

**Lifestyles of Rural Women in Atlantic Canada**  
**Colloquium Proceedings**

Sponsored by

**Center for Lifestyle Studies**

**Acadia University**  
**March 8-9, 2002**

*Brenda Robertson*  
*Ann Dodge*  
*Wendy Bedingfield*

## ***Introduction***

The purpose of the colloquium was to bring together 30 women from throughout Atlantic Canada with an interest in rural lifestyle issues for women. Participants were invited from the four Atlantic provinces representing a myriad of fields including psychology, sociology, theology, education, business, recreation, kinesiology, nutrition, justice, medicine, communications, and social work. Academics were invited from 7 universities throughout the Atlantic Provinces. Practitioners were invited from a variety of agencies including government, politics, military, schools, correctional institutions, media, and health care. The various small group discussion sessions were facilitated by participants with expertise on a specific topic. Sessions were designed to promote discussion on the issue with a group representing diverse perspectives. The colloquium began with a keynote address by Dr Leslie Bella and reception on Friday evening that was open to the public. In addition to the issues sessions, Saturday included a luncheon at the Tattingstone Inn, and a wrap up session where three key points from each session were shared with the group. During the final session, participants were free to share any ideas that they had with the group, based upon the discussions of the previous 24 hours.

## *Colloquium Participants*

***Organizers:***

Brenda Robertson                      Acadia University  
Ann Dodge                                Acadia University  
Wendy Bedingfield                      Acadia University

***Student assistants:***

Grace Boutilier                         Kinesiology Student, Acadia University  
Alicia Shortt                              Kinesiology Student, Acadia University  
Megan Birk                                Recreation Student, Acadia University  
Rachel Bedingfield                      Recreation Student, Acadia University

***Session Leaders:***

Ann McGrath                              Acadia University  
Carol Davis-Jamieson                    Nova Scotia Sport & Recreation Commission  
Cindy James                               Acadia University  
Connie Bothwell-Myers                 University of New Brunswick  
Janet Landry                               Windsor Recreation Department  
Jean Robinson-Dexter                    Sharing Strengths  
Jeanette Auger                            Acadia University  
Katherine Side                            Mount St. Vincent University  
Kay Johnson                               Annapolis Valley Regional School Board  
Leslie Bella                                Memorial University  
Ruth Morrison                             Acadia University  
Shanthi Johnson                         Acadia University  
Wendy Elliot                                Kentville Advertiser

***Participants:***

Ann-Marie Powers                        Acadia University  
Carol Pickings-Anthony                 Bridgewater Recreation Department  
Dawn Stegan                               Recreation Nova Scotia  
Debby Smith                                Nova Scotia Sport & Recreation Commission  
Heather Reid                               Acadia University  
Jan Marontate                              Acadia University  
Jane Lutes                                 Kings County Academy  
Joan Boutilier                              Nova Scotia Youth Center  
Linda Wheeldon                            Acadia University  
Michelle Matthews                        Epona Communications  
Nancy McBay                               Health Promotion Coordinator, EKM Center  
Nila Ipson                                 Dalhousie University  
Oonagh Holmes                            Acadia University  
Paula Chegwidden                        Acadia University  
Verna Cormier                              Debert Military Family Resource Center

## *Session Titles*



- “Improving the Resiliency of Children and Youth in our Community – A Woman’s Perspective ».
- “Coming into Focus: Women Activists using Rural Media”
- “The Lifestyle Challenges and Successes for Disabled Women Living Rurally in Atlantic Canada”
- “Strength in (so few) Numbers: An Exploration of Equity and Equality in the Lives of Rural Women”
- “Empowering Women Through Recreation”
- “Healthy Eating and Lifestyles of Older Women in Rural Areas: Current Status and Future Perspective”
- “Race Relations and Human Rights for Women in a Rural Setting”
- “Family Violence: Probing Rural Issues”
- “Women’s Experiences as Caregivers”
- “Economic Transitions: Women and Change in Atlantic Canada”
- “Babies, Business and Boats - The Challenges of Striking a Balance for Women in Business”
- “Arts Alive? Women, Arts and Culture in Rural Settings”

## *Leader Profiles*



***Keynote Address: “Rural Women’s Work: Caring, Family and Community Wellbeing”***

**Leslie Bella** has investigated the development of professional associations, and published several articles on social work and on other human service professions. She has developed curriculum related to rural social work, including social work with aboriginal peoples and other diverse populations. For several years, Leslie served on the various boards and committees of Canadian Association of School of Social Work, including a term as co-chair of the Board of Accreditation. She has also pursued work involving professionalism, social policy, family making and prevention of violence. She has published a variety of notable works, including *Challenging Heterosexism* and *Newfoundlanders: Home and Away*.

***“Improving the Resiliency of Children and Youth in our Community – A Woman’s Perspective”***

**Jean Robinson-Dexter** is the Community Development Coordinator for Sharing Strengths, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health of children and youth in western Nova Scotia. Jean’s background is in recreation and community development, working at a variety of levels, municipally and provincially in Nova Scotia. She has a degree in Recreation from Dalhousie University. She has served as Recreation Coordinator for Queen’s Co., Executive Director of the Recreation Association of Nova Scotia and has taught at Acadia University’s School of Recreation Management and Kinesiology.

***“Coming into Focus: Women Activists using Rural Media”***

**Wendy Elliot** has served 25 as a community newspaper reporter, editor and freelance writer in the Annapolis Valley. She was awarded Best Columnist Award from the Atlantic Newspaper Association in 1983 and again in 2001. She has been teaching drama at Wolfville Schools since 1990, and directs the *Fezziwig Family Christmas Frolic* annually. She served on a heritage and tourism committees for the Town of Wolfville in 1988 and has been active in Wolfville Home and School affairs for over 15 years.

***“The Lifestyle Challenges and Successes for Disabled Women Living Rurally in Atlantic Canada”***

**Janet Landry** is the Recreation Director with the Town of Windsor, and has worked in the Recreations departments in both Wolfville and Dartmouth. She also taught as a part-time lecturer at Acadia University. Formerly a psychiatric nurse, Janet is best known for her work as an advocate for community inclusion, and was awarded the provincial Recreation Rick Hansen



Professional Achievement Award in 1992 for her work with recreation inclusion and community development. She has a reputation for partnership and community building and has played many lead roles inspiring and chairing community projects involving health, education and recreation sectors. Janet is an active member of Recreation Nova Scotia and chairs the provincial Accessibility Committee.

***“Strength in (so few) Numbers: An Exploration of Equity and Equality in the Lives of Rural Women”***

**Cindy James** is a 1987 graduate of Acadia University in Recreation Management. She spent 10 years pursuing a career in recreation related fields including administration, research, community development and training. She entered into her second career in 1997 employed by Acadia University as the Equity Officer. She has recently diversified again by taking on the additional role of Training and Development Coordinator for Acadia’s Human Resources department. As a rural woman herself she looks forward to reflecting with other like-minded women on what that has meant to her over her 39 years.

***“Empowering Women Through Recreation”***

**Carol Davis-Jamieson** is a 25-year veteran of Nova Scotia’s municipal recreation delivery system. She spent 13 of those years as the Recreation Director for two rural municipalities. Since 1998, Carol has served as a Regional Representative for the Nova Scotia Sport & Recreation Commission. As a consultant for the government, she works with communities with the goal of increasing access to recreation for all Nova Scotians. A personal interest of hers focuses upon enhancing community based recreation opportunities for girls in physical activity and other forms of recreation. Carol lives the type of balanced lifestyle that she promotes to others and has diverse interests in physical activity, the arts, and outdoor pursuits. She is a regular participant in the B.O.W. program (Becoming an Outdoors Women).

***“Healthy Eating and Lifestyles of Older Women in Rural Areas: Current Status and Future Perspective”***

**Shanthi Johnson** is currently an Assistant Professor in the School of Nutrition and Dietetics at Acadia University and a Professional Dietician. She is also an adjunct professor at the Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging in London, Ontario. In the broadest sense, her research involves health promotion among older adults with a multidisciplinary perspective including nutritional, physical, and psychosocial components. In particular, her recent studies examine the determinants of independence; the impact of exercise on functional and nutritional status; osteoporosis health beliefs and preventative practices among young and old; and the role of nutrition in falls prevention.

### ***“Race Relations and Human Rights for Women in a Rural Setting”***

**Kaye Johnson** is the Coordinator of Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human rights (RCH) for the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board. Kaye obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Carleton University (Ottawa) and went on to Completed a Master of Social Work degree in 1994 from Carlton University, Ottawa. Kaye spent 17 years in the Air Force Reserves as a musician. From 1995 to 1998 she was the Regional Educator for Southwest Nova Scotia for the Black Learners Advisory Committee/Black Educators Association. Kay continues to upgrade learning through Master of Education courses at Acadia University.

### ***“Babies, Business and Boats - The Challenges of Striking a Balance for Women in Business”***

**Ann McGrath** is a graduate of the University of Toronto with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. In 1982, Ann returned to school at Acadia University to receive her diploma in Secretarial Administration. Following graduation, she worked as promotions coordinator for a local community development organization and continued there until she took a position as coordinator with Atlantic Insight magazine in Halifax. Her work with the Windsor Business Commission required involvement in all aspects of community and business development. From 1987-1996, Ann operated her own business- a full service administrative/desktop publishing storefront operation. In 1996 she began working for the Acadia Center for Small Business and Entrepreneurship on a full-time basis.

### ***“Women’s Experiences as Caregivers”***

**Jeanette Auger** is a sociologist teaching at Acadia University. As well as her academic pursuits of teaching and research Jeanette has been actively involved in the field of community development working with and for the aged, people with terminal illnesses and their important ones and elders who represent marginalized groups. In 2000 she published her first book entitled *Social Perspectives on Death and Dying*. Her more recent book, currently in press is entitled *From The Inside Looking Out: Competing Ideas About Growing Older*. Jeanette has conducted research into the needs of rural caregivers for the Victorian Order of Nurses, Lunenburg branch, and for the VON Annapolis.

### ***“Arts Alive? Women, Arts and Culture in Rural Settings”***

**Ruth Morrison**, inspired by her passions for music and teaching, earned a Bachelor of Music and Diploma in Education from McGill University; Masters in Education from the University of New Brunswick and her PhD in Education from McGill. Ruth has had an opportunity to share her love of music at all age levels. For sixteen years she taught and

supervised instrumental, choral and classroom music programs in the public school systems in Quebec and New Brunswick. Since 1993, Ruth has worked in the Schools of Music and Education at Acadia University. Recently in 1998, Ruth's work in music education was recognized when she received the Nova Scotia Music Educators' Musica Viva Award.

***“Family Violence: Probing Rural Issues”***

**Connie Bothwell-Myers** is the Director of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Center for Family Violence Research located on the University of New Brunswick campus in Fredericton. The Center is one of five national Centers established in 1994 as part of the Federal Government's Family Violence Initiative. Connie has been affiliated with the MMFC in a variety of capacities since 1995: as coordinator of a research team investigating violence against persons with a disability; member of several working committees; chair of the Board of Directors and most recently as Director. Several research teams of the Center have been exploring strategies to create violence-free relationships for girls and women living in rural communities in Atlantic Canada.

***“Economic Transitions: Women and Change in Atlantic Canada”***

**Katherine Side** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Women's Studies, Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax. Currently she is beginning work on a three year study which will exam the gendered effects of the transition from a small scale agricultural/fishing based economy, to a tourism based economy. The study is comparative with a base in rural Northern Ireland and a rural community in Nova Scotia. Dr. Side is also a member of the qualitative research team of the Healthy Balance project, a SSHRC funded project that will analyze women's care giving and unpaid labour in Nova Scotia over the next 5 years.

## *Discussion Groups*



Session 1

**“Improving the Resiliency of Children and Youth in our Community – A Woman’s Perspective”, Jean Robinson-Dexter.**

*Wolfville Room Rachel Bedingfield-recorder*

Carol Davis-Jamieson	Verna Cormier
Connie Bothwell	Heather Reid
Cindy James	Oonagh Holmes
Leslie Bella	

**“Coming into Focus: Women Activists using Rural Media”, Wendy Elliot.**

*Student Lounge Grace Boutilier-recorder*

Ann Marie Powers	Carol Pickings-Anthony
Michelle Matthews	Jan Marontate
Linda Wheeldon	Debby Smith

**“The Lifestyle Challenges and Successes for Disabled Women Living Rurally in Atlantic Canada”, Janet Landry.**

*Hall of Fame Room Megan Birk-recorder*

Shanthi Johnson	Dawn Stegen
Kaye Johnson	Joan Boutilier
Nila Ipson	Joan Allen-Peters
Roxanne Wiseman	

**“Arts Alive? Women, Arts and Culture in Rural Settings”, Ruth Morrison.**

*Socio-cultural Room Alicia Shortt-recorder*

Jeanette Auger	Nancy McBay
Katherine Side	Paula Chegwiddden
Ann McGrath	Jane Lutes

Session 2

**“Empowering Women Through Recreation”, Carol Davis-Jamieson.**

*Wolfville Room*                      *Megan Birk-recorder*

Katherine Side	Jean Robinson-Dexter
Ruth Morrison	Heather Reid
Nila Ipson	Jane Lutes
Verna Cormier	Roxanne Wiseman

**“Healthy Eating and Lifestyles of Older Women in Rural Areas: Current Status and Future Perspective”, Shanthi Johnson.**

*Socio-cultural Room*                      *Alicia Shortt-recorder*

Ann McGrath	Nancy McBay
Cindy James	Paula Chegwiddden
Joan Allen-Peters	Ann Marie Powers
Carol Pickings-Anthony	

**“Race Relations and Human Rights for Women in a Rural Setting”, Kaye Johnson.**

*Hall of Fame Room*                      *Rachel Bedingfield--recorder*

Janet Landry	Joan Boutilier
Michelle Matthews	Debby Smith
Jan Marontate	

**“Family Violence: Probing Rural Issues”, Connie Bothwell.**

*Student Lounge*                      *Grace Boutilier-recorder*

Wendy Elliot	Linda Wheeldon
Dawn Stegen	Jeanette Auger
Oonagh Holmes	Ann Dodge
Leslie Bella	

Session 3

**“Women’s Experiences as Caregivers”, Jeanette Auger.**

*Student Lounge*                      *Alicia Shortt-recorder*

Wendy Elliot	Nancy McBay
Ruth Morrison	Linda Wheeldon
Nila Ipson	Jan Marontate
Leslie Bella	

**“Economic Transitions: Women and Change in Atlantic Canada”, Katherine Side.**

*Socio-cultural Room*                      *Grace Boutilier-recorder*

Carol Davis-Jamieson	Dawn Stegen
Connie Bothwell	Jane Lutes
Joan Allen-Peters	Ann Marie Powers

**“Babies, Business and Boats - The Challenges of Striking a Balance for Women in Business”, Ann McGrath.**

*Wolfville Room*                      *Megan Birk-recorder*

Oonagh Holmes	Michelle Matthews
Paula Chegwiddden	Verna Cormier

**“Strength in (so few) Numbers: An Exploration of Equity and Equality in the Lives of Rural Women”, Cindy James.**

*Hall of Fame Room*                      *Rachel Bedingfield-recorder*

Shanthi Johnson	Heather Reid
Jean Robinson-Dexter	Kaye Johnson
Joan Boutilier	Debby Smith

 **Keynote Address** 

***Family, Caring and Community:  
Lifestyles of Rural Women in Atlantic Canada***

*By*

*Dr. Leslie Bella  
Memorial University*

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## Notes for a Keynote Address at Acadia University in March 2002

Thank you so much for inviting me to this colloquium - I am delighted to be here, and I am looking forward to hearing your ideas and participating in our discussions. I have been warmly welcomed already. Even though Air Canada cancelled my flight this afternoon and put me on Tango (so I travelled with my knees under my chin), I was delighted to be welcomed at the airport by a young man with a huge black limousine that stretched out forever. My legs have learned to unfold. Thank you.

In talking to you today I want to address three questions: First, who are the rural women of Atlantic Canada? Second, what are the significant issues in their lives? And third and finally, what can be done to address these issues, both by Acadia's Centre of Lifestyle Studies and other researchers and research centres in the region, and by the community organizations and their leaders who are also represented here today.

So, who are the "rural women of Atlantic Canada"?

This may seem to be an easy question - perhaps it seems obvious to you. If you see yourself as a rural woman, the tendency is to answer it from your knowledge of yourself and your neighbours - the answer is personal. If you are a scholar, you may approach the problem a bit differently - perhaps using statistics. In that case I would put up charts and tables telling you about income levels, education, family size and structures, hours of work and so on - perhaps making comparisons to men, or to some urban norm. Or, as a scholar I might be referring to some theory about the nature of rural life, the rural economy or the rural community. The scholar in me wants to answer this question using theory and research, but in a way that does justice to the diversity of your personal experiences as rural women. So, I will use theory but also include and examples to illustrate that theory.

So, who are the rural women of Atlantic Canada?

They are many things.

They are both hunters and gatherers, and they work on farms growing food and husbanding animals. They fish, pick berries and are capable of felling a moose. They drive tractors and they milk a dairy herd.

They work in wage employment outside their homes, in factories, schools, hospitals and stores, and they work in family businesses, coordinating the family as an economic unit that produces as well as consumes.

They live in traditional family units, with husbands and children, and they live in new family forms such as same sex couples, group homes, single person households.

They can be young women just beginning their life in a rural community, and they can be older and in need of supports to maintain their independence.

They can have lived in a community for generations, and be newly arrived from another region or another country.

They can live on small holdings outside towns and villages, and live in a small population centre that still sees itself as “rural”.

And, because some people are valued more than others in our unequal, competitive society with its colonial history of oppression and exploitation, they can be have privileged, by race, income, education, and occupation (as I have been in many respects), and they can lack those privileges.

They can be responsible for caring for others, as mothers, teachers and neighbours, and they can be among those receiving care, as children in school or at home, as older adults in nursing facilities or in the community, or traditional family households where able bodied men are assumed to have the right to that care.

They can look like most of their neighbours, and they can be visible minorities.

They can be able bodied and well, or their abilities can be challenged by accidents of birth, illness or age.

They may be nurtured by caring families and neighbours, a centre of a strong supportive network, or they may be isolated. If isolated, they may risk mental health difficulties, or ay even be caught in oppressive relationships with controlling or abusive family members.

Their lives may be centred in the rural community where they live, or in a distant urban community where they commute for employment.

To make this diversity more concrete and personal, I want to introduce some “real” women - not “real” women in the traditional conservative sense (heaven forbid!), or “real” in terms of being actual people, but real in the sense of their diversity, their representativeness, the complexity of their aspirations and of their concerns about the organization of care. My own experience of Atlantic Canada and the significant issues in their lives, include the following seven rural women:

1. A single white woman working as a senior administrator in a university in a city 100 kms away, and living alone in a country home 10kms from the nearest village. She must now attend to the needs of a frail parent in the city.
2. An older first nations woman living in coastal Labrador and raising two

grandchildren. She wants to know how to help them do better in school than her own children did.

3. A woman who co-owns a boat tour business with her husband. They have just negotiated a bank loan to add a restaurant and a craft store. She expects their teenage children will work in the store in the summers, and that this will teach responsibility and keep them out of trouble.
4. A young woman in a remote outport community with small children who is afraid to leave her abusive husband because he has threatened to kill them all if she does. Her fears are being expressed in various physical symptoms, which she describes to the emergency nurse when she arrives with a broken arm after “falling”.
5. A lesbian couple who pretend to be room mates because they fear that they will lose their jobs as day care workers if they come out in the community. And most of all, they would really like to affirm their relationship in their church.
6. A young woman with a baby who is raising enough money for university by cooking at a logging camp while her baby is cared for by her sister and brother-in-law. She feels guilty about not looking after her own child.
7. A foster mother who with her husband cares for children who have been declared by the child welfare authorities as in need of protection. She would like to go back to school to learn more about child psychology and child development.

In short, I have answered the question “who are the rural women of Atlantic Canada” by describing their diversity. Rural women are as diverse as the women of Canada’s cities and towns. Urbanites may have romanticised stereotype of “rural” women as traditional and conservative, as earth mothers with compost heaps that replenish their vegetable gardens, as women who can cook apple pies from scratch and provide jam for the church bazaar. But reality is far more varied. Not all are traditional; not all can cook or garden; and not all go to church.

So, given that rural women are diverse, what can we say about my second question, about the significant issues in their lives? What concerns do they share, in spite of their diversity? From my perspective, one theme threads through all of the vignettes I have just described - all rural women, indeed all women, but particularly rural women, must be concerned with the way “caring” is organized in their family and their community. I say particularly rural women, because of problems created by large geographic distances, by small population base, and by persistent stereotypical assumptions about the natural and generous nurturing capacity of good rural women.

So what do I mean by caring work? Caring is the work we do to meet one another’s needs, both in terms of physical care and in terms of personal affirmation. Caring work is essential to the creation and maintenance of family - to what I have called “family making” - and also to the

creation and maintenance of community - to what many of us would call “community development”.

Before I talk more about my specific concern today - that of caring work - I want to share with you my current interest in “family making”. This is the leading edge of my own work at the moment, tentative and underdeveloped. Feedback from and the participation of people like yourselves will help me develop this work further. I have become concerned that much of our work which focuses on the family unit uses the ‘traditional nuclear family’ as a standard. These works compare various family structures to this supposed norm and usually find the newer structures missing something. So we write of “broken homes”, “single parents” (as if the other parent never existed), and non-traditional family forms. All these labels imply a depart from a norm. I have been working on an alternative conceptualization of family that would be more inclusive, and would see as strengths those relationships we build that don’t fit traditional norms. I have been thinking about this off and on ever since I completed **The Christmas Imperative** ten years ago, and it is rooted in that analysis. The conceptualization I am working on now sees family as a process rather than a structure. We “make” family - hence the terms “family making” (borrowing shamelessly from Virginia Satir). This conceptualization allows us to control our own definition of our own family . I have identified three characteristics of this family making process: the first is that caring is involved in family making, and I will talk about that more in a minute. The second concerns the “enduring” nature of the relationships involved in the family making process. By ensuring I mean both extended through time, and also surviving various vicissitudes of life. The third characteristics has been more of a worry to me - because it concerns intimacy but is not about sex. At present I am using the idea of “shared domestic space” to capture this third dimension. Those of you intrigued by this idea can visit our “family making” website and see some of the examples of ideas, abstracts and research foci derived from these ideas. The link is on my personal website at Memorial at <http://>

Now, back to today’s primary focus, about Caring work:

Caring work includes both caring for and caring about. “Caring for” is the work we do caring for each other, taking care of each other, in our families, communities. “Caring for” is clearly work; it includes changing diapers, making meals, washing clothes and dishes, cleaning houses, putting gas in the car, buying groceries, going to parent teacher interviews, taking aging parents to doctor’s appointments, and so on. It can be unpaid, as in the caring work traditionally undertaken by a parent when looking after their own children, or their sister’s children or their children’s children - as in some of the examples I just included. Or caring work can be paid; poorly, as in the work of the foster parents I already talked about. Or perhaps only slightly better paid in the instances of the caring work of the lesbian day care workers or the emergency nurse.

But caring is not just about the physical work of caring for someone - it also includes “caring about” someone. This is invisible work, undervalued, but essential to our development and to our continued health and well beings. “Caring about” work can be about personal affirmation, or affirmation of relationship. Examples of work to affirm our caring about another individual would be the work we do finding a birthday present that is “just what someone wants”; or the work of organizing a Valentine celebration that shows we still care about our partner. Work to

affirm a relationship would include preparation of such family festivals as Christmas and Thanksgiving, and the organization of events that celebrate coupledness, such as weddings and anniversary parties. Caring “about” work also includes those smaller tokens of affection and affirmation - the remembered birthday date; the note with clippings from a newspaper in a town where you used to live; the Christmas card; the phone call, letter or even the email to a friend; the leisurely pancake breakfast on Saturday mornings and the extended family suppers on Sunday.

For most women “caring about” and “caring for” are so enmeshed that we feel guilty if we can’t do one without the other. So, the young mother working in the logging camp, who cares about her baby while the child is cared for by her sister, will feel guilty. So will the natural parents of the children living in foster care, and possibly even the birth mother of the Inuit children being raised by their grandmother. The teenagers of the parents with the tourism business may feel guilty if they want to work elsewhere for better wages, because they feel that if they care about their parents they should also provide labour for the family business. The administrator who must take her mother shopping and organize meals for her feels guilty if she resents the increased burden this places on her time, on top of her heavy workload and looking after her own home. We feel if we “care about” we must also willingly “care for”, without being paid and without counting the cost. That’s why feelings about Christmas can be so complicated - we somehow feel we must “do Christmas” to prove that our family is a successful one - to affirm the family as one in which we care about one another. And Christmas disasters are so much worse. When a drunken uncle Bill falls out of his chair, or gets too amorous with one of his cousins, we feel this reflects on our own family making ability as the organizer of the family’s Christmas celebration. We feel responsible for his behaviour. Most families seem to have an uncle Bill, or even an aunty Irene.

“Caring about” is going remain a matter for families and communities. This will be a core of our concerns as we develop the “family making” project I talked about briefly earlier. Caring for will take place in more or less enduring relationships and in the context of intimacy made possible by at least some sharing of domestic space. But as a society we have made some collective progress on “Caring for”. Today, as a result of the developments of the welfare state in the twentieth century, not all “caring for” is based in families or in the volunteer sector of our communities. Over the last century the state has organized caring for the sick, the frail and the young. We have organized hospitals, nursing homes, licensed child care and developed some home care services. Many of the occupations and professions that are dominated by women today also involve caring work. Nursing, teaching, child care, home care, social work, recreation leadership. All provide for pay the kinds of caring for that used to be and often still are provided by the women in a family and community - for no pay at all. As a result, pay is miserably low in most of these occupations. After all, who would hire a nanny who cared so little for children that she required a professional salary to look after them. So, the confusion and enmeshment of caring for and caring about has resulted in continued poor pay levels for work that is seen as traditional women’s work - as “caring” work.

The problem of poor pay for caring work is a general one - but it’s even more acute in rural communities. For example, in the community on coastal Labrador the pay for workers at the

women's shelter is significantly lower than at a similar facility in St. John's, and the rural community in which the young woman is trapped with her abusive husband has no such facility at all. Facilities in other rural centres are run by volunteers, with out the training and support that would be available to them as regular employees. Quality day care may be available for children in urban centres, but is less likely to be accessible to single parent working in a logging camp, to a foster parent in a remote community, or to a grandmother hoping to improve the educational chances of her grandchildren in coastal Labrador. The smaller population base may not make such services economically feasible, or politically essential. The geographic distances make those services which do exist inaccessible for those with limited resources. Foster parents, with one of them in the workforce, may be able to afford a keep car, but this is less likely for a teenage single parent. And a grandmother in coastal Labrador needs a snowmobile in the winter and a car in the summer to get her grandchildren from her place on the edge of the village to a day care centre, and they will only be accepted by that centre if her grandchildren were considered an "at risk" priority for day care - which they are not. And finally, the woman with the abusive husband - likely as not they are both convinced that he is entitled to be cared for by her. It is a characteristic of many abusive relationships that they are structured along traditional gender lines, with the husband expecting services from the wife. She cares for him - anticipating his needs, preparing his food, maintaining his clothes, cleaning up the messes he makes. He uses violence and the threat of violence to maintain her services. The more she is distanced from him emotionally by his violence the more she feels guilty about her growing fear and hatred and the more she feels his demands for services from her are warranted. She acquiesces, believing that "caring for" will some how make up for the death of her feelings of caring about. When she goes in search of help for her broken arm, is she asked about the possibility of violence. The hospital may have a domestic violence protocol, but the emergency nurse may be too overburdened to listen carefully to the woman and ask the right questions.

Thus far I have tried to make the argument that the organization of caring work is a central issue for rural women in Atlantic Canada - in terms of their own well-being, in terms of those they care about most (whether falling under what we traditionally call "family", or in terms of their communities, or in terms of their contribution as employed workers or as business people. For all, issues around the organization of caring are central. The answer to my third question follows. What can be done to address these issues, both by Acadia's Centre of Lifestyle Studies and other researchers and research centres in the region, and by the community organizations and their leaders who are also represented here today. There are four elements to my answer to this question.

First and most significant to the scholars and researchers is the need to incorporate issues of caring in our conceptual frameworks, whatever our disciplinary background. The centrality of caring is most obvious for scholars in post secondary institutions training employees for the caring professions - nursing, social work and so on. But the concept of "caring work" can also make an important contribution to our understanding of such diverse phenomena as residential camps for children as researched by leisure studies researchers; the nature of community caring in first nations communities as understood by anthropologists; the analysis of domestic violence by women's studies researchers; and even the use by health researchers of the internet to create online support for cancer survivors. I also encourage you to explore redefinition of family so that

the process of caring, the enduring nature of relationships and the significance of shared domestic space can be better understood, and given more critical attention than ties of blood or law.

Second, and, most significant to those involved in community organizations and community services, is the need to frame questions about the organization of caring in our communities. We need to understand who benefits from the gendered organization of caring work in our communities, and who loses. We need to look at alternatives and evaluate their potential in our voluntary organizations and in our public institutions. With our questions we must challenge decision makers, our politicians, our community leaders, and those in senior administrative and policy questions. Questions about the gendered nature of church congregation whose gay and lesbian members remain closeted. Questions about caring will challenge the children's aid society that will not fund child care for a the foster children of a parent wanting to return to school. Questions about caring will challenge the administrators of a hospital or a police agency whose workers have too little time to actually hear evidence of domestic violence, even though it is present before them. And questions about caring for and caring about will help us reframe our understanding of the stress of caring work, so that we can understand how individual lives, families and communities can be organized to minimize that stress. Perhaps we also need to address ways to make family in our communities - to strengthen caring, enduring relationships and to create community spaces that reproduce to some extent the characteristics of shared domestic space.

Thirdly, answers to these questions will require collaboration between academy and the community. The questions about the gendered nature of caring will originate in the community, but the skills for organizing the research endeavours to answer these questions are based in the academy - in the universities and research institutes like Acadia's Centre of Lifestyle Studies. We need collaboration, what I have called elsewhere "Deep Partnership", between scholars and community organizations, to ask and to answer relevant questions about the nature and future of caring work.

And fourth and finally, part of the answer to the problems originating the gendered organization of caring labour is in raising our own consciousness of these issues. This part of the solution lies in our own awareness of the significance of caring in our relationships with those we care about. So many women experience guilt as a result of enmeshment of "caring for" and "caring about", a guilt that can be resolved in part by consciousness raising. It can work! I see this work in my university classes at Memorial. One student left her child with his grandparents so she could return to school and earn enough create a home for them. Learning that she could "care about" without "caring for" what a revelation that allowed her to let hold of some of her guilt at not being with him right now. Another student felt so guilty about leaving her children's father that she actually believed that her teenage son was entitled to demand domestic services from her that he could easily have done for himself. As a result of his mother's increased consciousness about the consequences of the gendered organization of caring work, he has now learned to load the dish washer, and his mother expresses no guilt at all about his potential as a future user of the washing machine and clothes dryer. And in own my personal life, I can still help my stepdaughter understand that she can still care about her disabled brother without actually

providing continual nursing care he needs. And, if my own daughter has children, I hope to be a guilt free granny who will hugely enjoy caring about them if my “caring for” work is kept within reasonable bounds for the kind of energetic lively older person I plan to be. May you also be able to resolve those issues in your own lives. I hope that you will all, whether scholar, researcher or community leader, as parent or child, or as caring employer or employee, I hope that you will all use my thoughts to help you experience release from the guilt that we have all inherited from the gendered organization of our caring work in our respective worlds.

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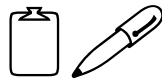
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## SESSION NOTES



The following are discussion points noted by the student recorders in each of the sessions. These notes are not intended to be a comprehensive reporting of the content of each session but rather to provide a flavor of the types of topics and issues covered during what was at times rather free ranging and delightful discussion. Following the points is a research question, framed in a box, that emerged from the discussion and that warrants further consideration.

## *The Lifestyle Challenges and Successes for Disabled Women Living Rurally in Atlantic Canada*

- Woman face a wide range of diverse disabilities-some obvious and others hidden
- There exists an active network for women with disabilities in Canada
- Women with disabilities suffer various forms of medical abuse
- Women feel guilt and blame themselves for disabled children
- Society believes that women with disabilities are somehow less attractive and desirable
- Disabled youth feel isolation at school
- Computers help disabled youth connect socially
- Disabled women feel guilt over not being a “normal” mom for their children
- Disabled women struggle to maintain a positive self image as they grow older
- Disabled women in rural areas often are economically challenged
- Accessible transportation presents special challenges in rural areas
- Rural women are often independent and struggle to ask for assistance or support
- Many support services only available in urban areas so to access them means forced relocation
- Many require instruction on how to live more actively rather than lectures on why they should...need action and not discussion
- We need more opportunities for these voices to be heard...especially in decision making processes
- Needs cannot be generalized as these persons are individuals with their own unique needs
  - Accessibility...clear legislative standards are required
  - Advocacy...resources for self managed care
  - Service promotion...information about existing opportunities and resources must be more effectively shared

How can communities ensure that the needs of disabled women are heard, valued, and addressed?

## *Coming into Focus: Women Activists using Rural Media*

- If you care enough you will jump that hurdle between private and public life
- Women now in public and not afraid of being heard
- Sometimes you can't live quietly and privately when there are issues that require public attention
- Computers have helped rural women feel more in touch with the global community
- Many more women working in the media then ever...using medium to express opinions
- Women are realizing that their opinions matter
- Rural life is changing-85% of farm women are forced to seek employment off the farm
- 90% of tax revenues comes from 8 major cities-sustaining rural communities is a challenge
- Women of rural Atlantic Canada have high rates of cancer and exposure to dangerous pollutants
- Challenging for rural women to connect together on their issues...rural media can be their voice

How can the quality of life for rural women be sustained?

## ***Improving the Resiliency of Children and Youth in our Community: A Women's Perspective***

- Often it is women who make youth feel important and give them hope for a positive future
- Resiliency is the ability to adapt successfully to challenges and manage adversity
- Need to move beyond focusing on risk and discover ways to make youth resilient
- Characteristics of a resilient youth:
  - Social competence
  - Problem solving skills
  - Sense of autonomy
  - Empowerment
- Need to determine if resiliency is class and culture specific
- Need for redefining appropriate behaviour for youth
- Family protective factors include good relationships, support for self identity, support and encouragement, reasonable expectations, and giving youth responsibility
- Role of the school and community can be key if protective factors do not exist at home...good role models, understanding and supportive teachers, opportunities for self development, positive social development
- Youth need support to develop potential and need reinforcement that they are valuable and capable
- Reaching youth that have been pushed to the margins is sometimes very challenging
- Society needs to value more than just good grades
- Youth need support finding ways to be successful and valuing their success
- Youth need appropriate levels of challenge and we can't always lower the bar to the perceived level of the norm
- Society needs to provide youth with tools to cope with life, not protection from it
- All youth need to feel valued

How can communities become youth friendly and find ways to embrace their youth as assets rather than treating them as liabilities?

## ***Arts Alive? Women, Arts and Culture in Rural Settings***

*For to be a woman is to have interests and duties, spreading out in all directions from the central mother core, like spokes from the hub of a wheel. The patterns of our life are essentially circular. We must be open to all points of the compass: husband, children, friends, home, community: stretched out, exposed, sensitive like a spider's web to each breeze that blows, to each call that comes. How difficult for us, then to achieve a balance in the midst of these contradictory tensions, and yet how necessary for the proper functioning of our lives (Lindbergh, 1955).*

*I have wonderful memories of a quilt that my mother made....it was a riot of color and bits of fabric. The quilt was an appropriate symbol that represents what women have historically done with respect to the arts. They have taken bits and pieces of their life and recycled them in ways that have created art. Bits of wedding dresses, baby clothes, husband's work pants...the women took these bits of their lives, which so often represented care giving, and created things of beauty. Their art was, and still is in so many ways, an outgrowth of their roles as mother, wife, nurse, teacher, etc. ...Women's growth as artists is often relegated to stolen moments when we retreat to a workshop, a writing chair, the piano bench...whatever limited space defines a "room of our own". We carry our world into our retreat. It is from these bits that we create our quilt...that we weave the bits into artifacts of beauty (Morrison, 2002).*

- Most women do not enjoy large blocks of time for their art...usually it is "stolen moments"
- Art is generally done in "little holes" rather than in dedicated studios or workshops
- Even finding "stolen moments" and "little holes" is difficult
- Women are care givers of the cultural and artistic life of a community
- Emergence of "artist" during the middle years for women...image of themselves as artists assumes a more central role
- The journey of midlife is not an outward journey, it is an inward one where harmony is sought between the unknown outer life and the inner self that has not been seen for sometime
- Arts as self-expression- "removing the mask"
- We create art for pleasure...not its worth
- Stepping out of a situation to improve one's life ..... without guilt

Can paid work and 'caring for' be balanced to provide time for self and self-expression?

## ***Race Relations and Human Rights for Women in a Rural Setting***

- In rural communities, issues become grouped and centralized because there are fewer people
- How do we define who we are?
- Opinion changes are based upon information
- If all we see in a person is color-we will form specific opinions
- What is the black experience? white experience? women's experience?
- Privacy is limited in rural settings
- Everyone knows everyone else's business
- Services are limited because too few numbers to justify
- Challenges in accessing information about resources to address racial issues

How can we better share information about resources available to address issues in rural areas?

## *Empowering Women Through Recreation*

- Recreation helps us connect with others
- Recreation helps give women a voice
- Recreation helps women escape stressful home life
- How can we support other people's recreation
- Empowering women with busy lifestyles to value leisure is challenging
- We need women role models in terms of valuing leisure
- Is it easier to become empowered through a group than alone
- Communities must assume responsibility for sustainable self development
- Grades 7 and 8 are important grades for influencing girls attitudes toward leisure
- School sometimes foster negative attitudes toward recreation for girls
- Physical activity is important for girls
- More physical activity opportunities are available for males than females
- Empowerment happens when people talk through issues
- Empowerment for females starts at a young age
- Multiple benefits can accrue from an activity

How can we use recreation to help empower women?

## ***Healthy Eating and Lifestyles of Older Women in Rural Areas: Current Status and Future Perspective***

- Rural lifestyles: health is compromised, life expectancy is shorter, higher rates of chronic disease
- Health determined by factors including income, social support network, working conditions, genetic endowment, coping skills, personal health practices, access to health services
- 80% of rural women are inadequate in 4 or more nutrients: calcium, Vitamin D, B6, B12, folate, zinc
- nutrition is important yet there is a stigma attached to using food banks
- services include meals on wheels, grocery delivery, community gardens, and food banks but some are scarce in rural areas
- The Nova Scotia agenda includes: reinforce healthy eating practices, support nutritionally vulnerable practices, increase access to proper foods, support research
- More local nutrition research is needed
- Nutrition needs of older women when not “caring for”...
- Services for rural residents are less accessible, less available and less acceptable

How can we encourage lifelong healthy eating?



## *Family Violence: Probing Rural Issues*

- Family violence is a serious deterrent to well being of women
- The conceptualization of women abuse differs regionally
- Gender roles are more structured in rural areas
- Women abuse is not openly talked about
- There is a reluctance in some rural communities to acknowledge wife abuse as an issue
- In certain communities there is a high tolerance of abusive behaviour
- Some feel women must keep the family together at any cost
- Strategies to address family violence in rural areas must be rooted in rural culture
- Unless family violence is addressed, rural communities will continue to be isolating, fearful places for women
- Men won't talk about abuse
- Women's self esteem and trust is low coming from abusive family situations
- Some women take an abusive relationship over no relationship
- Jobs outside the home give women access to differing views on abuse
- How can we be supportive of abused women in rural areas
  - Violence caused by breakdown in social values/male control
  - Less privacy/less service in rural areas
  - Violence is never acceptable

How can we convince women of their value and worth?

## *Woman's Experiences as Caregivers*

- Women are the primary comforters of others
- Services to support rural caregivers are limited
- Support services to support caregivers include: respite care, support groups, counseling, transportation, sitters, shopping, overnight help, training, release time, respect, and recognition to name but a few
- Caregiving services are diverse and include such functions as: personal care, meal planning/preparation, medication management, housekeeping chores, transportation, arranging appointments, social support, and financial assistance
- Rural women who are caregivers have differing needs
- Caregivers need to be cared for too
- Caregiving work is not valued by society
- Physical pain is easier to address than psychological pain
- Lack of resources for women caregivers who no longer give care
- People need to plan for aging

How can we ensure that rural caregivers are supported and valued?

## *Economic Transitions: Women and Change in Atlantic Canada*

- Gender matters during economic transition
- Women are responsible to cushion the effects of economic transition
- Economic transitions impact various aspects of life
- Times of stress and tension
- Many rural dwellers have to travel to urban areas to work
- Many rural communities are dying economically
- Decreasing jobs cause tension, jealousy, and distrust within communities
- When people have to leave their community to work they feel guilt
- Rebuilding of community
- Defining successful living
- Communities often need to depend upon outsiders to provide economic opportunities and solutions

How can we ensure rural communities can be economically sustainable?

***Babies, Business and Boats: The Challenges of Striking a Balance for Women in Business***

- Striking a balance between work and care giving
- In rural areas, women need to work harder to succeed at business
- Hard for women to get support for small business from banks in rural areas
- Women with business and family have little leisure
- Little time to develop and sustain friendships outside the business
- Women often enter business based upon economic feasibility rather than their real passion and interest
- In small business work always has to take priority
- Leisure has low priority
- Women take fewer risks than men
- To succeed you need to be involved in professional development
- Women in business still seen as care givers

What resources exist to assist women to find balance between work, family, and leisure?

***Strength in (so few) Numbers: An Exploration of Equity and Equality in the Lives of Rural Women***

- World Rural Women's Day is October 15th
- Equality is when a woman makes a mistake and it reflects her performance, not her sex
- Men support men more than women do other women
- Use media to celebrate women's successes
- Women need to mentor other women
- Women can have differing opinions
- Rural solutions have to come from rural areas
- Women should not strive to be like men but rather to be valued as themselves
- Gender wage gap larger in Atlantic Canada than elsewhere
- 50% of the wage gap between males and females is unaccounted for

How can we achieve gender equity in rural resource based industries such as farming, forestry, and fishing?

## Wrap up Session

This session was a free flow of comments, ideas, and opinions that people had based upon the discussions of the previous 24 hours. Following is a list of points raised during the session.

- ! It was interesting that women from such diverse backgrounds shared common concerns.
- ! It would be nice if this could become an annual gathering.
- ! A highlight was getting to meet new people who share the same passions as we do.
- ! At a future gathering, we could begin to address a few of the questions raised in the group sessions.
- ! The relaxed informal structure was conducive to self expression.
- ! It was nice to let your mind free lance.
- ! Women being care givers for others and not themselves seemed to be a common theme that ran throughout many sessions.
- ! It was nice to have music in one session...at future sessions we should have more opportunity for exploration such as this where we do advocate it for other women.
- ! If we share the proceedings with our own constituents, perhaps it will motivate others to tackle some of the questions and issues.
- ! It would be nice another time to invite women representative of some of the groups we spoke about in order to hear their voices.
- ! Connections between women are “powerful” and we must seek ways to connect with younger women.
- ! We must all find our own “manure pile”...aspects of our lives that are meaningful to us and we need to recognize, acknowledge, and nurture them.
- ! Nice to talk about what we want rather than be restricted by process.
- ! It was nice to be a presenter and to be a participant in other sessions as well.

