before the initial construction of the road, in the early 1960's, many homes used generators to run electrical appliances. Since reference to the road can be both temporal and symbolic, an informant must be asked to specify the exact year that an event took place, otherwise everything considered traditional will be lumped into the "before the road" category and everything

considered modern will be put in the “after the road” category.

The narrative of family change in Grey Rock Harbour need not commence with an analysis of family destabilization as in studies of the patrilocal extended family and social change. Unlike the patrilocal form, which encourages village or garden exogamy and tends to disperse women, the more nuclear, neolocal family in Grey Rock Harbour allows young couples to live where they choose. A salient feature in Grey Rock Harbour life is the solidarity of female groups and the importance of female kin and friendship relationships. Even taking into account the fact that Grey Rock Harbour was designated a resettlement community<sup>4</sup> in the 1960’s, a community-wide survey reveals that for the last four generations over 75 percent of the village women have married men from their own community and over 50 percent report that their strongest ties remain with their natal, rather than with their affinal kin<sup>5</sup>. Young brides, insecure about their household and childrearing expertise, prefer to set up residence near their mothers or older sisters. The important kin bonds other than that between husband and wife are those between mothers, daughters and sisters. The putatively traditional kin categories of “gardens” or “crowds” are not used in Grey Rock Harbour. Older informants seemed to be confused about the meaning of these terms. This may be in part due to the fact that in Grey Rock Harbour there are no fenced-in gardens since the land is unsuitable for growth of any garden produce, but it also reflects the fact that there is an absence of patrilocal groupings. Neighbors need not be relatives. Similarly, some informants expressed confusion over the term “crowd”. Heresay about this or that bad crowd is not uncommon, but crowd may also refer to a family, a region of the village, an entire village or even characters in a soap opera. When asked about “crowd” one woman told me, “Oh, you find those where I grew up in Belloram, but they don’t have anything like that around here”. Residence is determined by land and houses available rather than by kin affiliation.

Over time there have been two major trends affecting change in family life. The first has been the ever-increasing presence of the father in the home due to the changeover from a trip to a day fishery. The second change is that, except for the occasional house with an aged relative, there are no longer multi-family households to be found in the village. Young married couples now have the financial resources to set up households of their own when they get married. The flexible nuclear family has adapted to modernization and economic develop-

ment with little sense of crisis and with minimal structural alteration. In open-ended discussions of recent changes in family life, the villagers of Grey Rock Harbour repeatedly comment on four salient areas of social change. These are changes in patterns of: courtship and marriage, childrearing, male and female work roles and consumption.

#### CHANGES IN PATTERNS OF COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

Despite the availability of cars and telephones, young people still prefer to court and marry within the community. People from nearby communities are often referred to as rough or wild, not the kind to marry<sup>6</sup>. As in the past, premarital sex is common, although it may start at an earlier age—early rather than late teens. Teens know about birth control and sometimes use condoms bought in a drug store twenty miles away, but the major form of premarital birth control remains withdrawal. Since the population pool of eligible spouses is small, the young person who decides to remain in the village<sup>7</sup> feels a need to marry early. As one female teen informant told me “You have to act early if you want best choice.” This tends to equalize the age of spouses, whereas in the past girls tended to marry men older than themselves<sup>8</sup>. Local gossips report that both males and females use pregnancy as a strategy for getting married and, as in the past, most brides are pregnant. A notable change in attitude toward premarital pregnancy is taking place. There is much less emphasis on getting married when pregnant, especially if the girl is very young or if the parents do not approve of the boyfriend. Her mother will take over the baby and the teenage girl will be able to run about as free as before, continue her education or go to work.

The major change in marriage patterns is the increasing financial independence of the young couple. Today young men and women can quit school at age 16 and go to work in the village fish plant<sup>9</sup>. Here many earn wages equal to those of their parents. They reside at home and save their money so that they may buy or even build a house and furnish it at the time of marriage. Young people today have the choice of being independent from parents and in-laws, are free to live where they choose in the village, and are absolved from the responsibility of taking care of the aged. Young couples generally do not feel a sense of lost opportunities by dropping out of school and marrying early, e.g., “If you’re going to stay here, all you’ve got to do is work at the plant or fish, don’t need no special learning for that, might as well get on with your life as no.”

## CHANGES IN PATTERNS OF CHILDBEARING

Changes in childrearing patterns will be discussed along two dimensions: guidelines for childrearing and the practice of birth control among young married women. Children are reared under a dual spoil-and-toughen philosophy and most young women obtain their desired family size of one or two children by the time they reach their early twenties.

Current-day mothers and fathers feel an acute sense of deprivation about their own childhoods. Parents of young children often describe their own childhoods in negative terms, e.g., "When I was little, I was expected to work all the time, I worked very hard for no money and seldom had time to play" and "At Christmas, all we ever got was an apple, and that had to be split four ways." Today, children are well dressed in the latest styles from Simpson-Sears. They have plenty of toys, receive a constant diet of treats including "pop", "chips", "bars", and homemade sweets and have full reign about the household. A child's birthday is a big event celebrated with expensive bakery-decorated cakes and liquor for the adults.

Older children rapidly become successful entrepreneurs. Young boys and girls have few responsibilities or chores to perform at home. If they do help out by caring for toddler siblings or running to the store or mail box, they expect to be paid for it. When a child is asked to do something the response is often, "How much will you give me for it?" When children visit an old person they expect to come home with at least a quarter. In this way they receive up to two or three dollars a day. Most of the money is spent on sweets, or at the local hamburger-and-chips restaurant, movie theater, pool hall or church fair. Elders condone this behavior commenting that, "Life is cruel enough, they [children] might as well enjoy it while they're young."

Despite parental spoiling, it is still thought that children should be toughened. Fathers feel it necessary to toughen their toddler sons, while mothers tend to satisfy the toddler's every whim. Mothers tend to the baby every time it cries. One often hears mothers use the phrase, "Tis a sin to let them cry", as they comfort their child. Fathers toughen their toddlers, both male and female, through rough play, teasing and tickling. Mothers often become active in toughening their children as the child becomes older. Toughening also takes place in the peer group. Since boys and girls play together, the toughening process is similar for each sex. At a church hand goods sale I attended, the children were running wild in the center of a large hall. Boy and girl alike they were playing roughly—hitting and tackling each other and pulling each other's

hair. Frequently a child would come bawling to his or her mother seeking comfort. Mothers would alternately comfort them, punish them (with a single slap) or tell them to get out there and fight their own fights. Children play aggressively among themselves and are expected to settle their own disputes. Oldsters report that children are spoiled to a degree unprecedented in the past. However, the belief that toughening a child will give him or her strength of character and is necessary for children who all too soon will learn the hardships of life continues to dominate parent/child interaction.

The most remarkable contemporary change in family life is the choice that young couples make to have surgical sterilization in their early 20's or 30's. Young women equate poverty and the inability to get ahead in life with having large numbers of children. Older women envy the freedom and resources of younger women, who often are surgically infertile, while their mothers continue to reproduce. However, older women are ambivalent about the ethics of "being so selfish". "Tying the tubes" or "tubals" are done in the hospital of a nearby village. The operation is supposed to take place in secret, but it is hard to deceive community gossips. Through self-admissions and gossip, one can conservatively estimate that over one-half of the village women between the ages of 20-35 have "been fixed"<sup>10</sup>. It is tempting to attribute these operations to a misogynic or unethical doctor, but sterilization is actively sought and positively valued by women with young children. Undoubtedly the long-range effects of completing child-bearing at such an early age will have substantial consequences for the outport family of the future.

## CHANGING PATTERNS OF MALE AND FEMALE WORK ROLES

Male and female work roles in the family are also undergoing substantive change. With the combination of work available at the fish plant and with the preponderance of day, inshore fishing, men are at home more than ever before. When today's middle-aged women were newly married, their husbands were often gone from home for weeks or months at a time. Men would fish from Nova Scotia or Newfoundland, depending on where the most fish were. Five crew longliners and five-day fishing trips were the norm. Men would be at sea for five days and return home for the weekend, weather permitting. In contrast most women today have their husbands at home every night. Women do not feel that the burden of childrearing is placed as completely on them as it used to be, e.g., "Now that he's home more the kids know what it is like to have a



father." Rather than leave the village to work elsewhere when fishing is slow, men can now collect unemployment benefits and stay near their families year round. Families vacation together, camping out in local Provincial parks or visiting relatives elsewhere on the Island. The more adventurous travel to camper-trailer parks on Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. Some men even complain that they are home more than their wives, who have a busy schedule of community activities that take them away from home in the evenings. Many women work at the fish plant and the separation of household tasks is not as rigid as before. Men are expected to help out in the home, especially with child care, although this varies with the personalities of the couple involved. With both men and women working at the fish plant and with the increased involvement of men in household activities, the rigid division of labour which once characterized the traditional life is rapidly ceasing to exist.

#### CHANGING PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION

However disadvantaged outporters may be from the perspective of analysts such as Antler (1980 : 4), who emphasizes the fact that Newfoundlanders have the lowest incomes and the highest prices in Canada, the people of Grey Rock Harbour have an intense sense of relative gain when they compare past and present consumption habits. People see themselves as financially better off than in any previous era. They have higher incomes, are less in debt, and receive Canadian government benefits such as social security, baby bonuses, and unemployment compensation. Major expenditures are for cars, camper/trailers, boats, houses, and household conveniences.

Houses are paid for in full or built section by section as the young couple can afford it. Local men help each other build their houses and no one has a mortgage. Unemployment is viewed as a natural extension of government subsidies to the fishery. However, welfare is viewed as demoralizing and harmful.

Women redecorate their houses spring and fall. Every household has two sets of curtains, bed clothes, and furniture covers, one set for fall and one set for spring. Houses are kept freshly painted and at least one wall is re-wallpapered every spring. Gift-giving is extensive, especially at Christmas, when all presents are laid under the tree with price tags intact. Children chip-in together to provide lavish presents, such as color televisions or dinette sets, for their mothers, who voice guilt about buying these items for themselves. All generations see this wealth

and luxury as a kind of ultimate reward for the stoic endurance which accompanied the poverty of the past.

#### *Family Change and the Quality of Life, The Insider's View*

Rising household consumerism, leaving prices attached to gifts, early female sterilization, and raising children to expect to be paid for doing favors or running errands may not strike all observers as positive or adaptive aspects of family change. Antler (1980 : 4) certainly views the increasing attention given to home consumerism in a negative light. The citizens of Grey Rock Harbour do have ambivalent attitudes about the changes they have witnessed in their lifetimes. Change is seen as a mixture of good and bad. However, when adult women were asked if they would rather be living now than fifty years ago, 78 percent responded that they were glad to be living now<sup>11</sup>.

A closer look at local attitudes towards consumerism, single-family households, the nature of work, and birth control shows how insider views of social change may differ substantially from those of the academic or the more sophisticated critic of public policy. The views to be represented in this section are based on questionnaire data collected on attitudes towards change and upon ethnographic observation<sup>12</sup>.

Most of the Grey Rock Harbour villagers would not know the meaning of the word "consumerism". Instead they refer to the development of a cash economy as, "We can buy more now than we could back before the road." There is a consensus that "we were all poor before the road" and it is hard to deny that life has become easier in recent times. Formerly, a life of hard work was rewarded by further hardship and a dependence on the charity of others in old age. Now-a-days older villagers are the recipients of social security payments, making it easier for them to live comfortably in their own homes without depending upon their children for financial support. Old widows are no longer doomed to poverty and the consequent hardships of trying to keep their families together. With the immediate past being characterized by major health problems such as high infant mortality, (Staveley, 1977 : 75) rampant tuberculosis, and the lack of transportation to hospitals and minor nuisances such as fleas and lice, people today have a special appreciation for the free medical services provided every Monday in the village clinic and for bathrooms and readily available hot water in their own homes. Mothers who wore nightgowns made of flour sacks as

children now peruse the Simpson-Sears catalogue for children's clothes after every baby bonus check comes in. Unemployment benefits guarantee that the husband will not have to leave his family and seek work elsewhere when fishing is bad. However, there is controversy over government payments. Child care payments to unwed mothers are criticized as rewarding or causing premarital promiscuity, but justified because it seems unfair to punish a child for the parents' lack of responsibility. But, all in all, consumer goods are valued by the outporters. They are still on a "honeymoon" with their new-found purchasing power and, unlike those more accustomed to generations of consumerism, have yet to become intellectually jaded by their consumption patterns. Consumerism and money are emphasized because they mark a positive break with the past. As one older woman said, "You'd have to be some stunned to want to go back to being poor again."

Unlike Newfoundland households that are characterized by the patrilocal, extended family form, the households in Grey Rock Harbour have undergone minimal structural alteration. However, one change has been in the direction of movement from multi-family to single family households. Although, traditionally, the extended household form of the patrilocal garden was absent, young couples often stayed in their parents' houses until they inherited a house or could afford to build one of their own. Women report that whether they set up newly married residence in their own natal households or in their husband's, conflict rather than accommodation was the rule. There is an old village saying that "two women can't get along under the same roof". Historically a rigid age stratification existed between old and young women—old women being in their menopausal years and young women being the recently married. A mother refused to recognize her own daughter as an adult as long as she resided at home. The mother-in-law/daughter-in-law dyad was considered to be an inherently conflict-ridden relationship. The poor bride who could not find an alternative residence to that of her husband's home was much to be pitied. Furthermore, living conditions were crowded and there was little privacy for the young couple. Many a young bride was given the nastiest tasks in the household—emptying the slop pail and caring for the enfeebled or senile oldsters. The single family household that predominates today is positively viewed as a way of avoiding all sorts of traditional sources of conflict and allows a young couple the privacy to enjoy their newly married status. Mother and daughter relationships are less hierarchically structured, less antagonistic and more harmonious than in the past. Women

comment that now-a-days they feel themselves to be the same age group as their adult daughters and the mother/daughter relationship is characterized by admiration and friendship rather than by hostility.

Although these changes within the household are welcome, the ambivalence of attitudes toward change is reflected in the fact that changes in the relationships between households are bemoaned. Locals report that they used to visit more than they do now. This selective remembering is hard to verify. Most women continue to fill their afternoon schedules with visiting. On my afternoon visits, I was seldom the only visitor in any household. Personal visiting may be somewhat replaced by the telephone. Women telephone extensively every day. Each woman has a list of relatives and friends that she calls every day or at regular weekly intervals.

As to the nature of work, it is viewed as much easier today. Most women who reported they preferred life today rather than life in the past supported their opinion by referring to the slave-like nature of work in the past, e.g., "Before the road we used to work like slaves for nothing." This slave reference is commonly used to refer to work patterns in the past and refers to caring for large families, the complexities of household maintenance, feeding entire fishing crews and even assistance with preparing gear for fishing<sup>13</sup>. When asked if husbands respected women more now or in the past when they worked harder, women laughed at the ridiculous nature of the question. Most either responded that it made no difference or that as the economic components of marriage become less important the affective components became more important. Women feel appreciated more now, because husband and wife have more time together. When asked about work at the fish plant, women had a positive response. Rather than dwell on the negative aspects such as the long work hours, or the cold, wet work environment, women spoke of the more rewarding aspects of their work, including the camaraderie among women in the workplace, the importance of being part of the fishery, and even the aesthetic nature of the work — "I just love to touch the fish." Those more ambivalent said, "You can complain about the smell, but the money don't stink." Although they resent the fact that their wages are not equal to those of men<sup>14</sup>, they feel adequately compensated for their labor. When husband and wife both work at the plant, their incomes are very similar. The husband's income goes for household expenses and the wife's is spent as she chooses. Thus women control their own income. A substantial part of both incomes is saved against the bad years.

Older women both envy and pity their younger counterparts who have chosen to terminate their productive life at an early age. One middle-aged woman told me, "The old biddies complain but if they'd of had the chance they'd of got fixed, too." Many young women sterilized today were still living with their parents when their own mothers discovered themselves to be pregnant with an unplanned-for "change-of-life" baby, a condition which was more often received with disappointment than delight. Mothers and daughters frequently have children the same age. Young women commonly justify their decision to be sterilized with the belief that it will enable them to do more for the children that they do have. Women are aware of alternative forms of birth control. The pill is viewed as dangerous and the I.U.D. as ineffective. Choosing to complete their childbearing in their late teens or early twenties, women do not want to be burdened with birth control for the next 25-30 years of their life. Sterilization is preferred because it is free and considered safe, effective and final.

Aside from comments about the decline of visiting, other major complaints about present day life are that, "We don't have as much fun anymore," "The food just doesn't taste the same," and "We're all strangers now." These comments are hard to evaluate since they represent the insider's view of the past. Rough play, slapstick humor and elaborate practical jokes seem to have characterized the past but are for the most part absent today. One woman attempted to explain how it was more fun in the past by comparing wedding showers past and present. Presently, quiet games such as bingo and cards are played. Formerly, the games were livelier. "We used to play Pretty Puss at showers. It's like Simon Says. We'd all get silly and laugh so hard we'd wet our pants." Perhaps most aptly, locals view television and more richly appointed homes as the leading cause for a decline in the quality of self-entertainment. Resettlement, increased community size and smaller, more privatized households help to explain the stranger feeling. Also, government benefits and cash payments have allowed individuals to be less dependent upon one another than they were in former times. Thus, in the local view, change has been neither all good nor all bad. Local attitudes are ambivalent ; clearly, changes have been accompanied by a series of gains and losses. However, before one starts to contrast improvement in material living conditions with decline in the more aesthetic, moral or affective qualities of life, it is imperative to present one last item of value change.

An additional value-related phenomenon which the outport observer cannot possibly miss is the

sense of self-esteem and pride generated by a kind of Province-wide emergent "nationalism". Wright (1981 : 61), in a symbolic analysis of the Newfoundland seal hunt, identifies a Newfoundland collective ethos. The risk and hardship involved in the seal hunt is loaded with cultural meaning. The hunt's symbolic significance derives from its use as a metaphor of the strength and stoicism with which Newfoundlanders have faced their heritage of hard times trying to survive in a marginal environment (Wright 1981 : 61). According to Wright (1981 : 62), the reawakening interest in the seal hunt reflects an "us" against "them" clashing of rural traditionals with the intrusion of urban cultural values from the outside.

Although Grey Rock Harbour has never participated in the seal hunt, the Newfoundland ethos is present and manifest, in part, by the adulation given to men and women, who grew up before the road, e.g., during the hard times. These people are the heroes and heroines of the present. This is particularly true of the women. They are viewed as the paragons of family life. Grown children today have a great deal of respect for their mothers. Mothers, who kept their families together in difficult circumstances when husbands were often absent, are the symbols of all that is good and enviable in the Newfoundland character. Adult children like to compensate their mothers for the trials they endured for their sake, in the past, by presenting them with expensive gifts. When a mother expresses guilt about acquiring an expensive object (such as a new dinette table) she is exhibiting the strength and self-sacrifice that guided her through past eras, but she is also making an indirect request that her children purchase it for her. The mother/wife-co-worker role of women in the rural outport of Grey Rock Harbour is probably more rewarding and meaningful today than in the past.

Change has not undermined the importance of the family ; if anything, it has accentuated it. Outport life cannot be adequately described apart from this insider/outsider dichotomy. Locals actively cultivate a positive sense of identity of being a Newfoundlander. In spite of the complexities of change in Grey Rock Harbour, there is a sense of continuity with the past as well as a sense of adaptation to the present.

### *Continuity and Change*

Certain core values have survived from traditional to more modern times. These include the continued importance of the family and the values of hard work, self-sacrifice and stoic endurance.

The nuclear family, marital bond and mother/child relationship are highly valued and stable. There is almost no divorce or extra-marital philandering. As in the past, both the ideal man and the ideal woman are hard workers. Despite increased consumerism, people continue to be judged according to who they are rather than what they have. Modern labor-saving devices may have resulted in less effort needed to make a living or maintain a household, but both men and women continue to view themselves with high self-esteem as hard workers. They have more opportunity to select their choice of work activity. Women with clothes dryers continue to hang their wash every Monday before 10:00 a.m. Houses are immaculate ; with labor-saving devices women are able to keep their houses cleaner than ever before. Women still set bread and fix four meals a day. Even time spent watching television or visiting with friends is filled with knitting or crocheting valued goods for home consumption or for charitable sales. Men, when not fishing, work preparing fishing gear, hunting, or doing odd jobs. A leisure time activity of many young men in the community consists of helping their friends build their houses. The idea is to be constantly busy at something meaningful.

Another salient aspect of village life is the continued maintenance of strong female associations (Davis, 1979 : 22). These include women's church groups, women's dart teams, women's lodge, a women's exercise group and a women's service organization. For many, women's participation in voluntary associational activities extends families and integrates them into the community as a whole. Some aspects of these groups have changed. Bingo and darts, once unknown, are now popular associational activities. Women's kin affiliations are defined and redefined, as when all related women pitch-in and sponsor a community-wide wedding or baby shower for a common relative. The multiple women's church and lodge associations play a central role in preserving traditions on ritual occasions such as weddings and funerals. Charitable and leisuretime activities are also dominated by women's associations. The constant fund-raising for the church and charity and the frequently sponsored community-wide card games, suppers, fairs and dances are major time-consuming female activities. Women's organizations remain the most important element in the recreational and expressive spheres of community life.

An egalitarian ethic continues to pervade the village. Family—not class, income, occupation or education—is still the dominant social category. Disparities in wealth do exist but they are not

visible. Homogeneity is the norm. When I went to the village most of the women had a “mushroom” style haircut. When I left they were rapidly moving over to a “frizz”. Almost every woman's everyday coat is a “Labrador” style coat. There is a strong belief that “we must all go up or keep down together”. For example, all women are thought to be entitled to a garbage disposal, but the couple who purchased an expensive trash masher was the topic of weeks of virulent gossip, e.g., “Who do they think they're better than ? After all didn't their snobby daughter run off to college only to come home pregnant and without a man.” Those who want to be different, or those with more urbane, material values simply leave the community, which continues a stringent leveling of those who remain. One gets a definite sense that it is the community, rather than individuals, which is moving through time.

The last element of continuity rests on a continued identification with the fishery. Visually the harbour and its boats dominate the village landscape. Men wear the characteristic fisherman's dress—knitted navy blue toques, plaid flannel shirts, and thigh-high black rubber boots. Since over 75 percent of the men in the village work either directly in the fishery or in fishing related jobs, such as the fish plant, Grey Rock Harbour can be considered an occupation village. Everyday vocabulary is laced with fishery related terms. Fishing concerns affect all people. As one man told me, “If you stay here you've got to like the fish.” Today village women are more involved in the fishery than they were in the past. It is a woman's duty to worry about her husband when he is at sea (Davis 1982 : 24). Marine band radios are kept in the kitchen where women can constantly listen, hoping to pick up some information about their husbands at sea. Citizen's band transmitters are used to actually talk to their husband when he is at sea (Davis, 1982 : 24). Marine the fish plant women have a keener sense of involvement in the fishery than at any time before. The people of the village take great pride in being primary producers rather than being “parasites like bankers and government workers”.

### *Conclusion*

Outport society is definitely changing, but the terms structural disintegration, instability, alienation, apathy and depression hardly characterize the people of Grey Rock Harbour. With economic development and the greater awareness of their place in the world and in their own country that comes with television and other mass communication, the people of Grey Rock Harbour are be-

coming more and more like middle-class Canadians. However, they are still a far cry from having what Porter (1965 : 129-32) calls the middle-class family lifestyle : an automobile, suburban home, television set, central heating, regular dental check-ups and children bound for the university.

Rather than being viewed as helplessly suffering from disintegration, the family is better viewed as adapting to a more modern, rural lifestyle. Yet, change is selectively met ; among the villagers there is a feeling of continuity with the past and a selective maintenance of certain values and traditions of the Newfoundland ethos. The people of Grey Rock Harbour of all generations are attempting to combine the best of both the old and the new in a strong commitment to what they perceive to be a special kind of life in outport communities.

## NOTES

1. The word "outport" is a traditional Newfoundland colloquialism meaning any small settlement outside of St. John's. Current-day use of the term outport usually connotes a small, rural sea-side rather than inland community.

2. Antler and Faris (1979 : 150) refer to fish plant wages of \$1.40 or \$1.50 per hour. They do not state the year for which the figures are applicable. In November 1979 wages for women were \$4.30 per hour with time-and-one-half after 5:00 p.m. and double-time on Saturdays and Sundays.

3. Research was funded through a two-year traineeship from the U.S. National Institute of Child Health and Development administered by the University of North Carolina Population Center. For a more detailed account of life in Grey Rock Harbour see Davis (1983).

4. From soon after Confederation in 1949 until the early 1960's the Federal/Provincial Resettlement Program policy initiated and carried out an extensive and controversial program of community centralization. Rather than bring electricity and roads to isolated fishing communities, the government sought to resettle rural peoples to designated resettlement areas (Matthews, 1976). Grey Rock Harbour was designated a resettlement area when the dirt road was built connecting it to the Trans-Canada Highway. In the 1960's approximately 8-10 families moved into Grey Rock Harbour from villages further down the coast.

5. All percentages given in this paper are based on a random questionnaire survey of 37 women ages 35-65. Of this sample 14 percent preferred their husband's relatives and 28 percent interacted with both kin groups equally.

6. This is both a current and a traditional topic of gossip. One village several miles down the road has a particularly bad reputation. Recently several teenage boys were caught splitting tires and vandalizing trash

receptacles in Grey Rock Harbour. The village quickly became known for its "delinquent problem". Old timers found this to be nothing new, saying the neighboring village had always been wayward because it did not have a minister living in the community.

7. In seven of the nine weddings that took place from October 1977 to December 1978 both the bride and groom were from Grey Rock Harbour. All but one couple set up residence in the village.

8. In a random sample of women, 16 percent of those women over 40 years of age had married men 10 or more years older than themselves. No married woman under 40 had a husband more than 9 years older than herself. Older women explained the difference in economic terms, "In the olden days you had to wait till a man could afford to marry. It took years of saving. Now-a-days you can get a job at the plant so there's no reason to wait".

9. In September 1978 there were 26 students in grade 10 ; by Christmas there were only 16 left. Of those 16, only 11 stayed through the eleventh grade and final year of Newfoundland secondary education. Pregnancy, marriage, and an opportunity to work at the fish plant were most commonly cited as reasons for dropping out of school.

10. Directly asking a local woman if she has had her "tubes tied" is a gross breach of etiquette. As much as I wanted "hard facts" on this practice, I felt that direct confrontation was an unethical, unwarranted invasion of a woman's privacy. My very conservative "guesstimates" came from sitting in a kitchen with a map of all households in the village spread out on the table and asking informants who, house by house, had the operation.

11. Eleven percent of the women sampled had no opinion. Eight percent felt that they would rather be living 50 years ago because "back then people had more fun".

12. What follows is based upon general attitudes and beliefs expressed by women as they were asked to compare the past and present in terms of modern conveniences, male and female roles in the family and the fishery, and the quality of life in general.

13. Traditionally the village women were not active in the process of preparing salt dried cod. The process was left to a very small minority of women who were widowed or very poor and needed an extra cash income.

14. In November 1979, women were paid \$4.35 an hour as packers, wormers and trimmers. Men received an hourly wage of \$4.50 as ordinary laborers and a top wage of \$4.65 as cutters. The number of people "on" at the fishplant varies from season to season and from year to year. In November 1979, there were 156 fish plant workers and 46 of them were women.

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