

# Gender and Working-Class Identity in Deindustrializing Sudbury, Ontario

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## Abstract

In this article I explore the making of a gendered working-class identity among a sample of male nickel miners in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. Through 26 oral history interviews conducted between January 2015 and July 2018 with current and retired miners (ages 26 to 74), I analyze how the industrial relations framework and social relations of the postwar period shaped – and continue to shape – a masculinized working-class identity. I then examine the ways in which economic restructuring and the partial deindustrialization of Sudbury's mines have affected workers' ideas about gender and class. I argue that, amid growing precarious employment in both the mining industry and the regional economy more broadly, the male workers in this study continue to gender their class identities, which limits attempts to build working-class solidarity in a labor market now largely characterized by feminized service sector employment.

## Keywords

Deindustrialization, class, working-class identity, gender, masculinity, mining

## Introduction

This article traces how male nickel miners in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada formed a gendered working-class identity from the post-World War Two period to the present, and asks how deindustrialization and the recent growth of feminized service sector work in the regional economy have troubled these men's limited conception of who comprises the working class. As historian Bryan Palmer (2017) nicely puts it, class is 'always situated in a particular context and a specific social setting,' and, as a result, is necessarily 'one part structured necessity...and one part creative action' (Palmer 2017, p. 378). Following Palmer, I am concerned with the conscious activity of workers as social subjects who both respond to given historical circumstances and attempt to reshape them. Toward that end, this article engages with the dialectical process of class formation through oral history interviews with male nickel miners. By analyzing their historical narratives, I show how these workers constructed gendered class identities over the course of the development of the nickel mining industry in their community. I then explore the impediments that their form of working-class identity created as deindustrialization transformed the social relations and institutional structures on which such an identity rested. The article is concerned with how, in the process of organizing their union and gaining the rights of 'industrial pluralism' (Burawoy 1982), workers generated a masculinized form of working-class identity, the historical particularity and limitations of which have slowly been revealed during the past three decades of industrial restructuring and local economic change.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The two best, and most recent, overviews of the changes to resource mining in Sudbury are Leadbeater (2008) and Peters (2010).

A confluence of sociopolitical factors shaped the cultural reproduction of gendered working-class identity in Sudbury's mines. Because of the ways that employers, unions, and the state embedded a gendered division of labor and a dual labor market in the postwar industrial relations and social policy frameworks in Canada (Bezanson & Luxton 2006; McInnis 2002; Vosko 2011), class formation was arrested and delimited by boundaries of gender and sector, among other factors. Unionized male workers in the primary labor market drew on ideas about their 'natural' breadwinner status to buttress their demands for dignity and fair compensation at work (Forrest 1995). When the mining companies in Sudbury began to restructure their operations through the introduction of labor-saving technologies in the late 1970s, workers' resistance continued to draw on this gendered class identity and was effective only at mitigating the worst aspects of the social and economic fallout. Up to that point, no women had been hired for underground or mill jobs. In fact, women's struggles to enter the paid workforce and union coincided in the late 1970s with the first wave of major labor-displacing technologies (Keck & Powell 2000). In the subsequent decades, massive job loss and the eventual internationalization of ownership deeply restructured the local mining industry. Alongside deindustrialization and the growth of precarious and contract employment in the mines, highly feminized service sector employment have transformed the regional economy, in the forms of public sector work in administration and health care on the one hand, and low-waged, private sector service work in retail, sales and tourism on the other hand.

In light of these changes, this article considers how a subset of male workers' class identities have shifted, readjusted, or, conversely, remained unmoved by the reordering of class and gender relations in their households and the broader community. Through analyses of workers' narratives, I show the ways that working-class identity can simultaneously strengthen bonds of solidarity while it also imposes limits to the broader formation of workers into a class across gender identities, occupations, and space. Oral history interviews are an especially revealing methodological tool for uncovering the ways that workers' collectively reproduce working-class identity, as well as for probing the self-imposed limits such identity places in the road of class formation.

The article is organized as follows: After first reviewing some relevant research on deindustrialization and working-class responses, I provide historical and socioeconomic background about Sudbury's nickel mining industry, its industrial restructuring, and the growth of precarious employment in the community more recently. This is followed by a brief discussion of the demographic characteristics of the workers interviewed and the methodology employed in this research. The empirical portions of the article then analyze the role of gender in the making of the mining industry and workers' identities, as well as the ways that economic and labor market changes in Sudbury have destabilized the identities of working-class men. The article concludes by considering some of the ways that male workers have built class solidarity and how these continue to haunt attempts by unions and social activists to broaden class formation and respond to the rise in precarious employment in the regional economy.

### **Literature on Deindustrialization and Working-Class Culture**

Scholars from many academic disciplines have pushed us to explore the making of historically-specific masculinities. Historians and social scientists of the working class, in particular, have explored how masculinities have shaped working-class male identity, particularly among blue-collar industrial workers (Dunk 2003; Maynard 1989; Murphy 1997; Willis 1981; Yarrow 1991). Indeed, this is so in part

because of how frequently working-class men have relied on notions of manliness to assert their dignity and press for rights on the job (Meyer 2016). This research is frequently in conversation with feminist scholarship that has challenged the outsized attention received by the stereotypical male industrial worker in working-class history (see for example Cohen 1988; Meyer 2016; Sugiman 1994). Feminist social scientists and historians have drawn our attention to both the role of female wage workers in working-class history and the labor of social reproduction, in the process blurring the line between productive and reproductive labor (Armstrong & Armstrong 2010; Porter 2003). Although early labor history might have paid inordinate attention to working men, the working class has always been multi-gender, constituted and reproduced in both the workplace and the home.

The phenomenon of deindustrialization, however, has generated new focus on industrial workers, particularly (white) men. In popular discourse, the white, male worker seems to make iterative reappearances as the object of quasi-anthropological fascination, and of scorn – responsible for the growth of right-wing populism, unlikely electoral outcomes, or even cultural decay and backwardness (Vance 2018; Williams 2017). Yet, the gendered and racialized making of certain sections of the industrial working class has always been a two-sided process, at once a matter of the conscious activity of workers and the contradictions and constraints of institutionalized class relations in the state, labor laws, and union bureaucracies. Moreover, just as the dialectic between institutions and activity produced particular embodiments of working-class identity, so too have industrial restructuring and deindustrialization generated unique tensions as workers attempt to manage the resultant individual, familial, social, and cultural impacts. In fact, too often explorations of the cultures of working-class people, particular working-class men, obscure the repercussions of deindustrialization and other forms of capitalist restructuring in their emphases on ostensibly autonomous ‘cultural’ issues (Maisano 2017). To avoid fetishizing culture, researchers must situate working-class experience and its political, cultural, social, and narrative expression in the context of always-shifting material, class relations.

Sudbury’s nickel mines are in this sense a somewhat unique case through which to study the reconstitution of working-class identity amid deindustrialization. Although there is considerable scholarship on various facets of deindustrialization across sociology, history, political economy, and geography, much of this work centers on places impacted and workers ‘displaced’ (High 2010, p. 159) by plant shutdowns or closings resulting from outsourcing, and other forms of capital flight and job loss. Much less is known about processes of making and reproducing working-class identity in areas where deindustrialization has not meant full shutdowns, so much as restructuring, foreign acquisition, and workforce reductions, as is the case in Sudbury.

Since deindustrialization was first identified as a growing socioeconomic issue in the early 1980s, literature on its causes and consequences has grown substantially (see High 2013; Strangleman & Rhodes 2014 for reviews). Originally emerging in response to the significant social dislocations caused by shuttered factories and displaced blue-collar workforces, this scholarship has grown and deepened to include wide-ranging concerns, such as deindustrialization’s cultural and psychological impacts, its historical origins and economic impetus, and labor’s efforts to resist and reform affected factories or industries. Notably, oral history approaches have brought new methodological tools and concerns to bear on the topic (Bluestone & Harrison 1982; Camp 1995; Clemens 2011; Cowie & Heathcott 2003; Dublin 1998; Dudley 1994; High 2003, 2010; High & Lewis 2007; Milkman 1997; Moody 1997; Strangleman 2007, 2013). This research has been highly interdisciplinary, in terms of the range of approaches undertaken and the questions asked.

Scholarship in which workers figure centrally as the subjects of research has also broadened the study of deindustrialization, taking up questions of race, gender, culture, affect, and loss (Altena & van der Linden 2003; Bluestone & Harrison 1982; Cowie & Heathcott 2003; Dublin 1998; Dunk 2002; Finkel 2013; Frisch & Rogovin 1993; High 2010, 2015; High & Lewis 2007; McKee 2008; Strangleman 2004). Bluestone and Harrison's (1982) classic work *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* marked a significant shift wherein deindustrialization was studied more holistically, attending to its social, communal, and personal impacts, or what the authors referred to as its 'social trauma' (Bluestone & Harrison 1982, p. 65). As a result, more of the literature has sought to place workers as active subjects at the center of political, social, and economic processes. Yet, in some cases, there persists a lack of engagement with longer processes of class formation and class reproduction, which fails to take full account of deindustrialization's place within the long history of capitalist spatial dynamics (Cowie 1999; Harvey 2006; Silver 2003).

More recently, research has emerged that offers deeper conceptual criticisms of both deindustrialization and the original studies tracing its patterns (Joshi 2002; Strangleman 2017). The latter has taken a number of forms, such as critiquing what one scholar refers to as 'smokestack nostalgia' (Strangleman 2013) for equating the longing for good jobs and economic security with romanticized portraits of industrial work (see also Hart & K'Meyer 2003; Mah 2012). Others have taken aim at the gender and racial inequalities of postwar industrialism (Sugrue 1996; Joshi 2002), as well as its environmental devastation (Hurley 1995). Scholars of culture and cultural industries have also criticized 'industrial heritage' and other forms of social remembrance for frequently expunging class and class struggle in representations of industrial work (Chan 2009; Finkel 2013; Rhodes 2013; Stanton 2006; Taksa 2003). Despite their innovative contributions, however, some of these studies have tended to lose focus on workers and class relations, specifically as they have moved to analyzing cultural, affective, and discursive representations.

This article thus has more in common with literatures on deindustrialization and working-class cultures which use oral history and memory studies as a set of theoretically informed methodological tools (Halbawachs 1992; High 2003, 2010, 2013; Passerini 2009; Portelli 1991, 1997, 2011, 2017). I seek to build on the methodological innovations of sociologists and historians employing oral history and narrative analysis strategies (Passerini 1992; Riessman 1993) in the study of deindustrialization by looking at how the gendered identities of working-class men in Sudbury have come under strain amid profound local socioeconomic change. Here my objective is to show the multiple axes across which workers narratively construct class subjectivities and reproduce identity over time.

### **The Case of Sudbury, Ontario**

Before turning to the analysis of workers' narratives about deindustrialization, this section provides some historical background on the nickel mining industry and workers in Sudbury.

Prior to the discovery of nickel in the Sudbury Basin in the 1880s,<sup>2</sup> the town of Sudbury, located in Northern Ontario, had been little more than a railway station. The town's origins and identity have thus been inextricably tied to the nickel mining industry since its rapid development in the early twentieth century (Wallace & Thomson 1993). As was the case with much of Canada's industrialization (Clement 1992) American investment played a pivotal role in establishing Sudbury's mines. In 1902 the Morgan Trust swallowed the small firms Canadian Copper Company and Orford Copper of New Jersey, and incorporated as the International Nickel Company (Inco) in New Jersey. However, over the years Inco 'Canadianized', moving 'the benevolent monopoly's' headquarters to Toronto and becoming identified in the popular imagination with Canada, and Sudbury in particular (Swift 1977, p. 28).

Nickel's applications in shipbuilding and armaments meant that the United States Army and Navy were the initial destinations for much of Sudbury's ores before other consumer uses – such as stainless steel – were later developed. By 1950, Inco was supplying 80 percent of world nickel, a position the company held until the mid-1970s (United Steel Workers of America 1987). Sudbury's large nickel deposits and strategic value, as well as the monopoly ownership structure of Inco, thus combined to create a political-economic environment in which, once workers secured labor legislation and collective bargaining rights in Canada, unions could push for relatively good compensation for their members.

The organization of nickel miners into unions, however, was a slow process. The early mining industry attracted workers from a variety of national and ethnic backgrounds, French-Canadian, Irish, Italian, and Finnish. Many of these workers were new immigrants to Canada who spoke little English, which generated fragmentation and antagonism between workers that mine bosses used to their advantage (Clement 1981). Moreover, the transient nature of life in work camps and company-provided lodgings initially militated against longer-term settlement conducive to union organization (Wallace 1993). Prior to Privy Council Order 1003 in 1944 (McCrorie 1995; Wells 1995a, 1995b), which ushered in the system of industrial relations that Tucker (2014) refers to as 'Wagnerism' in Canada, production largely took place under what Burawoy (1985) characterizes as 'market despotism', wherein 'despotic regulation of the labor process is constituted by the economic whip of the market' (Burawoy 1985, p. 122). At Inco, physical repression or long periods without work or income were enough to starve out striking workers; and before state-regulated union recognition and collective bargaining, workers had limited ability to turn periodic strikes into lasting victories (Clement 1981; Palmer 1992; Thomson 1993).

The Communist-led International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (commonly referred to as Mine-Mill) was the first union to secure a lasting organizational base among Sudbury's miners. However, after impressive growth throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, employers and governments utilized growing Cold War anti-Communism to attack Mine-Mill for its Party affiliation (Abella 1973; Lang 1995). After the U.S. Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, restricting workers' ability to strike and requiring unions to sign 'non-Communist affidavits', union leaders as well ratcheted up the purging of Communists from the labor movement throughout North America (Heron 1996, pp. 82-83; Lichtenstein 1982, pp. 238-241). The Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL, later CLC), after a series of conflicts with Mine-Mill leaders, expelled all of the union's locals from the Canadian labor federation. Mine-Mill remained the certified bargaining agent in Sudbury throughout the 1950s –

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<sup>2</sup> The discovery of ores in Sudbury is steeped in folkloric mystery. Reports of Indigenous people mining copper had circulated since as early as the 1630s, but the actual 'first' discovery of nickel in the region is the subject of multiple and competing stories (Wallace 1993, pp. 18-19).

fighting an historic but ultimately unsuccessful strike in 1958 – before eventually succumbing to the isolation and sustained barrage of Cold War hostility imposed by the broader Canadian labor movement. They were replaced by the CIO-CLC-backed United Steel Workers of America (USW) Local 6500 in 1962.

The Steel Workers' certification in Sudbury portended Inco's full integration into the postwar system of industrial pluralism. With Mine-Mill defeated, Inco was compelled to concede what other industrial employers in Canada had already been forced to accept – that collective bargaining, automatic dues check-off, legally-stipulated processes for striking and managing workplace conflict, and a general system of regularized labor-management relations was the new norm (Panitch & Swartz 2009, pp. 10-19). However, as many scholars of the postwar industrial relations system have argued (McInnis 2002; Palmer 2017; Wells 1995b), the trade-offs that unions made to procure this class compromise had lasting impacts on working-class self-organization and consciousness. Unions were made responsible for disciplining their members and, when necessary, suppressing rank-and-file militancy during the lives of collective agreements. It so happened that this task fell to USW leaders in Sudbury at the same moment that broader rank-and-file rebellions were erupting as a wave of wildcat strikes across mid-1960s Canada, led largely by young workers (Palmer 2009, pp. 229-232). Among the oldest workers interviewed in this research, this process of de-radicalization is often remembered for its substantial conflict and discouraging adjustment. Leon, who began work in 1965, remembers the 1966 wildcat strike as “scary [...] to be honest.”

A lot of guys were angry. And the union, you see, they didn't call the strike, and couldn't support it. People had shotguns they were firing at the company helicopters. I think they were just trying to scare 'em, not actually hurt anyone. But [pause] blockaded roads, the whole thing. I'd been there less than a year, and there wasn't much anybody could do in the mines about it [poor working conditions]. The union guys [elected local officials] definitely wanted it to end, for us to go back to work and wait till the next contract.<sup>3</sup>

In his autobiography, former union local president Homer Seguin also describes the militancy of the wildcatting workers:

The picket line was manned by a few guys with guns. Some of our guys broke in at the Copper Cliff Smelter. I remember this well. They took the bulldozers and pushed big boulders and blocked the highway to Inco's offices. They blocked it for days and they cut the telephone lines, some of which served the Copper Cliff hospital. They even had the overpass at Copper Cliff dynamited, all set to blow (Seguin 2008, p. 46).

Seguin, from his retrospective leadership position, however, characterizes the strike as foolhardy, conducted as it was during a minor slump in nickel and copper prices. Most importantly, he and other union leaders wanted to contain workers' effusive hostility and funnel their organized energy into the next round of bargaining in 1969. In this they were relatively successful, eventually fitting one of the more historically militant sections of the Canadian working class into the Fordist system of industrial relations.

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<sup>3</sup> Leon (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. February 12, 2015. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of interviewees.

During the next decade and a half, the union made impressive material gains, bargaining significant wage increases, extended health benefits, and eventually, a 'thirty and out' pension scheme.<sup>4</sup> However, to the degree that the union was able to bargain over issues related to work organization, it largely did so through what Russell (1999) refers to as 'job control unionism' (Russell 1999, p. 162). Rather than mount a broad challenge against deskilling and the fragmentation of the labor process, union representatives instead pursued a strategy of fairly rigid job control coupled with frequent use of the grievance system (Clement 1981). In practice, this meant that the union would bargain job classification schemes into collective agreements, and then vigilantly monitor any managerial abuse of job parameters in the workplace. Partly arising because of the way unions conceded to management the right to organize the workplace under the postwar industrial relations framework (Wells 1995b), this type of occupational policing formed a new pillar of conflict at the point of production. Employers sought flexibility and workers wanted job security, and the grievance system became the terrain on which this battle was fought. Yet, most significantly, job control unionism left unions much less able to impede or influence the iterative introduction of labor-displacing technologies.

As global economic contraction set in during the 1970s, Inco began to feel the squeeze of costly collective agreements coupled with decreased global nickel demand and consumption (Swift 1977). Given the spatial fixity of Sudbury's mineral deposits and mining infrastructure, the company pursued substantial workforce reductions through an intensive project of labor process innovations. In 1971, employment at Inco, and USW 6500 membership, peaked at 18,224, after which it began a decline, 'at first slow and irregular and then rapid and steady' (United Steel Workers of America 1987, p. 3.2). By 1986, when the Steel Workers commissioned researchers to study the impact of new mining technologies, employment at Inco had fallen to 6,518, down 63 percent from its peak fifteen years earlier (United Steel Workers of America 1987, p. 3.3). As USW's study showed, Inco had spent considerably on research and development between the early 1970s and mid-1980s, and introduced new labor-saving technologies as a direct response to union power and rising labor costs.

By the 1990s, mechanization and automation were extensive throughout the mines and refining facilities (Hall 1993), leading one commentator to describe the local workforce as 'unrecognizable' (Buse 1993, p. 277). When Brazilian conglomerate Vale Ltd purchased the mines in 2006, slightly more than 3,000 workers remained (Saarinen 2013, p. 165), this in a city and surrounding area of roughly 164,000 people (Statistics Canada 2016).

The loss of blue-collar, unionized work in Sudbury is in many respects an intensified microcosm of wider trends in Canada. From 1981 to 2012 Canadian union density declined from 37.6 percent to 29.9 percent. Because of the significant loss of union jobs in male-dominated, goods-producing sectors (manufacturing, mining, fishing, utilities, construction, oil and gas), male unionization dropped more substantially than the overall decline. While women's unionization remained constant at 31 percent due to high public sector union density in health care, education, and social services, men's unionization rates dropped from 42 to 28.5 percent (Galarneau & Sohn 2013).<sup>5</sup> As well, private sector workers fared worse than their public sector counterparts. While the unionization rate for the latter grew slightly to

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<sup>4</sup> 'Thirty and out' refers to a guaranteed, defined-benefit pension plan after thirty years of employment, irrespective of the age of first employment or retirement. This pension arrangement became the hallmark of Fordist industrial relations and business unionism, though it was secured somewhat later at Sudbury's mines than in the Steel and Auto sectors.

<sup>5</sup> However, despite the loss of male-dominated, blue-collar, union jobs – and the now higher unionization rate among women – a gender pay gap that disadvantages women remains (Vosko 2011, p. 81).

reach 71 percent by 2014, union density in the private sector fell to 15 percent, down from 18.1 percent fifteen years earlier (Statistics Canada 2018). The implications of these changes are on full display in Sudbury. A substantially weakened union has been unable to stem the growth of a pool of contingent, non-union, contract workers on whom the mining firms rely to complete various servicing and supply tasks and to fill other short-term jobs (Robinson 2005; Roth, Steedman & Condratto 2015). And, as we will explore below, a growing service sector dependent on precarious, feminized labor has transformed the regional economy, the local workforce, and the households of working-class families (Leadbeater 2008).

## **Research Methodology**

In total, 26 workers were interviewed during this research, between January 2015 and July 2018. Interviews lasted between 45 and 120 minutes, with most taking approximately 90 minutes to complete. In the interviews, workers recounted their work histories, and if applicable, those of other family members who have worked in the mines. Workers were also asked about the history of mining in Sudbury, as well as about contemporary issues at work and in mining more generally. However, in the tradition of working-class oral history (Passerini 2009; Portelli 1991; Sangster 1994; Terkel 1997), research participants were encouraged to steer the interview narrative, and interview ‘prompts’ were more frequently employed than questions from the interview schedule.

Participants ranged in age from 26 to 74 years, with an average age of 48.2, and only one worker (age 45) falling between 38 and 49 years of age. My sampling method and the hiring history at Inco/Vale likely combined to produce this distribution of ages. This is first because male working-class friendship networks tend to be ‘informal’ (Dunk 2003, p. 7), with loose parameters of inclusion. Networks of friends, though quite expansive, are usually fairly age-determined. Thus, research contacts tended to suggest additional participants close to their own ages. In addition, particular waves of hiring and attrition-based job loss (Clement 1981; Leadbeater 2008) at Inco/Vale make the age range 38 to 49 less represented in the workforce as a whole. My sampling did not intend to reflect this and does not do so in any statistically exact way. It was not my objective to produce a representative sample of workers in Sudbury, but instead to intensively explore the making of working-class identity among a subset of miners.

All interviewees were male, reflective of an industry that only quite recently began hiring women in underground jobs in any sizable number (Keck & Powell 2000). The study’s snowball sampling methodology, though not intended to exclude female informants, nevertheless contributed to this result. That no female miners were interviewed is a limitation in terms of the representativeness of the data sample, though quite instructive in terms of the analysis of masculinized working-class identity that I pursue below. Interviewees were also all ‘white’, though some retain ethnic, linguistic, or cultural affiliations that they expressed as meaningful to their identities, particularly French-Canadian and Scandinavian heritages. This is reflective of Sudbury more broadly. In contrast to Ontario as a whole where visible minorities account for 29.3 percent of the total population, in Sudbury visible minorities represent only six percent of the population (Statistics Canada 2016). Finally, I intended this research to focus on rank-and-file workers, not elected union officials. Though I am attentive to the relationships between union structures, institutional forms, and working-class identity, I am concerned with ‘workers’ more broadly conceived, not simply their elected representatives. Of the 26 interviewees, only five had

ever held a position in their union local. Four had held health and safety committee positions, and one was previously elected to an executive leadership position.

During data interpretation I treated single interview narrative analysis and thematic coding across the interview data as in conversation with one another. But in developing the arguments that follow, I have attempted to situate the interview text within its social context by reading it against the political economy of mining in Sudbury and the histories of labor and gender, both regionally and nationally. As I understand it, working-class men in Sudbury construct and perform their identities within this complex interplay between social relations and narrative expression.

### **Gender in the Making of Working-Class Identity**

Mining in Sudbury has been and continues to be heavily male-dominated. During nickel mining's early history in the region, male workers often lived without spouses or children in mining camps, and low wages made sending money to often distant 'dependents' difficult (Clement 1981). However, as in the coal mining regions of Appalachia, mine owners encouraged family settlement under the assumption that the presence of wives and children would discourage strike activity and alcohol consumption among the working men (Portelli 2011; Yarrow 1991). As retired worker Bob Miner put it in his oral history with Wayne Roberts (1979), 'most miners who grew up in this camp and raised families felt the same way as I did. I'd have sooner broken my boys' legs than see them work in the mines' (Roberts 1979, p. 4). Miner was not alone in his longing for escape from the dangerous working conditions at the mines, or in his gendered conception of who would likely constitute the next generation of workers, i.e. the 'boys'. Many miners with whom I spoke also expressed a desire to see their sons and other relatives find work outside the industry. Yet, despite this sentiment, they frequently describe themselves and older relatives taking mining jobs as a means to 'raise a family'. In this way, mining becomes masculinized in workers' narratives through the duties of family responsibility and economic provision. Despite an ostensibly widespread desire among many workers to see their children pursue work elsewhere, whether due to lack of opportunity or because of the relatively good compensation that unionized mining could secure, work at the mines has frequently been intergenerational.

Brad, a third-generation miner, recited a comical illustration of the family provider narrative,

I still remember. Dad would tell this story all the time. His dad had passed, young. He [Brad's father] quit school and was gonna work in the mine, there. But he was a tiny guy, hardly weighed nothing, and he was too young, you know? So, he eats like two bushels of bananas before he's supposed to have the physical and get weighted and all that. Well, he gets there, and he's stuffed, right. And the, Christ, they're like 'oh sorry, we don't have time to see you today. You'll have to come back tomorrow'. So, he did the whole thing again the next day! Got the job though.<sup>6</sup>

This story, though told as an entertaining tale about the length to which Brad's father went in order to be hired by Inco and assist his widowed mother, also nicely exemplifies the way that many interviewees' stories about work in the mines draw on notions of masculine obligation. Similarly, the way that twenty-eight-year old Yves discussed his father's stories about unionized mine work also illustrates how these stories shaped Yves' ideas about working-class masculinity,

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<sup>6</sup> Brad (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury ON. February 13, 2015.

Dad talking to us about the mines for sure had an impact on me growing up. I definitely looked up to him, and to a lot of his buddies who were working at Inco and would be around our house. [...] I remember that the shiftwork was sometimes an issue with my mom. But it was obviously hard on him too. It's hard on anyone, plus, add to it that you're doing hard, physical labor, right. But yeah, I think him working there shaped what I thought about working later on, like I thought of it as a good-paying job, you could get ahead, the union was there to protect guys. And *he was able to take care of us* and everything (emphasis mine).<sup>7</sup>

From his experience growing up in a working-class household with a gendered division of labor Yves derived a picture of economic stability built upon the waged labor of a 'breadwinning' man (Forrest 1995). Many workers interviewed during this research utilize this 'typical' gender order as a measure of working-class material security. The ability of a single (male) job to sustain a household functions as a yardstick against which to measure work's value, and additionally provides a normative contrast to the growing supply of precarious jobs in the local economy.

As Yves also mentions, shiftwork played a role in solidifying the contours of gender relations in mining households. Male shiftwork increased the already disproportionate share of household labor performed by women. As many workers' narratives suggest, however, the work of social reproduction included more than the physical and material reproduction of husbands and children. Working-class women, whether they worked for wages outside the home or not, frequently supplied emotional labor as a palliative for the harsh working conditions of nickel mining and the iterative stresses of class conflict in a region so heavily dependent on the work of resource extraction. As retired miner Walter remembers, 'I think I was pretty open with the wife about my job. It was tough going sometimes, so I could talk about that at home. She was a big help often times'.<sup>8</sup> Walter emphasized throughout our interview how frequently he told his wife and children stories about work. By doing so he figuratively brought the workplace home, affirmed his place in the gender division of labor, aired his frustrations, and often obtained necessary emotional support. Such examples poignantly demonstrate how a certain portrait of working-class male stoicism in which difficult working conditions or periods of economic hardship are faced down without excessive complaint was in many respects sustained by the affective labor of women in the 'hidden abode' (Fraser 2014, p. 55) of the home.

A gendered division of labor centered on male waged labor and female social reproductive work became even more entrenched through the structures of postwar bureaucratic unionism and the forms that social and employment policy took under Canada's welfare state. Like the United States, Canada's industrial relations system – once it provided for union security – was based on decentralized bargaining units, for the most part at the workplace level. Under these circumstances, unions were far more likely to form in large, industrial, and thus male-dominated workplaces. Because women in paid employment were more likely to be in small firms, engaged in service sector work, and to exit and re-enter the labor market, they were largely excluded from the benefits of private sector unionization (Cameron 1995). At the levels of employment and social policy, governments further reinforced gender inequality in the labor market by structuring state-provided social protections and benefits around the 'standard employment relationship' of full-time, permanent work with a single employer (Vosko 2011). As a result, many working-class women either only had access to these social protections through a male partner, or had limited or no access to them because of their positions in the secondary labor market. These gendered legacies persist,

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<sup>7</sup> Yves (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. June 27, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Walter (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. May 19, 2015.

both in terms of unions' difficulties organizing in the growing service sector of smaller firms and variegated ownership structures (Coulter 2014); and also in the falling rates of access for such things as unemployment benefits, as the supposedly 'secondary' forms of work typically performed by women become the new norm in a service-dominated labor market (Porter 2003).

Gender also figured prominently in the building of industrial unions and the shaping of male working-class identity. When describing the struggles to improve work, pay, and safety in Sudbury's mines, many workers relied on narratives that centered the role of men as 'natural' breadwinners deserving of the rights of industrial unionism. Access to unionization took on the tone of a masculine demand, a means through which to attain the status of 'the family breadwinner'. As Anne Forrest (1995) summarizes,

Before World War II the practice of collective bargaining had been limited to a small minority of predominantly craft workers, and only they had been assured of a wage sufficient to support a dependent wife and children comfortably. The 1940s, by contrast, was a decade in which unskilled and semi-skilled men sought to broaden the boundaries of that privileged group. Union representation was the means by which working-class men asserted their claim to the status of family breadwinner (p. 143).

Workers interviewed during this research who were old enough to recount early struggles to secure union recognition emphasized the difference unionization made to their household incomes, usually meaning that their spouses could remain outside of the paid labor force. Seventy-two-year old Leon, for instance, recounted how 'being union' provided his family with what he described as 'independence',

Oh yeah, you see, before the Steel Workers, the guys couldn't say nothing. Inco ruled the roost in Sudbury. When I started, the union [the USW] was getting going, you know, finally getting the men what they deserved. For example, we lived in a company house, an 'Inco house'. But being union, you know, wages went up, my wife could be stay-at-home, you know, with the kids, and we could buy the house ourselves, own it outright, you know? That was a big deal at the time. For a working man to own his house, it gave us independence. Didn't feel like I was owned by the company.<sup>9</sup>

For Leon, unionization, home ownership, and a 'stay-at-home' wife were intimately intertwined. The battle to gain material security through strong union contracts was equally a means to solidify a normative family structure that simultaneously affirmed the dignity of 'working men' and shielded women from the paid labor force.

As Stephen Meyer (2016) brilliantly shows in his history of auto workers, masculinity underwent profound reinvention in the spaces of industrial work and unionism. The masculine dignity and male dominance that unionization and the family wage provided, in many respects, compensated for the class subordination and loss of skill and control men experienced at work. As workers resisted the alienation and subordination that characterized blue-collar, working-class life, they drew upon and reproduced other gendered (and often racialized) systems of oppression in the process of making their class

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<sup>9</sup> Leon (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. February 12, 2015.

identities.<sup>10</sup> Strikes, union campaigns, or work stoppages to defend union gains thus frequently took on a masculinized tone. This continues to be the case among miners in Sudbury. When Brazilian multinational Vale purchased Inco in 2006 and entered contract negotiations with the union in 2009, it became clear that the new owners sought significant concessions from workers in the areas of pensions, bonuses, and workplace control – particularly around the use of contract laborers (King 2017; Peters 2010). When narrating episodes from the year-long strike that followed in 2009-10, workers often recounted stories that highlighted the strike's most conflictual or even near-violent moments. For example, Dale, a mechanic, describes a confrontation he had on the picket line,

I was fired up on the line last strike. I mean, they were shipping product out. Never before had I seen that. I got right up the side of the truck with this guy, told him to 'get out' if he thinks he's tough enough. There's a tradition here of dealing with scabs, in my opinion. Driving a truck to haul product [pause] that, to me, is no different. We shouldn't stand for it.<sup>11</sup>

Other interviewees, upset with what they saw as a lack of resolve among many of their fellow members during a long and ultimately unsuccessful strike, contrasted the apparent 'softness' of the lines in 2009 with other historical examples which, to them, better exemplified how the union once made and protected material gains. 'I mean, scabs, guys used to know how to deal with that. You'd find tacks in your driveway or spray-paint on your garage door', Charles remarked.<sup>12</sup> As well, Alain contrasted 'older times when the company shut down production, and the men held hard on the line until the fight was done' with how 'soft the lines were last time'. 'The company keep up production, yeah, they did. Trucks were in and out, and we couldn't stop them', he remembered.<sup>13</sup>

However, generational tensions emerged around the question of contract labor. For the older workers in the sample, 'scabbing' by 'hauling product' or servicing equipment during a strike is among the most reprehensible things one can do. As Larry, a middle-aged miner, expressed it,

I mean, contractors, as far as I'm concerned – and many other guys would tell you the same – they're scabs. No two ways about it. 'Rent-a-miners' we call 'em. Yeah, if their tools go missing, or someone pisses in their gear, I don't feel too bad about it.<sup>14</sup>

Doug, another retiree, framed his assessment of contract laborers who worked during the strike in explicitly gendered language,

Look, it's like this: there's a history here, a tradition. Guys came before and fought like hell to have a union, to have all these things, like a pension and a decent living. This new company comes in and basically says 'to hell with us', and then a bunch of guys, as far as I see it, they're helping 'em [the company]. 'Man up', really! I know times are tough for a lot of guys, but you don't take away from what we built.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Classic studies employing ethnographic methods such as Dunk (2003) and Willis (1981) have made this point with particular sharpness. Palmer's (1988) essay "'What the Hell?'" Or Some Comments on Class Formation and Cultural Reproduction' remains an excellent theoretical exploration of the links between male, working-class alienation and culture.

<sup>11</sup> Dale (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. February 12, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Charles (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. June 28, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Alain (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. February 10, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Larry (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. June 30, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Doug (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. June 30, 2017.

For Doug and many other workers, the long-term restructuring of the mining industry in Sudbury represents an assault on a way of life. In their opinions, some younger contract workers are insufficiently attentive to how their individual actions may be contributing to the erosion of collective material security. To them, a lack of solidarity with fellow miners is an ‘un-manly’ comportment.

Yet, because younger workers are often employed as contractors prior to gaining full-time, union jobs – if they ever do – they tend to see their actions differently.

Like, I was that guy [a contractor] and I was just trying to work, you know? From my perspective, I’d done worse jobs. I get that the union – and I got it then – was trying to protect guys, but, to me, the issue is with the boss, not the guy [contractors] just trying to earn a living.<sup>16</sup>

Many young workers, like Ryan, have direct experience of the fraying of the labor market in the mining industry and beyond in Sudbury. Additionally, difficult union concessions, such as two-tier wage and pension schemes, tend to generate inequalities between workers of different ages. As a result, these young workers see their individual actions as simply necessary under the given circumstances. However, what is especially noteworthy is the way that masculinity figures in both of the above narratives. For older workers, solidarity and collective action through the union are positioned as both masculine in their form, and as necessary to preserve a particular family structure. For younger workers, on the other hand, precarious employment has redefined the masculine obligation. In a slack labor market with less room for upward advance, and without the collective protections that a strong union presence once provided, young workers need to ‘do what needs to be done’, as Dave put it, in reference to his time working for a contracting firm. This is especially the case when the insecurity of mining work and the rising cost of living have further necessitated two household incomes. As we will see in the following section, young miners frequently complain about the working-time, pay, and conditions that their female partners encounter in the local service sector economy.

### **Male Working-Class Identity and Female Waged Labor**

Labor’s integration within the postwar industrial relations system buttressed a gendered social division of labor in Sudbury, and further circumscribed women’s labor market opportunities (Keck & Powell 2000). The ‘breadwinner model’ either restricted women to the unpaid labor of social reproduction, or largely consigned them to insecure, and often poorly paid, work in the secondary labor market. In the process, the gendered occupational identities of male miners became tied to the ‘good jobs’ of this gender division of labor between workplace and home (Luxton 1990). It is therefore common to hear working-class men describe married women’s work outside the home as largely supplementary, secondary to social reproductive work, and certainly subordinate to the primary wage-earning of men. For example, Tim, a miner in his early fifties, positioned his wife’s work at home when their children were young, and her later work outside the home, as choices made in the context of his secure, union job and wages.

Inco meant a good-paying job you could support a family on. Mining wasn’t just automatically a ‘good job’, right. Having a union made it that way. My wife could stay home and be with the

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<sup>16</sup> Ryan (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. February 11, 2015.

kids and that. Once they got a little older, she worked a bit, but things were pretty much taken care of.<sup>17</sup>

However, as workplace restructuring, the loss of secure mining jobs, and the growth of precarious employment have transformed the regional economy, it is along the gender division of labor where we can detect some of the greatest impacts. For example, younger workers who began work as contractors in less secure positions told stories about how their partners have worked various, usually precarious or contingent, jobs. When these men secured full-time, unionized jobs at the mines, some of their female partners left paid employment while others continued. According to workers' narratives, negotiating these transitions has at times been contentious. Below James describes how his wife combined online retail sales with care responsibilities in the home when he was working as a contractor. According to James, she continues this work, though as his laugh at his wife's meagre earnings indicates, James does not consider her paid work central to their household.

Like, when I was contract, things weren't as good. We weren't struggling, struggling, but it was tough sometimes [pause] mainly because I didn't know what was going to happen a lot. We had the kids then, you know, and that's when [his wife] starting doing the online sales stuff [selling beauty supplies]. It wasn't bringing in huge money or anything, obviously [laughs]. But it helped, and it worked at the time with the kids not being in school. She keeps it going still.<sup>18</sup>

In our interview, James positioned his wife's income as secondary despite the lower pay he was receiving during the time when he was 'contract'. Yet, her lesser income was certainly not 'supplementary' in the sense of it being non-essential to their total household income. Later, James admitted, 'there were definitely times when the online money kept the ship sailing'. The partial deindustrialization of the nickel mines, the growth of contract labor, and the spread of service sector employment have necessitated dual incomes for many working-class families in the region – a process hardly uncommon across North America. However, working-class identity among male miners remains gendered and wedded to male-dominated employment and income generation. In our conversation, James did not consider his wife's experience servicing the needs of online customers as in any way comparable to his own work situation where, according to him, he often deals with controlling managers and other representatives of his new, multinational boss. For James, his wife's experience is not a *classed* experience in the same sense in which work is for him. This is not only because her class situation is somewhat obscured by its ostensibly 'freelance' veneer, i.e. that she can manage her own time and work from home. Other young workers with working spouses in more recognizable employment relationships also engaged in similar characterizations of their partners' labor force participation. Such characterizations reveal, rather, the ways that these working-class men think about class and work. For them, working-class identity is structured by the particular social relations of industrial employment, i.e. its full-time status, its occupational characteristics, unionization, and, notably, its male-dominance.

For example, Anthony described how his wife worked in retail during the time when he could only obtain contract employment. To him, her employment was temporary, a necessity only because his income at the time was insufficient to provide her a labor market exit option. During our interview, Anthony contrasted his wife's non-union job at a health food and supplement store – where she had to

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<sup>17</sup> Tim (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. February 10, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> James (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. February 10, 2015.

deal with a difficult boss – to his current unionized job at the mine, and then indicated that he is pleased that she no longer works there.

Well, when I was still working for contractors, that's when [his wife] started working in town [in Sudbury], working at [a vitamin/health shop]. We needed two incomes, you know. My money was good but it sometimes wasn't steady, that's the problem. She had a shitty boss and it wasn't a good job. Like, I kind of felt bad she was there at the time. I was glad when she quit.<sup>19</sup>

Anthony recognized the ways in which the lack of collective voice in his wife's workplace rendered her vulnerable to the dictates of her unscrupulous boss. He also described the difference his wife's paid employment made to their overall well-being. Yet, for him, her employment was a necessary evil only to tide their finances over until he was able to secure full-time work underground. Unionized male employment, in many of the narratives of working-class men, remains a path to 'breadwinner' status and a means through which to 'protect' working-class women from the vagaries of the low-wage labor market. Class – as both a social relation and an individual identification – derives from male employment. The historic attachment of class identity to the industrial unionism of the postwar order prevents many working-class men from considering their spouses' waged labor in comparable class terms to their own. As Anthony described it, his wife did not so much need a union at her job, but an exit option from employment altogether.

Because Anthony eventually acquired a union position, he and his wife had the option of her leaving paid employment; for most young working-class families, labor market exit is not viable. Moreover, in a regional economy where stable blue-collar work no longer occupies the central place it once did, the historic ties between unions and working-class life are unravelling. The experiences of precarious work in the service and retail economy and the growth of insecure, contract work in the mining sector are part of the same process. Both are representative of the ways that neoliberal capitalism has shifted more of the burden of both maintaining corporate competitiveness and of social reproduction onto the backs of working-class families. However, male miners, by and large, do not express their experiences in these terms. Class, in their expressions, remains affectively gendered, which haunts not only their narrative constructions of working-class identity, but also any effort to reconstitute working-class power across sectoral boundaries. The partial deindustrialization of Sudbury is then not solely about the loss of particular, male-dominated, 'breadwinning' jobs. This economic transformation is also registered in the narrative accounts of male workers as they cling to a bounded and historically-contingent characterization of working-class identity, even as this impedes an understanding of the forces which transform their lives, as well as those of workers of all genders in the region.

### **Re-imagining the Working Class, and the Limitations of Masculinity**

Thousands of lost jobs and the growth of precarious employment have transformed Sudbury's regional economy over the last several decades, redrawing class relations at the mines and in the broader community in the process. However, these structural changes have not translated into significant efforts to rebuild organized working-class power. In part, institutional impediments such as Wagnerism's system of decentralized bargaining account for organized labor's inability to make lasting inroads into the retail and service sectors. Industrial unions, such as the United Steel Workers, although they have begun to organize among social service providers, have not been able or willing to invest the resources necessary

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<sup>19</sup> Anthony (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. May 18, 2015.

to build union footholds in the private service and retail sectors. In 2018, Canadian union density in wholesale and retail trade stood at 12.4 percent, while accommodation and food services remained at just over six percent (Statistics Canada 2018). Unionized female workers are common in public health care and educational services, and public administration, but among the working-class interviewees in this research (whose female partners, when in the paid labor force, worked almost entirely in the private service sector), there was no female union membership. The result is a highly gendered conception of being working-class among the men interviewed during this study, where their long-term commitment to work is distinguished from women's supposedly weak attachments to the labor force.

Other historical legacies persist as well, haunting the narrative pictures of class conflict that working-class men paint. For many workers, it is not only that class struggle has been a decidedly masculine affair and a mechanism through which to secure male dignity; it is rather the case that women played an instrumental role in the struggle for union security and working-class welfare. But, according to this narrative, women played a subordinate or supportive role. Women are not absent from the history of male workers' long struggle to improve the conditions of labor in the mines. Rather, their support was vital, though ancillary. They were there in the Women's Auxiliary, providing food or warm clothing during strikes, and in the homes of working-class men, finding creative ways to make food stretch over long periods in which picket pay was the only source of income. As Luxton (1990) shows, women have historically played an integral part in the union's social and cultural life in Sudbury. Their organized participation in the ten-month strike at Inco in 1978-79 – as well as the union's conflicts with the 'Women Supporting the Strike' committee – is also brilliantly captured in the 1980 film *A Wives' Tale*. Yet, this secondary role accords women, in the narratives of working-class men, only partial agency, their primary interest remaining to provide assistance to the struggles of working men. Within this narrative framework, it becomes difficult to imagine working-class women responding to the conditions of precarious employment with collective resistance directed toward addressing their own workplace interests.

In other ways, however, when working-class men recount the various struggles to improve mining work, they present a more dubious account of women's contributions to this objective. According to some workers, for example, women had a tendency to equivocate in the face of employer aggression. Perhaps the clearest example of women's ambiguous impact on strike action appears in men's stories about the 1958 Mine-Mill strike, which is also remembered as the death knell of the Communist-led union. Miners' wives in the Women's Auxiliary were heavily involved in the strike. In response, local politicians attempted to undermine the union by dividing the organized women from the striking men. As several older workers tell it, the mayor of Sudbury at the time, playing on male anxieties about socially-engaged wives, called a meeting with the Women's Auxiliary to discuss the strike. To the surprise of those in attendance, the local media subsequently quoted the mayor as saying the Women's Auxiliary had voted in favor of ending the strike – a claim that the women vociferously denied. However, the myth that 'the women' publicly undermined the 1958 strike persists (Luxton 1990). Examples such as this also shape a view among some working-class men which sees women as less committed than men to unions and potentially unreliable during periods of class conflict. Again, stories such as these highlight the difficulties many men in this study faced in adapting their historical understanding of working-class identity to the changing gender composition of the local workforce.

The persistence of a gendered class identity among some male miners' results also from the class dynamics during the period when women first entered the mining workforce. Although nickel mining

remains male-dominated, beginning in the late 1970s, women did start to obtain jobs underground and in the mineral processing facilities in small numbers. Many of these women had to struggle against reluctant and obfuscating male human resources personnel in order to be hired, as well as recalcitrant male managers and supervisors once at work (Keck & Powell 2000). However, it was not only men in positions of power who presented an obstacle to female employment at the mines; harassment from male coworkers was also a significant issue. Retired miner Walter, remembers, ‘oh, it was bad in the beginning. I admit, I wasn’t fond of the idea [women in the mines] at first. But I came around, and now some of the best people in there are ladies. But, boy, some fellas really gave ‘em a hard time’.<sup>20</sup> Although a large portion of the harsh response to women working underground was a result of sexist attitudes among the men, the class conflict during the period in which women began working in the mines must also be part of the explanation. Female employment increased concomitantly with the technical reorganization of production at Inco and the precipitous job loss which this entailed. Thus, in some respects, a class conflict over how to manage the introduction of labor-saving technologies became partially expressed as a gender conflict. As job losses mounted through attrition and periodic lay-offs throughout the 1980s and 90s, male miners interpreted the growth in female miners as labor market competition. Brad, for example, remarked that his father had often complained about women in the mines, stating, ‘he was like “I’ve got buddies who have gone elsewhere [to other jobs] but all these women are getting hired”’. In some cases, men understand the influx of women into the workforce at Inco/Vale as a microcosm of issues in the labor force as a whole. How working-class men interpret labor market competition and class solidarity is shot through with the historical legacy of class and gender relations in Sudbury.

## Conclusion

Through an analysis of 26 in-depth, oral history interviews with male nickel miners in Sudbury, Ontario, this article has explored how the organization of unionized labor and social reproductive work facilitated the constitution and reproduction of a masculinized working-class identity. With the partial deindustrialization of Sudbury’s mines, growing precarious employment in both the mining industry and the regional economy has re-made the gender composition of the local workforce. For men in this study – particularly the young workers with female partners in paid employment – these changes to work and home have placed their masculinized class identity under considerable strain.

The persistence of a circumscribed male working-class identity, though partly reproduced through the social networks of working-class men (Dunk 2003), is also the legacy of the postwar industrial relations system and social policy framework of the Canadian welfare state. A dual model of labor market regulation (Cameron 1995; Fudge 2005; Vosko 2011) meant that male workers had much greater access to unionization, collective bargaining, and employer-based benefits, as well as greater coverage through the ostensibly universal social insurance programs provided by the state, such as unemployment insurance and old age pensions. Nonstandard workers (part-time employees, contract workers, and temporary staff), who were and remain disproportionately female, were relegated to a low-wage secondary labor market, had limited access to benefits and state supports, and were made dependent on poorly enforced minimum employment standards legislation designed precisely not to trouble low-wage employers (Thomas 2004). As employment in the primary sector has shrunk, and employers and governments engage in sustained attacks on unionized workers’ pay and employment conditions (Panitch & Swartz 2003), the Canadian labor market is increasingly characterized by nonstandard – and

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<sup>20</sup> Walter (pseudonym). Interview by author, Sudbury, ON. May 19, 2015.

often feminized – service sector work (Vosko & Clark 2009). Sudbury is in many ways exemplary of these changes to work and labor in Canada.

Generating solidarity under these circumstances is difficult. As unionized workers in the primary sector fight to protect the relative privileges they still possess, their fights often take the form of limiting women's access to the shrinking preserve of union security. Male workers in this study often expressed such sentiments. By contrast, when workers in the service sector struggle to raise the standards and protections at the bottom of the labor market, they face the institutional challenges perpetuated by labor market dualism and bureaucratic unionism (Camfield 2011; Coles & Yates 2012; Pupo & Thomas 2009).

A contradiction lies at the heart of working-class identity as I have characterized it in this study. On the one hand, the male workers in this study draw on a highly gendered class identity in the process of making solidarity meaningful and durable over time. On the other hand, it is precisely this circumscribed articulation of class identity that limits class formation across gender and sector, and in turn, constrains working-class agency as the material conditions that gave rise to the postwar class compromise come undone. Untying the knots of class and gender remain a daunting but necessary task for these workers if they are to confront the challenges posed by deindustrialization and the growth of precarious employment in Sudbury.

### Author Bio

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