

ASPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY COURTSHIP  
IN A RURAL NEWFOUNDLAND COMMUNITY

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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KATHRYN MARY KIMIECIK









**ASPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY COURTSHIP IN  
A RURAL NEWFOUNDLAND COMMUNITY**

**BY**

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**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate  
Studies in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts**

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**St. John's  
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**22 September 1987**

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ISBN 0-315-39469-2

## Abstract

In this thesis, rural Newfoundland courtship is treated, not as one stage on the way towards engagement or marriage, but as a system of behavior that may be divided into marital and non-marital courtship. Male-female relationships in Newfoundland are characterized by strong nonverbal expressions. These expressions and correlated behavior may be referred to as a code of courtship behavior.

This behavior takes place in various contexts, most notably, at dances or when walking along community roads. Each of these contexts determines behavior specific to the structure of the event. The dances are a primary source of opposite sex interaction. "Walking the roads" is an evening's stroll along roads and lanes whereby young adults and adolescents come together to socialize and to confirm or deny mutual interest. Each of these social events is conducive for male-female interaction on both a group and individual level. Nonverbal signals are used to convey messages of interest and to encourage or discourage a potential partner, whether it is for sexual or emotional gratification.

Love and friendship poetry is analyzed as it exists in one rural community but especially for one young man who has been both recipient and author of such poems. Relationships between author and recipient are of paramount importance as is the relationship between recipient and the third party to whom a poem is shown. Adolescent poetry is an intensely private tradition and its functions exemplify this. The poetry maintains the privacy so absolutely necessary for the conveyance of such intimate emotions without disturbing community standards.

Newfoundland courtship communication is perhaps most indicative of a culture's desire for nonvocality when dealing with sensitive topics. In order for participants in courtship to communicate successfully an intricate and elaborate code of nonverbal signals is used.

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## Acknowledgements

I'd first like to thank the School of Graduate Studies at Memorial for awarding me a fellowship in 1984-1986, and Dr. Chris Sharpe and Dr. Gerald Thomas for their assistance in granting me a bursary for the Fall of 1986. Thanks also to the Institute for Social and Economic Research at Memorial for awarding me a research grant to complete my fieldwork in the Fall of 1985.

John and Dorothy Kimiecik, my parents, have been a constant source of, if at times, dubious encouragement. I thank them for making a trip here during the summer of 1985 so that they might share with me the Newfoundland I had come to think of as a second home. For me the most important part of their trip was the opportunity for them to meet my closest friends in Welch's Cove. I thank also my sister Sandy for countless phone conversations and for my parents' permission to use their phone credit card.

---

Especially important to me was the support of Jerry Pocius who encouraged me to undertake the research for this topic. Without his generosity and support I would not have attempted to use my own experiences with the people of Welch's Cove as a starting point for the research. His enthusiasm for this project never seemed to cease as did mine upon occasion, and for that I thank him.

I thank my first supervisor, Martin Lovelace, for unequivocal editorial work on very early stages of this thesis and for never failing to hide from me in the hallway when he didn't want to see me. It's ok, Martin, I would have too.

Larry Small took over supervisory duties when Martin finally got his sabbatical, and I thank him for his words of wisdom and his keen sensitivity when encouraging me to write the truth, even when it hurt.

Phil Hiscock volunteered to read later drafts of my thesis and I cannot express how deeply his sincerity and academic excellence have benefited me in the actual writing. Phil finally convinced me that my personal experiences in Welcher's Cove were critical enough as part of the overall data and should be included in the thesis. His enthusiasm never ever waned and was important to me during a very exhausting stage. Thank you, Phil.

To all my classmates, but especially, my dear friends Clara Murphy and Lynn MacDonald, I say three down, three to go. May you never get computer burnout.

Clara, Lynn, Barbara Reiti and David Buchan all gave editorial advice on various papers that I have presented related to this study and whose suggestions have been implemented into the thesis.

Thanks also to Sharon Cochrane and Linda Kirby (Dept. of Folklore secretaries) for putting up with me for four years of phone use, "Can I have the keys, please?" and all the little stuff.

There are countless people who have made my stay in Newfoundland bearable, as there are countless people who have talked to me about my research, encouraging me and giving me ideas. Paul Foley, Trevor Bell and Dan Hart shared many an argument and a beer with me all the while never letting me forget that I am a human being first and a researcher second. With his financial support Paul made a trip to the 1986 AFS meeting in Baltimore possible and for that I am very deeply grateful.

Trevor Bell, well, he's an Irishman who makes up his own proverbs as the need arises and who spent one memorable afternoon with me in Welcher's Cove.



I hereby acknowledge taking advantage of Trevor's generosity and knowledge of the computer system. I owe the successful completion of all of the Tables and Figures, and, most importantly, the actual print out of this thesis, wrung from some mystical laser printer, to his help, even though he was busy with his own thesis. Thank you, Trevor.

Martha MacDonald, Marie-Annick Desplanques, Delf Hohmann, John Cousins, Diane Tye, Elke Dettmer, Ian McKinnon (Cape Breton), David Foy, Morgiana Halley, and Bridget Noonan were other friends and students who were studying folklore while I was living in St. John's. Each one has been, in their own distinctive way, subjected to the pains and the pleasures of writing this thesis during all its hideous stages. More important perhaps was their friendship while I was taking courses or just hanging around.

Cheers go to the Department of Geography graduate students, Barbara Dowsley, Jackie Gallagher, Ngiap Puoy Koh, and Trevor Bell, for allowing me unofficial use of some of their office space when it got down to the wire, and for other things I am unable to mention. These little things meant an awful lot to me. Thanks, guys.

To my second family in Welcher's Cove, I am sorry that I cannot acknowledge you by name, but be forewarned that you haven't seen the last of me yet.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. Courtship in the Social Sciences

Courtship is any behavior between individuals of opposite sex that facilitates mating.<sup>1</sup>

The above definition, taken from an ecology text book, expresses a perspective that initially seems rather stark and scientific. Courtship studies of species other than man are often easier to find in the literature than those devoted to human beings. However, this very fact can tell us a good deal about ourselves. Comparisons of human and non-human courtship, particularly between humans and primates, offer valuable distinctions between what may be biological urges and what are cultural adaptations.<sup>2</sup> Birdwhistell points out a common ground for such comparisons:

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<sup>1</sup>Robert E. Ricklefs, *Ecology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Chiron Press, 1979) 267.

<sup>2</sup>Jane Goodall, in what is probably the most extensive analysis of primate (chimpanzees) behavior, describes symbolic vocal and non-vocal courtship signals as they relate to mating and sexual receptivity. Among these signals are "direct gaze" and "bipedal swagger." See Jane Goodall, *The Chimpanzees of Gombe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986) 133, 447-450, and 556-557. Diane Fossey, in her study of the mountain gorilla writes, "As is typical of young gorilla females, Pantay became rather coquettish when flaunting her newly acquired sexual prowess." See Diane Fossey, *Gorillas in the Mist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983) 74; see also George B. Schaller, *The Mountain Gorilla: Ecology and Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 275-289; and Vernon Reynolds, "Friendship Among the Primates," in Elliot Leyton, ed. *The Compact: The Selected Dimensions of Friendship* Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies 3 (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1974) 33-41.

To be viable members of their social groupings, fish, birds, mammals, and man must engage in significant symbolization -- must learn to recognize, receive, and send ordered messages. In other words, the individual must learn to behave in appropriate ways which permit the other members of the group to recognize and anticipate his behavior.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary rural courtship is virtually a non-existent field of study.

Sociological courtship research peaked in the 1950s but was almost exclusively concerned with middle class and/or college students.<sup>4</sup> Anthropologists have emphasized primitive societies' elaborate courtship ritual as it pertained to engagement ceremonies often based on economic exchange,<sup>5</sup> while in folklore the perspective has been historically based.<sup>6</sup> While these studies are useful, they are also limited. The main link among these three disciplines is the underlying assumption that courtship is but one stage on the way towards marriage and that *successful* courtship leads to marriage while those relationships that do not end in marriage are often deemed *unsuccessful*, and simply classified as pre-marital

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<sup>3</sup>Ray L. Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context; Essays on Body Motion Communication* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970) 74.

<sup>4</sup>For example, see Willard Waller, "The Rating and Dating Complex," *American Sociological Review* 2 (1937): 727-734; Willard Waller, *The Family* (New York: The Cordon Press, 1938); Samuel Lowrie, "Dating Theories and Student Responses," *American Sociological Review* 16 (1951): 335-340; Robert O. Blood, "A Retest of Waller's Rating Complex," *Marriage and Family Living* 17 (1955): 41-47. A good exception to this approach is William Foote Whyte, "A Slum Sex Code," *American Journal of Sociology* 49 (1943): 24-31.

<sup>5</sup>See for example; Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957; orig. pub. 1929) 65-92; Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Family Among the Australian Aborigines* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963) 34-68; Adriette B. Weiner, *Women of Value, Men of Renown; New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976); F. E. Williams, *Orokaia Society* (Oxford University Press, 1969; orig. pub. 1930); Douglas Oliver, *Two Tahitian Villages: A Study in Comparison* (Lale, Hawaii: The Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1981); and J. L. Comaroff, ed., *The Meaning of Marriage Payments* (London: Academic Press, 1980).

<sup>6</sup>Hilda Murray, "The Traditional Role of Women in a Newfoundland Fishing Community," MA. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1972.

sexual behavior. This attitude is pervasive in the early literature and as a result there is a great void in the study of courtships that do not culminate in marriage.

Marriage, even mating, need not be the determining factor of a successful courtship. By emphasizing the concept of courtship to include those relationships that have been previously defined as "unsuccessful" one need not interpret courtship on a success-failure basis. This perspective then, enables the researcher to study relationships that do not end in marriage as entities in and of themselves. This is the underlying concept which guides this study.

In anthropological literature, theories of courtship are often based upon the work of early anthropologists like Malinowski, Mead, and Westermarck.<sup>7</sup> The general anthropological trend in the study of pre-marital male-female relationships presented by Westermarck, treats courtship as a manifestation of selective mating and as such, Darwinism plays an important role in the development of this perspective.<sup>8</sup> As to the existence of courtship, Malinowski offers this concise explanation:

Courtship, mating and pregnancy lead in animal and man to the same end: the birth of the offspring.<sup>9</sup>

Explicit in this view is that the propagation of the species is the predominant reason for courtship. Where humans are concerned, Malinowski elaborates:

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<sup>7</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Societies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953; orig. pub. 1927); Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 5th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Allerton, 1922); Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (New York: Mentor Books, 1956; orig. pub. 1928); Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York: Mentor Books, 1962; orig. pub. 1935).

<sup>8</sup> Westermarck, *Human Marriage* I; see also Malinowski, *Sex and Repression* 225.

<sup>9</sup> Malinowski, *Sex and Repression* 207.



The concrete forms of courtship, matrimony, and parenthood vary with the culture and the forces by which they shape human behavior are no longer mere instincts but habits into which man has been educated by tradition.<sup>10</sup>

Custom, or in Malinowski's terms, "habits," can be understood as an action which fulfills a need.

Experimental studies indicate that particular modes of action become habitual when they prove reasonably effective in gratifying recurring wants. Once these actions are perceived to be effective, there is a felt need to perform them whenever circumstances give rise to the wants with which they have become associated.<sup>11</sup>

Custom, then, is the force which defines and shapes courtship behavior.

Mead describes the evidence for and then discusses social conditioning as a determinant of sex and temperament, in modern terms, of gender-based behavior.

Each of these tribes had, as has every human society, the point of sex difference to use as one theme in the plot of social life and each of these three peoples has developed that theme differently.

Our own society makes great use of this plot. It assigns different roles to the two sexes, surrounds them from birth with an expectation of different behaviour, plays out the whole drama of courtship, marriage, and parenthood in terms of types of behaviour believed to be innate and therefore appropriate for one sex or the other.<sup>12</sup>

This thesis is a study of the interplay between courtship as a prelude to mating or "the birth of the offspring," and the form courtship takes for one particular rural culture.

American sociologist, Willard Waller, working from the late 1930s through the 1950s, felt that

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<sup>10</sup>Malinowski, *Sex and Repression* 227.

<sup>11</sup>Ward H. Goodenough, *Cooperation in Change* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1963) 64.

<sup>12</sup>Mead, *Sex and Temperament* xii-xiii. See also Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Premier, 1950) 50-51.

courtship [could] be defined as the process of forming a family. Courtship is the bridge between the life of the child in the parental family and the life of the adult in his own family.<sup>13</sup>

This definition emphasizes courtship as one stage towards marriage, when in fact, courtship does not always culminate in marriage. He did, however, say that "the average American has many courtships," and that one of the greatest functions of this is education, particularly for the female.<sup>14</sup> In the end, though, he ultimately dismisses those relationships that do not end in marriage:

The attitudes which are formed in a prolonged period of purposeless courtship are not helpful in either the sexual or the personal adjustments of marriage.<sup>15</sup>

For Waller, courtship in which the end result is not marriage is normally viewed, on a larger scheme, as a failure. Nonmarital courtships can be interpreted only as a failure if one believes that marriage is the happy ending of a successful courtship. This educational and success/failure perspective dominates the sociological and in some cases, anthropological literature. Nearly thirty years later, in 1964, Farber stated that

... courtship and marriage may be deemed as a continuous process in the development of husband-and-wife interaction.<sup>16</sup>

This statement assumes several things: that courtship is one stage on the way to adulthood; that every person one dates is a possible mate (biological or emotional); and that multi-dating is not an end in and of itself.

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<sup>13</sup>Waller, *The Family* 177.

<sup>14</sup>Waller, *The Family* 143-144. See also E. E. LeMasters, *Modern Courtship and Marriage* (New York: MacMillan, 1957) 84-85; and James West, *Plainville, U. S. A.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945) 195.

<sup>15</sup>Waller, *The Family* 145.

<sup>16</sup>Bernard Farber, *Family, Organization and Interaction* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1964) 160.

LeMasters defined courtship as

the process by which the individual moves from the single status of the adolescent to the married status of the adult. Thus, as we use the term "courtship," it includes random dating as well as the more marriage-oriented types of heterosexual social relationships. In this sense, we take the position that *all* dating experience is essentially preparation for marriage, hence we feel it should all be considered as courtship.<sup>17</sup>

Although this definition does include "random dating" or nonmarital courtship, it emphasizes educational development for eventual marriage. It is possible, however, that many relationships, particularly those that are very brief, one-encounter events are not part of a larger courtship system organized to educate the participants in the ways of marriage. Short-term, nonmarital courtship is often used by the parties involved for immediate sexual or emotional gratification. In a short-term relationship there simply is not time for the individual to develop the practices one might later use in a long-term or marriage-centered relationship. This thesis concentrates on short-term encounters, or relationships that are not characterized by a strong sense of commitment by either party involved.

Short-term relationships, as they are presented in this thesis, differ from marriage-oriented dating. LeMasters' "random dating," because it is based on an "urban, middle-class subculture," is simply not applicable to the rural Newfoundland courtship system.<sup>18</sup> Classic "dating" -- girl meets boy, boy asks girl out, he picks her up, meets her parents, they go to movie, restaurant, etc., boy takes girl home -- is a highly structured social event that takes place in larger urban centers where one's date is likely to be relatively unknown, or even a total

<sup>17</sup> LeMasters 70, emphasis his.

<sup>18</sup> LeMasters 71.

stranger.<sup>19</sup> This kind of dating rarely takes place in rural Newfoundland. When it does it is often for a very specific social event: a dart party or a wedding reception.<sup>20</sup>

Courtship in Newfoundland can and does end in marriage. However, marriage is often a result of pregnancy and not the other way around.<sup>21</sup> This study focuses on those relationships which do not or have not yet ended in marriage. The available definitions of courtship, while not inadequate, certainly emphasize a tripartite relationship among courtship, engagement and marriage (or the family) or a combination of at minimum, courtship and marriage. For this reason it is necessary not to re-define courtship, but to place greater attention on courtship per se and from there to focus on nonmarital courtship.

In this thesis courtship may be defined as follows: courtship is a relationship between a male and female where sexual tension exists. Sexual tension is any behavior between participants ranging from verbal banter, through hand holding to sexual intercourse. Courtship need not lead to marriage, reproduction, nor even be related to mate selection. It can be short-term or long-term, a brief encounter or a stabilized understanding between the two parties. It is a relationship which is motivated ultimately by the possibility of opposite sex

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<sup>19</sup> Lemasters 100-101.

<sup>20</sup> Kimiecik, T84-3.

<sup>21</sup> The last two marriages in Welcher's Cove (in 1986) were assumed by community members to have taken place because of pregnancy, rather than as a result of emotional commitment. One of the couples married before the birth of the baby, while the second married shortly afterwards. Not all premarital pregnancies result in marriage to the father of the baby.

interaction.<sup>22</sup>

Relationships between males and females who have not yet reached a culturally defined marriageable age have as many courtships as, if not more than, those people who comprise the marriage pool. Teenage and young adult relationships are very often nonmarital, with both parties well aware that they are either too young to marry, or that they simply do not yet want to marry. Nonmarital courtship exists only as a retrospective concept; only after a couple has broken up, or when they no longer see each other, can one label it as nonmarital. The kinds of nonmarital relationships I have looked at are those which concern young adults in rural Newfoundland who are not necessarily looking for a marriage partner, but who, nevertheless, become involved in various kinds of courtship relationships. Some of these relationships approach a marriage-oriented stage and are briefly discussed as such.

Courtship has often been studied in retrospect.<sup>23</sup> Research carried out often begins with studying married couples. Because I wanted to look at those relationships between people who are not married, the focus of the thesis is necessarily synchronic. The study of courtship through carrying out research with married couples automatically lends a nuptial slant to that study. It is for this reason that the study of courtship is often biased towards "successful" courtships, which have ipso facto resulted in marriage.

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<sup>22</sup>Courtship is as much a part of homosexual relationships as heterosexual relationships but this study is confined to courtship within heterosexual relations.

<sup>23</sup>See for example Karen Szala, "Clean Women and Quiet Men: Courtship and Marriage in a Newfoundland Fishing Village," MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1979.

## 1.2. The Community of Welcher's Cove

In the summer of 1984 I spent approximately two and a half months living in Welcher's Cove, where I met and socialized with a core group of young adults, all of whom were single. At that time none of them had a steady boy- or girlfriend and all were quite active socially. I returned to Welcher's Cove for several weekend trips during that school year and spent two more weeks there in September 1985. All place names and personal names in the following discussion of that community are pseudonyms.

Welcher's Cove is a small community in Newfoundland (pop. 125).<sup>24</sup> Having been settled in the mid 1600s it is one of the three oldest communities in this region. Its primary economic occupation has been and remains the inshore fishery. Welcher's Cove reached its peak prosperity, with a population of 1000, at the turn of this century and has long since been in a decline. There are two main religious groups, Anglican and Roman Catholic, as well as two main ethnic backgrounds, English (west country) and Irish (southern). There has not been, in living memory, any major religious conflict between the two groups.

There is one road leading into the community with several branches snaking through various outer sections. There is one main grocery shop, although from time to time a smaller shop opens during the summer months.<sup>25</sup> The fishing season is from May to October and fishermen normally receive social assistance

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<sup>24</sup> All historical data is taken from Canadian Census records, documents in the Maritime History Group at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and local parish records. Because of the concealment of the community, I will not give here more specific documentation.

<sup>25</sup> Since the time I completed my fieldwork a year-round secondary store has opened.

during the other six months of the year. Two fish plants in the area employ several young men from Welcher's Cove, and those people usually have steady work all year long. Men from Welcher's Cove also work on boats in the Great Lakes region and are often away for five to six months at a time. Some of the younger men who neither fish, work in the fish plants, or in the woods, have government jobs on the community wharf during the summer but because they are government employees, tension sometimes develops over government regulations. As a result, two young men quit those jobs before the end of August of my field season.

Women, in general, do not work outside the home. They either tend young children or, if they are able, are employed for a Canada Works Project, usually for a short, set amount of weeks.<sup>26</sup> In recent years by means of these projects, the old Roman Catholic church, no longer in use, was restored as a community hall, a picnic site was developed, and a community storage shed, known locally as a stage, was also built. In addition several young women (in their late teens) had jobs cleaning up the community's litter during the summer I spent there. Women are no longer directly active in the inshore fishery, except during the squid season when several married women take charge of drying the squid on specially designed racks in their yards. In 1984 there was one young woman attending university in St. John's.<sup>27</sup> Post-secondary education is not emphasized as an option for either

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<sup>26</sup> Canada Works Projects are short-term, government funded employment programs used mainly to ensure a year-round income of unemployment insurance. See *The Report of the Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment, Building On Our Strengths*, Doug House, chair. (St. John's: Office of the Queen's Printer, 1986).

<sup>27</sup> In September 1986 a second young woman started first year university in St. John's.

young men or women. Most people feel that education does not help with employment, and, in fact, a large majority of young people never earn their high school diploma.<sup>28</sup>

In the summer children have a great deal of freedom and they roam around the community, stopping to visit when and whom they please. Some of the younger boys work on the wharf when fish are brought in, and they are allowed the task of cutting out the tongues of the cod and selling them locally. Younger boys often do a good deal of small game hunting and pond fishing. In late August the children are usually off in the country picking berries by themselves or with their older female relatives. Most often, at least in the summer, they spend their time simply visiting and passing on the latest bits of news or information from the men on the wharf or in the shop to their mothers and grandmothers who tend to stay in the houses or in the yards.

Boredom is the number one complaint among the young people of Welcher's Cove. It is one of the reasons I stopped asking "How are you?" as a greeting early on in my stay. The children's as well as the adult's response to this was never enthusiastic, even if they were busy with something. More often than not the children responded with a shrug of the shoulders and rolled their eyes. When school let out in late June the children were very excited and could not wait to have their longed-for freedom. Two weeks later, they were often heard to say, "I'm so bored; there's nothing to do out here." And indeed, there are no movie theaters, no games arcade, no gas station/convenience store, not even a take-out where they might mingle with outsiders who are in town for a bite to eat.

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<sup>28</sup>Kimiecik T85-3; and *Building On Our Strengths* 216.



The situation is not very different for the older teenagers and young adults.

Unmarried females or those women whose husbands are away or those without children, watch a good deal of television. One young married woman whose husband worked on the "Lake boats" and with whom I once boarded, told me she had a rule for herself that she would not turn on the television until noon; she knew that once it was on, it would stay on until she went to bed at midnight.

The television set kept her company while her husband was away working. Watching television does not interrupt other chores, but it can make visiting awkward: the visitor finds herself, if she is a woman, subjected to the "stories," but also stories *about* the "stories."<sup>29</sup> However, if the weather is especially fine people tend to linger more outdoors; during my summer's fieldwork we had three months of warm clear skies. During the fall and winter months, people tend to stay indoors and get together during the evening. Linda, a married woman in her late thirties, told me that in the winter if the 9:00 pm movie on television is no good they simply go to bed for lack of anything better to do.

The community is typical of the many coastal outposts in the province. Rates of unemployment, school drop-outs, and teenage pregnancies are high.<sup>30</sup> Many of the young people, especially the women, longed to be in either St. John's or a larger town, but acknowledged that when they spent time in such places they

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<sup>29</sup>The "stories" are the afternoon dramas otherwise known as the "soaps." They are watched mostly by single women or childless women. Almost always the woman who watches television in the afternoon is simultaneously doing any number of domestic chores.

<sup>30</sup>Kimiecik, T85-3; *Building on Our Strengths* 207-300. See also Cato Wadel, *Now, Whose Fault is that? The Struggle for Self-Esteem in the Face of Chronic Unemployment*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies 11 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1973).

quickly became homesick. Patterns of daily life in Welcher's Cove are highly repetitive, with most people knowing each other's daily habits and schedules. Time passes slowly and people look towards each other, and especially to their immediate families, for entertainment, whether it is playing cards, watching television or having a cup of tea.

### 1.3. Personae Dramatis

The following is a list of the people with whom I spent most of my time and who are of direct importance to this study. The ages given are those at the time of my main fieldwork in 1984-85.

Mac, 33, friend of mine from St. John's; friend of Tom's in Welcher's Cove;

Tom, 33, Mac's nearest neighbor in Welcher's Cove; moved to Welcher's Cove fourteen years ago from across the bay in order to fish;

Linda, 37, Tom's wife, born and raised outside of Smithport, about forty-five minutes from Welcher's Cove;

Bob, 16, the eldest son (of five) of Tom's and Linda's;

Ruby, 13, their eldest daughter;

Iris, 6, their youngest child;

Joe, 19, single, near neighbor of Tom's, nephew of one of Tom's crew members;

Greg, 19, single, Joe's best friend from the nearest community;

Mickey, 20, single, Tom's newest and youngest crew member, also a near neighbor to Tom and Mac;

Frank, 30, single, Mickey's first cousin, also a near neighbor;

Darlene, 18, single, Frank's sister;

Glenys, 18, single, Darlene's good friend;

Barbara, 21, single mother, friend of Glenys and Darlene, close neighbor to Glenys;

Cheryl, 19, single, from Green Cove, 10 km from Welcher's Cove.

Shirley, 25, single mother, engaged;

Stella, 26, from Welcher's Cove, now living nearby, separated, two children, Shirley's sister;

Brian, 28, single, Mickey's brother;

Mark, 30, single, Glenys' brother;

Jim, 20, Darlene's brother; and

Mary, 28, single, Darlene's sister.

The people of this group, especially Mickey, Brian, Jim, Mary, Darlene, and Frank, formed a tight social network largely because they were first cousins. They lived across the road from one another, and were close in age. They were all single, and through them, I met other single people in Welcher's Cove and at dances. They used their kin relations to meet non-kin from other communities. One sibling might know quite a few different people than their other siblings, through school, for instance, and this could lead to future contacts during social events. The young women often depended, for example, on their older brothers for drives to and from local clubs.

A secondary group with whom I spent a good deal of time included Stella, Joe, Greg, Tom, and Mac. These people formed a somewhat distinct group with which the people mentioned in the above paragraph rarely socialized, although Mickey and Frank were often members of both groups. Eventually, I spent more

and more time with this latter group which caused some talk in the community because these people were thought, by the community, to be freer in thought and action than was necessary. This difference between the two groups is discussed in Chapter VI.

#### 1.4. Exogamy

In the Newfoundland outport exogamy is the rule rather than the exception.<sup>31</sup> Marriages between Roman Catholic people from different communities is also the norm in this area.<sup>32</sup> Roman Catholic records for the period 1910-1984 list fifty-seven marriages where in which at least one of the parties was from Welcher's Cove. Of these fifty-seven, forty-six were exogamous. For the young people of Welcher's Cove there are approximately fourteen other communities from which possible mates are chosen.

Although exogamy is practiced, it has limits. One must not marry too far away. This is true both for people who leave the community upon marrying and for those who bring in a spouse from another community. The following piece of advice was given by a father to his daughter after her break-up with a fellow from rather far away and of a different religion: "Marry your own kind, marry near home, and marry a Newfoundlander."<sup>33</sup> These words neatly sum up the families

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<sup>31</sup> John Sawed, *Private Images and Public Imagery: Interpersonal Relations in a Newfoundland Peasant Society*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies 2 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1966) 70; James Faris, *Cat Harbour: A Newfoundland Fishing Settlement*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies 3 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1972) 79.

<sup>32</sup> Taken from parish records to which the Catholics of Welcher's Cove belong.

<sup>33</sup> MUNFLA MS: 74-112.

opinions of an ideal spouse. It expresses the desire for cultural homogeneity while acknowledging that the daughter will likely marry someone from another community, but one that is close by. Faris, in *Cat Harbour*, explains.

Cat Harbour men give every impression that they prefer to marry local women. Fathers in former times admonished their sons, 'You don't want to marry too far away; you can't trust them'. . . . It may appear that there is some discrepancy between the statistical pattern and ideal statements about what ought to be. But the problem is a false one, and in actual fact, no discrepancy exists. . . . Men do prefer local women. . . it is simply that only some 35% of the local women are eligible mates, for exogamic restrictions exclude a number of local females. . . . Cat Harbour must trade its sisters and daughters for women who may be complete strangers.<sup>34</sup>

Part of the reason families like their children "to marry near home" is because there is restricted knowledge of people who live outside their frame of reference. Firestone calls this frame of reference a "social area."<sup>35</sup> The social area for Welcher's Cove includes about eight other communities, but extends, with decreasing knowledge, up and down both shores. This takes in an additional twelve communities. Familiarity with other communities, but more importantly, with other families, is crucial in the decision of whether a person may be viewed as an acceptable future mate.

In an interview with Darlene, Glenys, and Barbara we talked about why they prefer to go out with men from outside their community, while their male counterparts ideally prefer women from within the community.

D: I've been friends with them [males from Welcher's Cove] for so long, I really thought I was going to have problems even going out with James [a male from a nearby community whom she was now seeing]

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<sup>34</sup> Faris 80.

<sup>35</sup> Melvin Firestone, *Brothers and Rivals; Patrilocality in Savage Cove*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies 5 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1967) 33.

casually] because I was friends with him before I was, you know [seeing him seriously]. I guess it's where they [outsiders] don't know much about you and you can. G: Probably hide a few things. D: I can communicate with a stranger better than I can with a long-time friend. I can. K: You'd prefer a stranger to get married to? D: Yes, guys prefer local girls. The guys are a lot different in that way. I guess they want to know you for a long time, right? That's how I find it anyway. K: Why would they like local girls? D: Because they know more about you where they've known you so long. And I guess they feel like if they met somebody in Smithport one night and next year they decided to get married, well they really don't know much about her, seeing as they've only known her for a year. Whereas a local, probably they've known her all their life and they know a lot about her.<sup>36</sup>

For some of the young women in Welcher's Cove, potential boyfriends must come from outside the community. One also has the impression that the girls enjoy the thrill of meeting and talking to a person whom they may have seen only from a distance or even only heard of through friends. For them, new male associations are often motivated by a sense of adventure, and this attitude often renders them more assertive than their male counterparts. Perhaps this is a result of socialization, their understanding of and preparation for possible or eventual moving out of their home community.

One must bear in mind that despite early dating behavior the males do marry women from other communities and bring them back to their father's household. Exogamy for the men seems not to be so much by choice as by necessity. Only a certain number of males and females are ever potential mates and when the potential marriage pool is depleted in a geographical area, eligible partners must be looked for elsewhere.

<sup>36</sup> Kimiecik, T84-3.

Different behavior characterizes marital and nonmarital courtship. People are little concerned with parental approval during the early stages of a relationship than they are when a relationship becomes more serious. In a short-term relationship one can pay attention to a wider variety of members of the opposite sex without fear of getting involved too deeply. Although LeMaster's concept of the structure of random dating does not apply easily to the Newfoundland situation, there are many similarities between the subjects of his study and those in Newfoundland when looking at the *functions* of nonmarital courtship. Although not all are directly applicable here they do suggest possibilities as to why short-term courtship exists. He outlines six such functions and points out that nonmarital courtship.

(1.) serves as the point of least resistance to enter or re-enter the system. . . . It provides a point of relatively easy entrance into dating, and if we have broken off a more serious relationship, it also provides a way of "getting back into circulation." (2.) Random dating serves to anchor one end of the courtship continuum. [It] provides a sort of happy hunting ground until they are ready and able to move on in the courtship system. (3.) Random dating performs a dalliance function. [Some] people often wish to make sure that marriage will not take place during the first few years of dating.<sup>37</sup> (4.) Random dating serves a variety of learning functions. [Of these, most notably it] plays an important role in forming conceptions or images of the self.<sup>38</sup> (5.) Random dating serves parents in various ways. . . . Parents get their first opportunity to see what sort of persons their son or daughter will choose to associate with, and for parents with insight these choices can

<sup>37</sup> In LeMasters study, however, this was largely due to economic reasons. "A large proportion of American youth have hopes of rising in the economic system, and marriage is often conceived, rightly or wrongly, by these persons as a handicap or barrier to their economic ambitions." LeMasters 98.

<sup>38</sup> Included in this function LeMasters lists learning "the social graces, such as eating in public restaurants, dancing, card-playing, drinking, [and] polite conversation . . . Some preliminary knowledge of the opposite sex, including mild necking and its control, is an important part of this learning." LeMasters 99.

tell a great deal about their son or daughter.<sup>39</sup> (6.) Random dating serves as a free-enterprise dating market. Probably at no other courtship period are the socioeconomic barriers as low as during random dating. Economic, ethnic, religious, racial, and age differences are at their minimum level at this point.<sup>40</sup>

In a homogeneous society like rural Newfoundland, one of the few social barriers is religion. However, in Welcher's Cove this seems not to have been a problem in recent years. People today generally pay less attention, especially where nonmarital courtship is concerned, to religious background. It is important to keep LeMasters' functions in mind, but to make allowances for the differences between a homogeneous rural and a heterogeneous urban culture.

### 1.5. Nonverbal Courtship Analysis

Because of my fieldwork experiences (described in Chapter II) the approach of this study of courtship is based on nonverbal communication. This is discussed fully in Chapter 6 but a brief introduction here is needed. My understanding of rural Newfoundland culture is based on the observation that much of what goes on in a small community is under careful observation by most members of the community. In order to alleviate the sense of constant observation, people can either turn a blind eye (this is discussed in Chapter 4) or they can attempt to conceal those things which they want kept secret.

Where courtship is concerned there is a general attitude of keeping one's emotions to oneself until one is absolutely sure of a reasonably positive response.

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<sup>39</sup>This function seems more relevant for middle-class parents whose sons and daughters participate in highly structured dating in a heterogeneous society.

<sup>40</sup>LeMasters, 97-100.



from the other party. Descriptions of the confusion that can result from not being able to understand the process of unravelling the truth are rare in academic writings but two literary examples will explain this nonverbal courtship code as it exists in two distinct cultures. Willa Cather, in *O Pioneers!* describes the prairie life of Norwegian-Americans at the turn of the century in Nebraska. Alexandra, her main character and farm owner, is concerned with her employees and their male-female relationships.

Of the youngest girl, Signa, who has a pretty figure, mottled pink cheeks, and yellow hair, Alexandra is very fond, though she keeps a sharp eye upon her. Signa is apt to be skittish at mealtime, when the men are about, and to spill the coffee or upset the cream. It is supposed that Nelse Jensen, one of the six men at the dinner-table, is courting Signa, though he has been so careful not to commit himself that no one in the house, least of all Signa, can tell just how far the matter has progressed. Nelse watches her glumly as she waits upon the table, and in the evening he sits on a bench behind the stove with his *dragharmonika*, playing mournful airs and watching her as she goes about her work. When Alexandra asked Signa whether she thought Nelse was in earnest, the poor child hid her hands under her apron and murmured, "I don't know, ma'm, but he scolds me about everything, like as if he wanted to have me!"<sup>41</sup>

Noticeable in this passage is Signa's confusion as to whether or not Nelse is really serious. Nelse, on the other hand, seems interested in Signa but it is obvious that no verbal communication about this interest has passed between them. At this stage the relationship is based on perceived actions, and both parties will wait until they are sure of further signs before making an emotional commitment.

Somewhat more pertinent to the Newfoundland situation because of ethnic antecedents is a description of West Country courtship by Thomas Hardy in *Far*

<sup>41</sup> Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913) 86.

*From the Madding Crowd.* The main characters, Farmer Boldwood and

Bathsheba have had several encounters but neither would admit a commitment was desired. It is worth quoting this passage at length.

He [Farmer Boldwood] approached the gate of the meadow. . . . Bathsheba was holding open a little pen of four hurdles, into which the mother and lost lamb were driven, where they would remain till the old sheep conceived an affection for the young one.

Bathsheba looked up at the completion of the manoeuvre and saw the farmer by the gate, where he was overhung by a willow tree in full bloom. Gabriel, to whom her face was as the uncertain glory of an April day, was very regardful of its faintest changes, and instantly discerned thereon the mark of some influence from without, in the form of a keenly self-conscious reddening. He also turned and beheld Boldwood.

At once connecting these signs with the letter Boldwood had shown him, Gabriel suspected her of some coquettish procedure begun by that means, and carried on since, he knew not how.

Farmer Boldwood had read the pantomime denoting that they were aware of his presence, and the perception was as too much light turned upon his new sensibility. He was still in the road, and by moving on he hoped that neither would recognize that he had originally intended to enter the field. He passed by with an utter and overwhelming sensation of ignorance, shyness, and doubt. Perhaps in her manner there were signs that she wished to see him -- perhaps not -- he could not read a woman. The cabala of this erotic philosophy seemed to consist of the subtlest meanings expressed in misleading ways. Every turn, look, work, and accent contained a mystery quite distinct from its obvious import, and not one had ever been pondered by him until now.

As for Bathsheba, she was not deceived into the belief that Farmer Boldwood had walked by on business or in idleness. She collected the probabilities of the case, and concluded that she was herself responsible for Boldwood's appearance there. It troubled her much to see what a great flame a little wildfire was likely to kindle. Bathsheba was no schemer for marriage, nor was she deliberately a trifle with the affections of men, and a censor's experience on seeing an actual flirt -- after observing her would have been a feeling of surprise that Bathsheba could be so different from such a one, and yet so like what a flirt is supposed to be.

She resolved never again, by look or by sign, to interrupt the steady flow of this man's life. But a resolution to avoid an evil is seldom framed till the evil is so far advanced as to make avoidance

impossible.<sup>42</sup>

This kind of nonverbal communication and awareness of both their own and each other's manipulation of behavior is indicative of the kind of courtship communication I present in this thesis.

### 1.6. Methodology

In addition to carrying out fieldwork, I drew up a questionnaire titled "Newfoundland Courtship Customs" which was distributed to six classes at Memorial University of Newfoundland in January 1986. A copy of the questionnaire is included in an appendix. In all, 162 responses were collected and these are housed in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA Q86A). Where responses are quoted from in the thesis, eg. Q86A/61:4, f21, the number of the questionnaire is given first (Q86A/61), followed by the number of the question being answered (61:4), and then includes the sex and age of the respondent (f21).

Because of the sensitivity of the topic and the fact that the interviews I conducted include real names of people and places in the area those recordings are in my personal fieldwork collection. Tapes are listed as "T" followed the year (1984 or 1985); manuscripts are given an "M" designation. These include M84-1, M84-2, M85-1, and M85-2. Direct quotations in the thesis from Barbara, Darlene, and Glenys are taken from interview T84-3 (the third interview in 1984); quotations from Joe in Chapter V are from interview T85-1; the four poems in Chapter V are the above "M" numbers.

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<sup>42</sup>Thomas Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (London: Cathay Books, 1984; orig. pub. 1874) 83-84.

This study is comprised of five main chapters, three of which are ethnographic. The first, Chapter II, is a discussion of my personal fieldwork experiences as they relate to male-female relationships. This chapter is included to help explain why I have taken a nonverbal approach to the data. The next two chapters describe contexts for courtship in rural Newfoundland. Chapter III is an ethnography of a Saturday night dance at a club. I attended dances nearly every weekend of my field season. These dances clearly were a high point of the young people's social activity. Chapter IV is a description of a courtship custom known as "walking the roads" as it exists in Welcher's Cove. This is followed by Chapter V, an analysis of friendship and love poetry. This poetry expresses emotions but follows the basic principle of nonverbal communication where courtship is concerned. Finally, I present in Chapter VI an analysis of nonverbal courtship communication based largely on the questionnaire responses.

## Chapter 2

### My Personal Experience in Welcher's Cove

#### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter is based on my personal fieldwork experiences in Welcher's Cove.<sup>43</sup> I discuss four events that are significant to my understanding of male-female relationships in Newfoundland. They are also critical to my approach to the material in general. I found myself considered the female counterpart of a relationship in which I was an unwilling participant. The complications which developed out of this "relationship" are the factors that prompted me to pursue an objective analysis of courtship in rural Newfoundland.

The four events are presented in the same sequence in which they occurred. The first three are all taken from the first weekend I spent in Welcher's Cove. They are: (1.) my first evening with Tom and his family on Friday evening; (2.) my first Saturday night at *The Seabreeze*, a club in Smithport, and (3.) a picnic on the Sunday of that weekend. The fourth event is one that is included to show the reader how far things had progressed out of my control. Throughout the retelling of these four events it is important to recognize community sanctioning

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<sup>43</sup>For an excellent discussion of "cultural fluency" see: Fernando Poyatos, "Linguistic Fluency and Verbal-Nonverbal Cultural Fluency," in Aaron Wolfgang, ed., *Nonverbal Behavior: Perspectives, Applications, Intercultural Insights* (Lewiston, New York: C. J. Hogrefe, 1984) 431-459.

and encouragement of some male-female relationships. Without this, I may have been able to cope with Mickey and his attentions but because we were a steady source of conversation the non-existent relationship between him and me became very real in the eyes of some people.

I hope the reader will keep in mind that I never entertained Mickey with thoughts of becoming seriously involved with him. At no point during the summer did I ever use him to gain information on courtship in Newfoundland. Only because I found myself subjected to a courtship relationship did I even remotely consider carrying out academic research on such a topic.

## 2.2. My First Evening in Welcher's Cove

My first extended visit to Welcher's Cove was in early May of 1984. I had been there only once before in late April, arriving about midnight on a Friday and leaving about 2:00 pm the next day. Although I had met Tom and his family at that time, I spent most of Saturday morning with several of his children who gave me a tour of the community.

A correspondence started between me and Ruby, Tom's eldest daughter who had just turned thirteen. My return visit was no surprise to them as they already had some indication of my attraction to both the place and themselves through my letters to Ruby. When I did finally make it back to Welcher's Cove, my visit had been a matter of concern for about a week within Tom's family and some of his closer friends. A mutual friend living in St. John's, Mac, told me that two of the younger men in the community had been asking Tom about me. The younger of the two, Mickey, said he was going to get to me first, and the older, Frank, said they would be fighting over me before Saturday night arrived.

The prime focus of my weekend visit was the assumption that I would be attending a dance on Saturday night at *The Seabreeze* in Smithport and that furthermore a date must be found to escort me. I had heard the gist of this through Mac but was unprepared for the onslaught of attention I received when I actually arrived for my second visit. Immediately after unloading my things at Mac's house I went with him up to Tom's house for an evening visit. Tom is Mac's nearest neighbor. It was then that I realized the full impact my presence had created. The children, notably Ruby and Iris, Tom's youngest child, were most pleased to have a new face around and gratefully I was able to focus some attention on them. Much to my horror I had considerable difficulty understanding the conversation that was taking place between Tom, his wife Linda, their children, and Mac. Previous to this I had spent no time outside of St. John's and because of this was completely unprepared for the accent and the dialect that was spoken. My reaction to this was stunned silence and many smiles. Mac very kindly and politely interpreted for me. The only thing I remember after about forty-five minutes of conversation was that much of it was loaded with sexual innuendo and that I was the focus of attention. At some point I also realized that I was being discussed in terms of a dance the following night and that a date was being arranged for me. There was no question that I might not want to go, or that I might not want an escort.

Essentially, the selection of my date had been narrowed down by Tom, presumably, to two possibilities, Mickey, about twenty years old, or Mickey's first cousin Frank, about thirty. Both were single and apparently willing escorts. At the time I felt that Frank was Tom's preferred choice, however, it seemed that he

would have to work the late shift at the fish plant and so would not be back in Welcher's Cove in time to drive to the dance.<sup>44</sup> Mickey was available; he was the newest and youngest member of Tom's fishing crew. It seemed there would be no problem in getting him to agree to the date and in any case he came to Tom's house within an hour of my arrival, obviously to inspect me. Even amidst my confusion with the language, the purpose of his presence that evening was clear. Frank arrived later, again, just getting in off the late shift and informed Tom that he would be unable to leave work early the next day on my account. The matter was thereby settled and much to my embarrassment, the next evening was almost completely out of my control.

When it came time for getting ready on Saturday, both Tom and Linda were excited about going out. Because they did not own a car, they rarely had the opportunity to go out of Welcher's Cove. Mac's presence and his ownership of a truck lent them an independence they had not often had before.

Because of my feelings about the evening being out of my control, there were two things I demanded of Mac. One was that I not be expected to go alone with Mickey all the way to and from Smithport. Never having been on a blind date before in my life, I had no intention of starting now in a strange place and with people whose language I could not understand. This was easily arranged because Tom and Linda were going with Mac and his escort, Shirley (also arranged by Tom) so it was simple enough to include Mickey and me in this group. No one seemed to mind and in fact, if I had driven alone with Mickey it

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<sup>44</sup>There are two main fish plants in the area that employ people from the Welcher's Cove region. Both are approximately a thirty-five minute drive from Welcher's Cove.



would have looked a bit forward on my part. Couples who drive alone are announcing to the community that they are indeed "seeing each other."

The second of the two stipulations came up on Saturday when we gathered at Tom's house to drive to Smithport. As subtly as possible, I tried to convey my desire not to sit in the back of Mac's truck with Tom, Linda and Mickey. I felt a great need to reassure myself that I had some control over the event and the placement of people in the vehicle for the long ride seemed to me something I could maneuver. Forty-five minutes is not a long time if you are at ease with the social situation and can understand the language of the people around you. It was partly the failure to understand the language that prompted me to request Mac that I be allowed to sit in the front of his truck with him and Shirley, rather than in the back with Tom, Linda and Mickey. I do not know how well this went over with the rest of them but no one seemed terribly put out and I suspect it also gave them the opportunity to talk about me. So, with this configuration, the six of us set off for *The Seabreeze*.

### 2.3. My First Dance at The Seabreeze

Talk during the ride over was focused mostly on Shirley's excitement about the dance. Most of her queries could not be answered by Mac and me because they concerned who might be attending the dance that evening. Mac was also trying to set the upcoming scene for me. He had been to *The Seabreeze* once or twice before and he repeatedly told me about the kinds of behavior I could expect to encounter. The scenery and the sunset hour made for a good deal of the conversation as well.

We arrived at the club in plenty of time to pick out tables and seats, so we arranged ourselves along the back wall of the club, between the entrance door and the washrooms. It was another forty-five minutes before the music started so there was time to continue discussions about the dance, but questions about my background and my life in St. John's were also brought up. The time passed pleasantly and we eventually turned our attention towards the increasing flow of people into the club.

Tom is known by many people in the area, especially by those who are from the Welcher's Cove region. Linda, his wife, also knows many people because she was brought up in a community just outside of Smithport. This meant that people were continually greeting us at our table. Because there were many people from Welcher's Cove at the dance, we quickly became known as the "Welcher's Cove contingent." For me this was good because it automatically put me in a context for interaction with strangers and I was then able to use my connection with Tom and Linda to feel both more relaxed and secure.

By this time several rounds of drinks had been bought. Throughout the night and those that followed, I learned the great extent alcohol plays in the male-female relationships that I observed, including my own with Mickey. In fact, if it were not for the amount of alcohol that he consumed on any given evening, I do not think that he would ever have felt brave enough to ask me to dance. However, this does not mean that he felt no sense of courtesy. He was expected by Tom and his friends to show me a good time. These acts of courtesy became obvious as soon as we arrived at the club in the form of drinks being purchased for me. He and the others continually asked me how I was doing and if I was

enjoying myself. This "duty" of his meant he would have to ask me to dance; it did not matter how he managed this task, as long as it was done.

It became closer to the time when the music would start and I found myself becoming more and more uneasy about dancing the first dance with Mickey. I tried to convince myself to relax but I was still very much a stranger among these people. Because of this I seated myself between Mickey, by whom I was obliged to sit, and Mac, since he was the only person I knew I could depend on in case of total chaos, which, I was convinced, was about to commence at any moment. The music finally started and I did not have any more time to think about what was going to happen -- it already had.

The first song was a fast one, and Mickey quickly asked me to dance. It had been a long time since I had danced with strangers and I was unaccustomed to the structure of the invitation to dance. In St. John's I was more used to asking my male or female friends to dance with me. Because of the difference in technique here I had to wait for an invitation to dance. After dancing with Mickey to several songs, I declined his offer and stayed in my seat so that I could have a better picture of the scene around.

At some point early on in the evening, Tom asked Mickey if he could dance with me. Part of me was furious at the thought of not being asked this directly, but I had no choice in the matter and knew I had better remain silent about it. This was the first time this had ever happened to me and not knowing what else

to do I simply smiled and accepted it.<sup>45</sup> It was important that I dance with Tom because he was my host and responsible for the choice of my date. It became obvious to me throughout the night that my entertainment was a matter of concern for all of the people I met that night, especially those from Welcher's Cove. In the event, the only other male I danced with that night was Mac. Interestingly enough, Mac did not ask Mickey for permission to dance with me. I assumed this was because we were already friends and in a sense I think they all felt it was Mac who was ultimately responsible for my well-being.

I danced to all kinds of songs with Mickey, Tom, and Mac but only in retrospect did I realize my biggest mistake. That first evening I danced indiscriminately with Mickey to both fast and slow songs. Unknowingly I was communicating to Mickey that I was interested in being more than just friends with him. The physical contact, even as limited as I controlled it, was enough to indicate to him that I was available and interested. If I had realized the significance of accepting both fast and, especially slow dances, I would never have danced so much with one partner. Because I felt obliged to be equally courteous in my role as guest, I danced with Mickey almost every time he asked. By dancing with him so much I was overemphasizing that role. I had unknowingly expressed a solo interest in Mickey and was therefore unprepared for the attention that I would receive from him in the next month and a half.

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<sup>45</sup> During the Fall of 1986, I attended a dance in St. Bride's, Placentia Bay. I was with two males and one other female, recently arrived in St. John's from upstate New York. I had warned her that such an occurrence might be possible and within one hour of our attendance an older man in his late forties asked one of the males at our table (with whom he had conversed earlier in the washroom) if he could dance with her. My male friend's response to this was to say to him, "Sorry, but we're dancing," even though it was obvious to me that they had not at that point started for the dance floor. This seemed to satisfy the gentleman and he returned to his seat.

After the first set was over, Mickey asked me to go for a walk. The club had become increasingly hot from the large number of people in attendance and I thought it might be nice to be outside on a warm summer evening. Without realizing the significance of such an act in this culture I accepted his offer. Also, by this time my curiosity had been aroused about what was taking place at the dance. We went outside and I saw people everywhere -- in the parking lot, in cars and trucks, and, I was later to learn, behind the building. We headed out of the parking lot and started off down the road. As we walked Frank and Joe drove by and pulled over near us for a chat. They had just arrived and because the club was filled were unable to gain entrance to the dance. Frank's first question for me was, "Are you enjoying yourself?" and because I was, my reply was enthusiastic. I later learned that all of these seemingly insignificant responses of mine encouraged both Mickey and the people of Welcher's Cove to feel that Mickey was the reason I was having such a good time. He had a job to do and was apparently doing it well. He had community approval for the attention he was paying to me. Naturally, being a stranger, I depended on these people for any sense of security I had in the experience. My reciprocated courtesy further reinforced Mickey's perception that he was a major cause for my enjoyment that evening. Of course, he was part of the cause, but there were other factors as well.

After about ten minutes of conversation with Frank and Joe we turned back towards the club and when we reached the parking lot Mickey directed me towards a pickup truck and promptly drew me into his arms.

This lasted only momentarily as I had no intention of getting involved with him. It also helped that he was becoming increasingly drunk. I have learned that

when the young men from Welcher's Cove and nearby begin an evening's drinking they either become more aggressive or pathetically apologetic for their actions. Mickey belongs to the latter group. We returned inside and to my increasing concern, discovered that he and I had become a main source of interest that night, all amidst a good deal of teasing. This took the form of smiles and laughter, knowing glances, and winks.

The music soon started for the second set and we continued dancing as before, that is to both slow and fast dances. During this set no other men asked me to dance. At the time I attributed it to general shyness, but now I realize it was likely due to the fact that I had made a very clear statement to others by going for a walk with Mickey, thereby designating him my main interest.

When it came time for the second intermission, I went out to sit on the front steps with Shirley. She had asked me if I wanted some air, so feeling that I should spend some time with her I agreed and headed for the main door. After talking mostly about the heat inside and some of the the people who were there, Mickey came outside, took my hand and in a very business-like way, led me behind the building. There was no hesitation this time as to where or why he was taking me back there. Although I allowed this to happen, I had control over his following actions. He attempted to kiss me but met with no success. I was not rude to him but made it clear that I did not want to get involved. Simultaneously to his initial attempt he asked me if I wanted to make love with him. Again, I tried to be as polite as possible. He became very apologetic and said he did not mean to take advantage of me. He very obviously did not take advantage of me and was unaware that I would not have gone behind the building if I did not

know what was going to happen. He did not seem to understand that the entire scene happened only because I allowed it to. We soon returned indoors.

All of this interaction went on between sets of music. While the music was playing hardly a word was spoken between us even though the music was not too loud for conversation. Dialogue in any case is not the norm, and even the discussion about whether or not I wanted to sleep with him was implicit rather than explicit. Although he would hold my hand to and from the dance floor, he never once tried to hold my hand at the table. He never put his arm around the back of my chair. I mention these two things because they are acts that I would have expected had I been with someone from my own background. It seemed not the norm to pursue any of these, to me, familiar tactics in public.

There are usually only two breaks in the music, each of approximately twenty-five to thirty-five minutes in length. I quickly learned that Mickey and I were not the only people who "went out for air". The parking lot was a hive of activity, both inside vehicles and out. Some of the people who could not actually get into the dance remained around the front door of the club, either in the hopes of getting in or just to socialize.

The third set continued as before and when the last song was played Mickey simply assumed, in his role, that I would dance with him. Unfamiliar with the implications of this act, I accepted. In fact, I had no choice in the matter anyway. After the dance we returned to our table where we all remained for approximately another forty minutes. At this time some of the remaining beer was drunk but there was still, to me, an unbelievable amount left over. Throughout the night rounds of drinks were purchased, regardless of who actually wanted one. One or

two complete rounds were bought after last call, which meant that we would be in the club well beyond the time the music stopped. Traditional and commercial Newfoundland songs were sung at the table during this period.

We finally left the club about 2:00 am and I had decided that I would be brave and face the back of the truck with Mickey, Linda and Tom. In a way, my interaction with Mickey was as much a test of myself as anything. His response to me gave me the courage to attempt to interact with other members of Welcher's Cove on my own without Mac's verbal interpreting.

In the truck on the way back, Mickey attempted to put his arm around me, but I ignored him. I felt that I had done enough socializing for one night. But he tried again and I confess that not knowing what to do I acknowledged him by not complaining and so he kept his arm around me. He tried to kiss me and met with small, polite success. With difficulty, I managed to keep him at bay for the entire ride. I thought I had managed to maintain something of a neutrality with him, but weeks later learned I was in social trouble.

When we arrived back in Welcher's Cove, we climbed out of the truck and went up to Tom's house where Linda began preparing a large meal. After recapping the evening's events and eating, which took about one hour, I begged tiredness, said my thanks and went home. Mickey took this opportunity to walk out as well and asked me if I wanted to go for a walk. Knowing full well what he wanted by this time I compromised by letting him walk me partway towards a beach that is very near to the house in which I was staying. He again attempted to kiss me but I was adamant and managed to disengage myself after only a few moments. As far as I know he walked home after that. I know I did.



## 2.4. The Picnic

This next section concerns another episode in my relationship with Mickey that I consider to be significant. However, I did not learn this until much later.

The Sunday morning after my first dance dawned clear, warm, and bright. By 10:00 am there was a small gathering of people on the bridge outside Tom's house.<sup>46</sup> Mickey, Joe, Frank, Mac, Tom, Linda and their children, were already there when I arrived. Beers were in hand and the previous evening's events were being discussed.

As I approached the group I was subjected to some light-hearted teasing and everyone asked for my opinions on the dance. I reassured them that I had had a good time. Earlier that morning there had apparently been some talk of going on a picnic. I noticed that Linda had not yet started the morning's preparation for the Sunday dinner. If she had begun this task we would not have gone. Even though the actual decision to go on a picnic was not articulated until 11:30 am, it was understood that we would be going simply by Linda's non-preparation for the noon meal. It was suggested that we go to a community area, about forty-five minutes away, where there was a rocky beach and a picnic site. Eventually Linda and I began preparing the food that we would eat later that afternoon. Frank and Joe did not want to go for a drive with Tom, Linda and their seven children, all piled in the back of the truck. However, Mickey expressed a desire to come with us on the picnic. At the time I assumed his presence there was usual and as such made no notice of it. I simply took it for granted that picnics were not

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<sup>46</sup> Bridge is the local term for a wooden deck attached to the house. It normally has no railing and is used extensively during the summer months for socializing.

completely out of the ordinary and that Mickey often went with Tom's family when they did have one. The afternoon was spent pleasantly while we alternated between the grassy picnic area and the beach.

About three weeks later Mac and I were talking about that particular weekend when he told me that Mickey went on the picnic just to see me again. I was surprised by this news and began to re-evaluate the previous weeks in light of this new information.

## 2.5. Community Encouragement

Following this talk with Mac I started making mental notes on Mickey's behavior towards me. I noticed that he spent a good deal of time at both Mac's and Tom's houses in the evenings and on weekends when I was there. This too, I learned, was atypical of his normal routine. Once when I phoned Mac at Tom's house from St. John's I asked him if he had seen Mickey or Joe recently and he replied, "Are you kidding? We won't see them until you get back here." When I returned to Welcher's Cove, it was assumed by all parties except Mac and myself, that I was there to see Mickey. Tom's eldest son, Bob, age seventeen, constantly made remarks about my "going with" Mickey. My dress clothes that I wore to the dances were always commented on in respect to "making it easier" for Mickey. Mickey often was not present at these times, but I know from Tom and Mac that he received similar teasings.

This went on for about a month before I found the situation completely intolerable. I continued going to the Saturday night dances and clearly Mickey and I were a community-sanctioned couple. I could not protest loudly or longly

enough to convince some of my new friends that we were not going together. I had danced with Mickey at the dances at *The Seabreeze* unaware of the impact this had, but eventually I started saying no to more dances with him, especially slow ones. I also made a conscious decision to accept fast and slow dance requests from a wider variety of men. By this time I had danced with most of them once or twice, but I had previously avoided the slow dances. I also became aware that when I did accept a slow dance with these other young men that it became something of a game. When I accepted dances with them their responses were always over-enthusiastic and full of surprise. In their eyes I was becoming a bit fast. This was mostly due to the fact that they saw me as "unavailable," and the implications of dancing with someone else's girlfriend are complicated.

Throughout this period Mickey and I maintained a completely non-verbal relationship. Never once did he say *anything* to me about the relationship we were supposed to be having. Somehow I was expected to have figured out that he was interested in me. But my previous experiences with men were exclusively non-Newfoundland. I was more accustomed to going out alone with a man in whom I was interested. Never did Mickey suggest we go anywhere alone, except for that first night when he asked me to sleep with him and even that was implied rather than articulated.

In rural Newfoundland there are very few venues for semi-public courtship. There are few movie theaters, fewer restaurants and the like than what I was used to. These pastimes were something I considered to be part of the context for the development of a relationship. Because these contexts were unavailable to me at this time I had no other ways of understanding what was going on. In Welcher's

Cove, people in the early stages of a courtship relationship are almost always in a group situation. Until it is agreed by both parties that they are a "couple," and have advanced to sexual intimacy, social activities are group-oriented. Generally when two people become a couple the relationship becomes somewhat stable. Their relationship loses some of its uncertainty and they become more dependent on each other for socializing activities. Only when a couple is stabilized do they go out as a couple together in public.

I continued making verbal protestations of the relationship which, as far as I was concerned, was completely non-existent. I talked lightheartedly about it with Barbara, Glenys and Darlene, and also with Joe, who was quickly becoming a good friend. I had planted some seeds of doubt within their minds but most of it went unheeded. By mid-August Mac was a party to my efforts actively to discourage Mickey's attentions, and we launched an unofficial campaign to extricate me from this situation. The following account is of one of the two major events I manipulated to ease the increasing tension I was subjected to. The second of these is discussed in Chapter IV, *The Roads*.

## 2.6. My Attempts at Discouragement

One Saturday night in mid-August we went to the local club (12 km away) instead of going to *The Seabreeze*. I had already made the decision to actively fight my way back to "single" status in the community. The dance that night was very quiet and there were not many people in attendance. However, there was the usual configuration of local people who would normally have attended the dance in Smithport. That night I danced with everyone who asked me, including

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two slow tunes with two different men. I refused to hold anyone's hand going to and from the dance floor. The evening progressed as usual, with lots of drinking, chatting, and dancing.

Because I was not exclusively dancing with Mickey I did not realize to what extent he had been drinking until we all stood up to leave the club. I led going out and only when he caught up with me in the parking lot did I realize how very drunk he was. He put his arm around me and I let him keep it there because sometimes it was easier to deal with him that way. In my supposed role as "Mickey's girlfriend" I knew that in his drunken state I was somewhat responsible for tending to his well-being. He clearly would not be able to take care of himself at this point. Because I also knew that he was completely incapable of driving his truck I demanded his keys. I had come to the club with Mac, Tom, and Linda but I felt that someone would have to drive Mickey and his truck home. I volunteered to do this and in some ways this counteracted my behavior at the dance. If I had been really determined that everyone see my "breakup" with Mickey I would have left him to fend for himself. As it was, I requested that Tom ride with me and Mickey back to Welcher's Cove. This was agreed upon and we all left the parking lot.

A group of men, mostly single, came back to Mac's house when we arrived in Welcher's Cove, but because I was the only female in attendance I quickly said goodnight and went upstairs to bed.

The talking and drinking went on until about 4:30 am. Mickey had passed out earlier on the daybed in Mac's kitchen so he was left there overnight. Sometime around 6:00 am I awoke to the sounds of someone entering my room.

and walking into a small room beyond that was accessible only through mine. I knew there was a fold-up cot in there so I assumed someone was going to take it downstairs for someone to sleep on. It was too dark to see who it was that went through my room, but I made little notice of it. After about five minutes of waiting, I realized the person was staying in there longer than necessary. I left my bed and went to find out what was going on. What I found shocked and frightened me. Mickey had thrown himself on several boxes and was sound asleep. After I discovered who it was and what had happened I was determined more than ever to clear up our "relationship" once and for all.

I went back to my bed and when I woke a second time at 9:00 am I went downstairs. Mac first stopped me in the upstairs hallway to tell me that Mickey was probably still asleep downstairs in the kitchen. I quickly replied that he was, in fact, asleep in the back bedroom. Mac knew the implications of this: Mickey had gone through my bedroom and everyone would know that he did not go home that night. Mickey came downstairs about an hour later and he insisted that Joe and Greg had carried him up there as a joke. I quickly reassured him that he had staggered up there on his own two feet; although I did not know that for sure. However, I knew Joe well enough not to think that he would do such a thing to me. At first I made light of the situation, but Mac and Tom were aware of the implications that kind of behavior would have upon my reputation. We all knew Mickey would talk about being upstairs simply because he could not figure out how it had happened.

When Mickey left the house Mac told me that this was a perfect event for me to use to my advantage. We also alluded to it briefly with Tom and it

became apparent that he understood something of my predicament and that I needed to salvage my reputation. Mac and I then agreed to take advantage of Mickey's behavior to help me disentangle myself from Mickey's attentions. We would turn what looked like my immorality into Mickey's foolish behavior.

That evening there was a small assembly of people in Mac's kitchen: Tom, Mac, Mickey, Joe, Brian, Greg and me. I was in the back kitchen pretending to be busy so as to avoid the male-dominated scene in the main kitchen. From here I could hear most of what was said, but I did not have to participate directly in the conversation unless I wanted to. Naturally Mickey's drunken behavior and the evening's party were discussed. Mac and I were unsure until a short while later whether or not Mickey had spoken of being upstairs. At one point I was in the back kitchen and heard Mac say something about "upstairs." Through the current conversation, Mac realized that Mickey had already mentioned it to several people.

The conversation continued and Mickey repeatedly said he did not know how he had made it upstairs and that it must have been someone playing a joke on him. I only became madder at his words and finally told everybody so. Mickey could not understand why I was mad. Mac took his cue and said, "Kathy was just wild." I then repeated myself and said, "I was really mad." Still Mickey wondered aloud about his trip upstairs while everyone else remained silent. I finally shouted at him, "Because you don't go through a girl's bedroom in the middle of the night!" That silenced him, but more importantly I had nods of approval from Mac, Tom, and Joe. Up to this time Joe thought it was a rather funny situation but he soon realized I was serious. Mickey still was doubtful

about the how of his actions but I had made my point. I was less concerned with him at this point than with the effects my words would have on all those who were present. I knew stories of my anger with Mickey would circulate so I was satisfied and the conversation then turned to other things.

## 2.7. Conclusion

I do not mean to have the reader think that I spent all of my time plotting and scheming to destroy Mickey's reputation in the community. However, by mid-August I had made my decision to carry out an academic treatment of courtship in rural Newfoundland and it was critical for this that I maintain a certain status within the community. On an academic level, I needed to talk with the other young women about the very thing that was happening to me. In order for me to do this I had to clear up my relationship with Mickey before I could talk about it honestly with Darlene, Glenys, and Barbara, who were to become my main informants. I also did not seek to upset Mickey in anyway but for my own sanity, and I mean that quite literally, I had to straighten out what I saw was the reality of the situation. I learned the hard way that "reality" is only a matter of perspective. s



## Chapter 3

### "I'm not there for the music!": The Saturday Night Dance Scene

#### 3.1. Introduction

The attendance of weekend dances is a common phenomenon in Newfoundland. Dancing, usually in conjunction with times, has long been an important part of Newfoundland society. In his 1982 doctoral dissertation, "Towards an Ethnography of Times" W.W. Wareham sets out to distinguish the entertainment events and their components for the people of a small community in Newfoundland.<sup>47</sup> He focuses particularly on events with teenagers and adults where flirting and courting are involved. His presentation of "informal times" (those which did not take place in the halls, but in houses, boats, and stores) emphasizes dancing as the base component of these events. However, he also points out that "they [times] were also the main occasions when men and women met and engaged in courtship activity."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Wilfred W. Wareham, "Towards an Ethnography of Times," diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1982.

<sup>48</sup> Wareham, 452. See also John Szew, *Private Images and Public Imagery: Interpersonal Relations in a Newfoundland Peasant Society*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies 2 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1986) 67.

In 1981, Colin Quigley presented his analysis of dance in rural Newfoundland \*based on a holistic view of dance behavior.\*<sup>49</sup> He focuses on both actual dance steps and performance contexts of pre-modern days. The dance events themselves are classified according to local nomenclature and are as follows in Table I.

**Table 3-1: Dance Events in Rural Newfoundland**

Dance Events	
Group I	Group II
garden party	house time
wedding	hall time
concert	kitchen racket
calendar festivals	store time
mumming	bridge dance
Orangemen's time	wharf dance
	teenage dance
	Saturday night dance
	balls
	hungry dance

He recognizes the distinction between events at which dancing might occur, Group I, and those that are more explicitly dance related, Group II. Clearly, the number and kinds of dance events gives one an indication of dance as a major part of the entertainment world for rural Newfoundlanders. In his chapter, \*Continuity and Change in Newfoundland Dance Culture,\* Quigley relates his

<sup>49</sup> Colin Quigley, \*Folk Dance and Dance Events in Rural Newfoundland,\* MA. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1981, ii.

understanding of the replacement of group dances with mixed-sex, couple dancing, to country or rock music.<sup>50</sup> He points out that previous to the improvement in land transportation, potential mates met at festival occasions that served several social needs. He feels that the modern dance event that takes place in clubs serve primarily one function, that of courtship.

It is the structure of courtship within the club scene that I describe in this chapter. The stages in the selection of dance partners, mechanisms for mutual observation and the dancing itself are manipulated by dance participants to ensure they create an adequate amount of opposite sex interaction throughout the night.

The use of a night club as a weekend social center appears to have become the norm since the late 1950s through early 1970s when roads were constructed throughout the province, leading to the purchase of vehicles and thereby increasing land mobility.<sup>51</sup> In tandem with this was the increase in government liquor stores and the building of clubs. One Memorial student has written an essay titled "The effects of a Nite Club on an Area," and compares pre-club community entertainment with post-club events. His findings are similar to Quigley's:

[previous to the acquisition of a road and then the club] there were very few 'Saturday night drinkers'. . . In 1970 a small tavern was opened. The idea was to provide a place for the men of the area to drink and enjoy the conversation that had previously occurred on the wharves. Strangely enough, the women of the area gradually came,

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<sup>50</sup>Quigley 343-361.

<sup>51</sup>For a history of early American dance halls in America see Russel B. Nye, "Saturday Night at the Paradise Ballroom or Dance Halls in the Twenties," *Journal of Popular Culture* 7 (1973): 14-22.

first merely to inspect. . . later to enjoy the benefits of this unfamiliar phenomenon. The owner then decided to hold Saturday night dances and the club was filled every Saturday at 9:00, even using taped music. (MUNFLA 75-55)

This chapter deals with the club dance activities of unmarried males and females, focusing on a core group of young men and women from Welcher's Cove and their interactions with members of the opposite sex at a club in Smithport, *The Seabreeze*. Nearly every weekend throughout the summer of 1984, a small group of people from Welcher's Cove made the forty-five minute drive to Smithport in order to attend a dance at the largest club in the easternmost part of the peninsula. This group normally consisted of three to five females, five or six males, and one married couple. Their participation in this event can be used to exemplify the kinds of relationships which exist between males and females in this and nearby outports.

My description of this event is divided into two sections. Pre-Dance Activities begins with pre-dance and preparatory activities for the dance and concludes with the drive to the dance. Dance Activities starts with the selection of seats and tables, and describes patterned behavior related to courtship.

### **3.2. Pre-Dance Activities**

#### **3.2.1. Preparation**

The following section is based on data collected over a two month summer period of attending the dances at *The Seabreeze* and describes an accumulation of data rather than one specific evening. In this way I hope to show the kinds of things that go on, not necessarily for every participant every Saturday night, but

which occur at one time or another for most of them. The young --between 18 to 30-- single people I know from Welcher's Cove attended the dance in Smithport at least twice a month. They included Glenys, Darlene, Barbara, Shirley, Stella, Frank, Brian, Mickey, Joe, Jim, and Mark.

### 3.2.2. Mid-week

The two items uppermost in people's minds early in the week, Wednesday or Thursday, are the mapping out of who is going and how they will either get a ride or who will ride with them. The first of these considerations calls into question whether it is worthwhile for them to go. If during a house-visit a person wants to find out if others are going, the dance is not always immediately discussed. Very often, especially by single males, an air of indifference is expressed. However, when the subject is finally brought out it becomes apparent that the dance is the main topic of concern. One young male's response to "Are you going?" was "I'm not sure." I soon learned this customary response invariably meant "yes."

For the females, expressing excitement is the norm. For them the trip to Smithport is an opportunity to meet new males or re-acquaint themselves with others. The following is taken from an interview with Barbara, Darlene, and Glenys on the afternoon before going to a dance:

K: At the dances, it seems to be on the back of everyone's minds, "Will I end up with this guy tonight?" D: It's in mine now! After all this talking, all I've been thinking about since we came here [to do the interview] is *The Seabreeze*. I can't wait to get down there! I just can't! G: I can't either! D: I'm going to have a good time tonight. G: So am I. D: Everybody's going to have a good time tonight. I think everybody's going to really enjoy themselves tonight. B: I hope so. G: Just put your mind on it. D: Yeah. K: Do you think that has a lot to do with it? I mean, if you go out in a really great mood like this? G:

Yeah. D: Yeah, you've got to go out there. . . with a positive attitude that this is going to be the night. This is going to be the night that I'm going to have fun, and go out and do it, have fun. G: I mean not, you know, *fun* fun, but [laughter] fun, right? D: Go and do whatever comes naturally. [emphasis hers]<sup>52</sup>

For the males who work during the week, Saturday night is the only possible time when they can stay out all night without having to wake up either at 4:00 am if they fish, or 8:00 am if they work at one of the fish plants. Occasionally, some of the young males work a late shift and either do not bother to drive to Smithport or arrive late and hope that they will still be able to get into the club. For those males who are unemployed, the weekend is also a time of expectation because the dance means that their employed friends will have time off to spend with them.

Early preparation is important because one has to let others in the community know who will attend. People who say they are "thinking about going" influence those who may be undecided. In this way a core group of people will assure both themselves and others that there will be friends at the dance. One or two people who are negative in either their response or tone can easily influence others in their decision to make the trip to Smithport.

Another factor in why early preparation is the rule is that many people do not own cars and therefore rides must be secured. Females usually do not own cars which means they must depend on others for a ride to the dance. For the young women of Welcher's Cove several options are available and some options

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<sup>52</sup> Throughout this thesis all direct quotations from Barbara, Glenys, or Darlene are taken from an interview I conducted with the three of them and is in my personal fieldwork collection. (T84-3)

are preferred to others. (1.) Go with a brother or other male kin. (2.) Go with a female friend who has a boyfriend who is driving. (3.) Go with a female who has a car. This third choice, although unusual, was in fact a possibility for some of them. During the summer I spent in Welcher's Cove, one of Darlene's close friends from another community, Cheryl, owned a car. At that time neither one had a steady boyfriend. This and the ownership of a car gave them an independence which meant they could go to any club they wanted at any time.

It is rare that single males and females drive as a couple to the dance. When it does occur, the male and female are announcing to friends and family that they are now a "couple." Very often the ride to the dance was considered to be unrelated to the return trip. It mattered less with whom you went than with whom you returned. The return trip will be more fully treated at the end of this chapter. All three of the options for rides to the dance were used at different times by the females I knew. Each possibility allowed a certain amount of flexibility so that one need not make the return trip with the same people with which one arrived.

### 3.2.3. Day of the Dance

On the day of the dance there is an intensification of communicative preparation which occasionally grows to near frantic proportions. For those who are still unsure as to how they are getting to Smithport, phone calls are made two or three times (if not more) during the day to find out who is going, and just as important, who is going with whom. Once when I stopped for gasoline in a nearby community, two neices of a young woman from Welcher's Cove asked me

if I had room for their aunt to drive with me to Smithport that night. As I was unsure yet who was riding with me, when I arrived back in Welcher's Cove, a phone call to the aunt was necessary to complete the final arrangements.

Communication networks must remain open so that if one needs a ride it can be obtained relatively simply. If there is any social tension between people who have vehicles and those who do not, it becomes more difficult for those who do not to secure a ride to the dance.

The following dialogue took place that same afternoon as above, as we were talking about *The Seabreeze*:

B: Who's going to *The Seabreeze* tonight, Kathy, with you? K: As far as I know, just Mac. I don't know if Tom and Linda will go. You're [to all three] certainly welcome to come along. G: I think Brian and Mark are going. D: Yeah, so we'll probably try to get [a ride] with them. G: I'll ask Brian [her first cousin] if I see him around. I'll ask Mark [her brother] anyway. B: I'll get a ride with Kathy. D: Yeah, so where would you [to me] stop? You'd probably stop and pick us up. Well, see if we're not around [pauses] K: We can stop by around 8:00 or whatever. D: Stop round by the house [hers] or whatever. About 8:00 is it? K: When we're ready to leave, yeah. D: Ok. G: I'll come over to your house [to Darlene]. D: Alright, then good. B: Glenys, pick me up [on foot]. G: I'll pick you up on the way. [laughter] D: Ok, excellent. B: We'll see what's going on then.

The above conversation was very hesitant and did not flow easily. It was not until Barbara said that she was going to come with me and Mac that Glenys and Darlene decided to come along as well. Because they like to have as many options as possible, they do not like to make their final decision without consulting each other. They also like to keep their options open in case a better, or more interesting offer comes up. For instance, a ride with me is not as exciting as going with a brother and his unrelated friends. Glenys' acknowledgement of both Brian and Mark indicates that there were at least two other possibilities open to them for that particular evening's drive.



Tension is created and manipulated by those people who have cars but who are undecided about attending. Very often these people determine whether or not others make it to the dance. Occasionally, tangible evidence of plans to attend is apparent in the washing of vehicles on Saturday afternoon. Not all car owners wash their car every week but those who do often jokingly acknowledge that they are getting it ready for the big dance. During the interview that afternoon we also talked about personal grooming as a means of mental preparation. They all said they love to take their time, have a nap and a hot bath and basically psyche themselves up for the evening ahead. And so with bodies and cars washed and choices of passengers and drivers made, all is ready for the drive to the dance.

#### **3.2.4. Drive to the Dance**

The drive to the dance was, for me, also a time of looking forward to the evening ahead. Because it is a long drive there is a good deal of conversation about the day's events. If there are fishermen present I often heard the most recent information on the politics of the in-shore fishery, combined with personal insights on the subject. Not feeling secure about my knowledge of such a topic I often remained quiet or, depending on the configuration of people in the vehicle, spoke with another female. However, when the mood was lighter, there was always plenty of teasing and sexual innuendo. If Mickey and I were in the same vehicle this was often the case. There was also speculation about who would be at the club and who everyone would like to see in attendance that night. Once, when I drove with four other women most of the talk had to do with an upcoming wedding. This then led to discussions on weddings in general and statements

about what each of their own weddings might some day be like. Because of the length of the trip and the necessity of driving past or through many smaller communities, people are reminded of acquaintances and friends along the route. There is some familiarity with neighboring communities and people often made remarks as to whether or not they thought a friend might be home as they drove by. As one gets closer to Smithport the talk is almost exclusively devoted to the dance, the band and the people who will likely be there. When the parking lot is entered, comments are made as to the size of the crowd. If it looks busy, people hope they are still early enough to get in. With proper planning and no delays on the ride over, a position at the dance is secured.

### 3.3. Dance Activities

#### 3.3.1. Arrival and Selection of Seats and Tables

The most critical custom which helps ensure a good time occurs upon arrival at the club. This custom is simply the selection of a table. Although at first glance this may seem trite, it is one of the most noticeable features of the entire evening. One must arrive early to avoid the club being "blocked" and to have a full choice of seats and tables. "Blocked" is the local term used to describe the club when it is full and when one can no longer get in unless patrons already in the club leave. "She's blocked" or "I hope she's not blocked yet," were the forms most often used.<sup>53</sup>

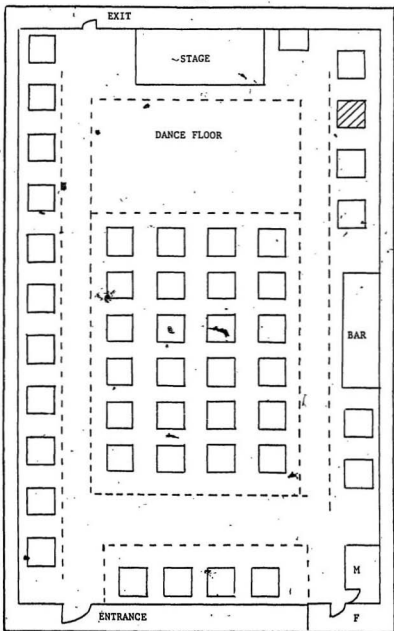
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<sup>53</sup> blocked 'to obstruct' (a) crowded; overflowing; "The church was blocked to the doors." *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, eds. G.M. Story, W.J. Kirwin, and J.D.A. Widdowson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

Before even the choice of a table the first thing the young women from Welcher's Cove do is go to the washroom. The washroom is a focal point for female social activity and will be discussed below. Occasionally a table is selected first, with jackets left on chairs to claim it before the walk to the washroom. Once inside the washroom the women discuss who is already in the club and where they are going to sit, provided they have not already chosen a table. Inevitably the single females from Welcher's Cove sit up near the dance floor towards the stage area (Figure 3-1). This customary choice is based on their shared perceptions of best location to see and be seen. When the table is selected before the trip to the washroom, the talk in the washroom is specifically oriented towards perceived effects of their arrival. By selecting a table first they allow themselves more time to see and be seen. This technique, however, is a slow and deliberate one, and takes a good amount of confidence to do it subtly and therefore may not always be carried out.

Table choices are based on the single factor of being able to see as much as possible while letting others observe as well. If the area chosen is too crowded (by the bar, for instance) people will stand and mutual observation is not possible. If it is not active enough, eye contact is not made. This need for reciprocal observation means that only a certain number of tables are considered ideal and it is these which are always filled first.

The club itself is a large one that seats approximately 160 (at square tables) with upwards of 200 people attending. It is a square U-shape and is set up to allow a maximum of movement along its three main aisles. The best seats are those which line any of the aisles but especially those which are near the dance



not drawn to scale

Figure 3-1: Table Selection

floor or the washrooms. Because people must continually walk past these tables to and from the dance floor there is ample opportunity for mutual gazing.<sup>54</sup> Some of these tables are also important for two or three reasons. A table near the washroom but not the dance floor can be considered a good one because of the constant flow of traffic to these rooms. A third area of good seats is near the entrance to the club where one can see all who enter and leave. The actual position of the chairs chosen is also important. A secondary table might be made less so if one sits facing the crowd so that the best possible view may be obtained under the circumstances.

This kind of decision-making is no secret to anyone who attends these dances. Comments are often made about "our table" and reflect the knowledge that "good" tables exist. Those tables which allow for obvious eye contact and easy access to the dance floor are always the first to be filled up. Consequently, those in the center of the "U" are last in preference and remain empty until all the others are filled. In addition, the number of people at the club makes it difficult to walk past the crowded tables to reach the center of the club. Favorite tables are also claims to territory and as such, effort is made to control a small area of the club. After two or three consecutive Saturday nights our table area was referred to by other friends who were not from Welcher's Cove as that of "the Welcher's Cove crowd." "The Welcher's Cove crowd is here again" was a common greeting from those who came into the club.

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<sup>54</sup>Michael Argyle and Janet Dean, "Eye Contact, Distance, and Affiliation," *Sociometry* 28 (1965) 289-304. I will use Argyle's and Dean's definition of 'gaze' and 'eye contact' throughout the thesis: "Gaze" refer[s] to a person looking another in the eyes, and 'eye contact' refer[s] to a mutual gaze."

Control mechanisms allow for a fair balance of women and men scattered throughout the club rather than clustered in one area. A table of four single women will rarely choose to sit by another table of similar composition. For example, once when five females (myself included) arrived late at the club, I pulled up a second table next to a group of friends which included two males and two females. I thereby inadvertently created some tension. By creating a larger space, seven females ended up sitting in close proximity (Figure 3-2).

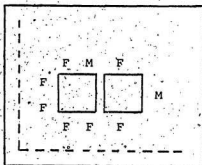


Figure 3-2: Male-Female Seat Distribution

There was an obvious lack of males at the table. In addition, competition was increased by having seven females together rather than only two or three. It was obvious that the four females with whom I arrived wanted their own table. Even though the table we were sitting at was of a high status, the composition of the table was not, in their terms, ideal. Because I was satisfied with my seat the configuration did not annoy me. The women remained where they were but it took one whole set before they appeared relaxed enough to accept invitations to dance and by then two-thirds of the night was over.

### 3.3.2. The Music of the Dance

Before discussing the courtship activities which take place within the dance context, the music of the dances needs to be looked at. The music is, in a word, eclectic. Michael Taft in his discography for Newfoundland and Labrador writes, "... Irish and country and western music are combined with traditional Newfoundland music."<sup>55</sup> The bands, which play at the weekly dances are all capable of and accustomed to playing country, rock and roll, and traditional Newfoundland songs. In Newfoundland in general jukeboxes offer a selection of the latest top forty of pop, and country and western and traditional Newfoundland music. Degrees of expertise vary but every band made attempts at all three kinds of music. In an interview by Gerald L. Pocius and David A. Taylor with Bud Davidge and Sim Savoury of *Simani*, a Newfoundland two man band, the performers point out that the more the audience can participate the more the audience enjoys themselves and that the enjoyment has less to do with the quality of the music than with the relationship between the band and audience.<sup>56</sup> Because there are as many middle aged and older people who attend *The Seabreeze* on a Saturday night as there are younger people, the manager of the club feels he must hire bands that "play what suits the public."<sup>57</sup> The

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<sup>55</sup> Michael Taft, *A Regional Discography of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1904-1972*, Bibliographic and Special Series 1 (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive, 1975) vii. See also Peter Narváez, "Country and Western in Diffusion: Juxtaposition and Syncretism in the Popular Music of Newfoundland," *Culture and Tradition* 2 (1977): 107-114.

<sup>56</sup> MUNFLA 84-074:16.

<sup>57</sup> Taken from field notes of an informal interview with one of *The Seabreeze's* regular barmaids.

manager never hires straight rock and roll bands because he needs groups who play "a bit of everything." If there are preferences, it is towards country bands, but even these play a good deal of rock and roll from the 1950s to the 1980s. The following songs are typical of the kind of music performed at the *Seabreeze*:

"Tight Fittin' Jeans," "Storms Never Last," "Old Time Rock and Roll," "Good Hearted Woman," "Red Red Wine," "Johnny B. Goode," "Holding Her and Loving You," "Put Another Log On the Fire," "Mussels in the Corner."<sup>58</sup>

There are, however, two clubs within driving distance that cater to rock and roll only. Both of these bring in bands from the mainland and draw very young crowds. One of these has a thoroughly bad reputation, known for its fights and brawls. I was discouraged to attend this club and in fact never did. I attended only one dance at the other club, which had a less noxious reputation, but Tom and Linda disliked going there because of the young crowd so we tended to return to Smithport week after week.

Whatever the choice of bands, the music at *The Seabreeze* reflects a wider public desire for music that is danceable. In general, most people dance to most songs, regardless of musical style. And for some, the music is only a backdrop for the social event, hence Darlene's comment, "I'm not there for the music!" However, those who do pay attention to the music seem to be satisfied with the variety.

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<sup>58</sup> "Old Time Rock and Roll," by Bob Seger, on Capitol 4702, 1979; "Good Hearted Woman," by Waylon Jennings, on RCA 0615, 1972; "Red Red Wine," by Neil Diamond, on Bang 556, 1988; "Johnny B. Goode," by Chuck Berry, on Chess 1691, 1958; "Mussels in the Corner," by Harry Hibbs, on Caribou CC-45-6907, 1978. I'd like to thank Neil Rosenberg and Jock McKay for their assistance with this discography.



There are songs which have taken on localized importance and may then become elements in the courtship process. For instance, Darlene, Glenys and Barbara agreed that "Red Red Wine" has implications for them beyond its face value.<sup>59</sup> First of all it is a slow dance tune which means one has to be careful with whom one dances. For these young women the song symbolizes romantic love. They feel that if they are asked to dance to this song the male asking them is undoubtedly interested in them. Darlene said, "It really means something if you dance to it." This kind of local interpretation not only helps them in the partner selection process but also works as a protective aid. If a male knows how Darlene feels about a particular song he may take advantage of that. She, on the other hand, may politely decline, based on her feelings toward both the male and the song. In the same way, Darlene may, if she needs to, drop hints that she likes a particular song. The male who receives that information may then use it as he wishes. In other words, an invitation's meaning may vary with context depending upon which song is playing and how that song affects the listeners.

In 1956 Donald C. Horton presented an analysis of over 200 popular songs according to four major rating agencies in the United States.<sup>60</sup> He found that the majority of the songs dealt with various stages in male-female relationships. He had this to say as to why so many popular songs dealt with courtship:

... casual observation confirms the fact that they [young people] do murmur the lyrics of the songs to which they are dancing and repeat

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<sup>59</sup>Neil Diamond, Bang 556, 1968.

<sup>60</sup>The rating agencies surveyed were "Hit Parade," "Song Hits," "Country Song Roundup," and "Rhythm and Blues." Donald C. Horton, "The Dialogue of Courtship in Popular Songs," *American Journal of Sociology* 52 (1957): 569-78. See also E. E. LeMasters, *Modern Courtship and Marriage* (New York: MacMillan, 1957) 82.

lines or phrases of songs in teasing and joking at social gatherings. In a culture in which skill in the verbal expression of profound feelings is not a general trait and in which people become embarrassed and inarticulate when speaking of their love for each other, a conventional, public impersonal love poetry may be a useful- indeed, a necessary-alternative.<sup>61</sup>

An eighteen year old female respondent to the questionnaire had this to say:

While dancing with him, sing the song and act as if you are singing it to him. (especially) if it talks of sex or liking someone. (Q86A/52:6, f18)

This inability to verbalize in one's own words how one feels has led, in this community, to use popular songs to communicate. In 1969 a follow-up to Horton's study was done and even though the actual kinds of male-female relationships had changed, and an increase in world political awareness had developed in song, the use of the popular song as a communicator still held true for a majority of this age group.<sup>62</sup>

By the end of the second dance I attended, a slow country and western song had been designated by friends as "our song," referring to my relationship with Mickey. The song was Ricky Scagg's "I Wouldn't Change You if I Could." To this day I do not know why this particular song was so designated but for the remainder of the summer, whenever it was played in any club, live or on the juke box, comments were made by friends and he and I were expected to interrupt whatever we were doing and dance together. This song may have been the first slow dance we had together or it may have been the last song of the first dance I attended. However, by early August I did not encourage dancing to this song and

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<sup>61</sup> Horton 574.

<sup>62</sup> James T. Carey, "Changing Patterns in the Popular Song," *American Journal of Sociology* 74 (1969): 720-31.

often made excuses to avoid such contact. Once an "our song" has been chosen by either the community, friends, or the couple, it can be used as a public indicator of the increasing or decreasing interest of both people involved. The level of interest is easily observable through the use of a song like this. The creation of an *identification song* reinforces and encourages partners to make contact with each other. Once a song is identified with a specific couple, friends and family will always remember and comment on the song as belonging to that particular couple. This kind of community awareness can reinforce either a real or perceived relationship.

### 3.3.3. Selection of Dance Partners

The choosing of dance partners is complex and may be viewed in three stages (Figure 3-3).

- a. eye contact (perceived or desired interest)
- b. approach/request
  - 1. conversational
  - 2. non-conversational
- c. accept/decline

Throughout the evening a female must decide if she is going to dance with more than one male or only one. If she chooses to dance with several partners she must behave in the same way with each of them or she may inadvertently express interest where there is none. Of course the actual dancing may be the venue for revealing sexual interest.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "What a man in his essence, and what a woman is in her essence is revealed to the partner in the way they dance together. You can sometimes get better acquainted with the total self of a person of the other sex in an hour's dancing together than in an hour's conversation or work together, or in nearly any other social relationship." David Goodman, "Dancing, Social," *The Encyclopedia of Sexual Behavior*, eds. Albert Ellis and Albert Abarbanel (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1961) 326.

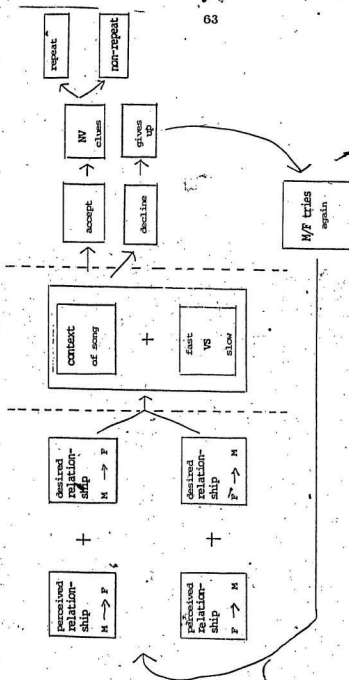


Figure 3-3: The Selection of Dance Partners

When a female is asked to dance she must decide yes or no based on her knowledge of the male, her level of interest (possibly dependent on that knowledge), and his level of interest (according to her perceptions). This can take place in a matter of seconds, or it may have been carefully thought out over a period of hours or weeks.

### 3.3.3.1. Eye Contact

"Eye contact is essential," wrote one of the respondents to the questionnaire.<sup>64</sup> This comment, like so many others reveals a complete awareness of exactly how people are able to judge reciprocal interest. Also from a male, "I use no hints except looking into the eyes; that can answer alot of questions for you."<sup>65</sup> "Lingering eye contact," "long staring," "see if you can hold this [eye] contact for a period of time," are other responses from the questionnaire that will be fully covered in Chapter VI, *Newfoundland Courtship Gestures*.<sup>66</sup> For now it is enough to understand that without some kind of mutual gazing, an approach is unlikely, and a positive response is even more unlikely.

### 3.3.3.2. Approach/Request

The actual invitation to dance can vary from a tap on the shoulder to a more structured conversational pattern. When I asked Darlene and Glenys specifically how males with whom they are unacquainted approach them this was their reply:

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<sup>64</sup>Q86A/113:4, m18.

<sup>65</sup>Q86A/31:6, m19.

<sup>66</sup>See also Q86A/28:6, 17:6, and 85:6 for a representative sample of comments on eye contact.

G: They come over and ask me to dance, and then they come to my table and sit down and we talk. K: What will he talk to you about? G: He'll probably ask you your name first. D: Where you're from, what you're doing to *The Seabreeze*. G: If you work or whatever, right? That's how I got to meet Barry, that guy that I was dancing with. . . . He came down to my table. Darlene was there and he was talking to the girls [Darlene and Barbara] first 'cause he knew you, didn't he? D: Yeah, he knew me. G: And then he came down, asked me my name, and where I was from, and what did I work at, and after that he asked me to dance.

A male may ask a female to dance before he talks to her or he may attempt a conversation first. In either case, the conversational approach is highly structured and rarely seems to stray from the above described course.

I asked Darlene and Glenys if they ever approach unacquainted men and this was Darlene's reply:

It takes nerve. Well, I find if I got a couple of drinks in me then I can do it. And tonight I'm going to do it! I'm going to really plunge tonight. If I see a guy, if I see Doug there tonight and Jim's not there, [her current, unstable interest] I'm going to go up to him, say, "Hi, Doug what are you up to?" And I'm going to ask him to dance, and whatever comes after, and if I find it a little hot, and I need a little air [laughter] I'm going to say, "Doug, want to take a little stroll?" I'm going to do it tonight! You watch!

When I asked the girls earlier in the conversation how they meet new men at the dances, they could not articulate the steps they take. Once we had talked long enough about the entire dance scene, specific information about the structure of an approach became easier to talk about. Although I had asked earlier what they thought the various stages of a pick-up were, they could not think of anything specific. When it was put in the context of a particular male and a particular evening, Darlene's approach technique was easily talked about and well understood by both herself and her girlfriends.

### 3.3.3.3. Accept/Decline

I have already alluded to the question of slow vs fast dances and it is this factor which has major implications in male-female relationships at the dance. Slow dances and waltzes necessitate a level of intimacy that varies in degree.<sup>67</sup> A slow dance allows for full body contact and is a real indicator of the level of interest being expressed. When asked how they know the level of interest,

Darlene and Glenys, amid much laughter, described it this way:

D: It all depends on how he's acting on the dance floor, you know? Some guys just dance with you and snuggle up to you. More of them will start snoozin' around your neck. G: Blowin' in your ear. D: Grabbin' you tighter, and start, you know! You know what I mean! They'll start rubbin' your shoulder and blowin' in your ear like Glenys said.

We have these responses from the questionnaire:

At dances males usually do the asking and to send a signal guys usually hold the girl very close, put his hand on her behind or even blow in her ear. This usually results in the couple leaving and most times engaging in sexual intercourse. (Q86A/60:5, m19)

When waltzing, if a girl puts her hand around your waist or back she is not too interested. But if she puts her hands and arms around your neck she is interested. (Q86A/92:6, m18)<sup>68</sup>

When an offer to slow dance is accepted by a female she automatically lends that male approval. When the offer is declined, it is perfectly acceptable for the male to ask at a later time, often to a fast song. Good friends may slow dance without fear of sexual proposition simply because the relationship is already confirmed prior to going out on the dance floor.

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<sup>67</sup>Waltz is the local cover term for both slow and 3/4 time tunes that are specifically waltz tunes. Slow dances are those, often country and western, that are not conducive to a waltz step but encourage physical contact between partners.

<sup>68</sup>See also Q86A/92:6, 117:6, 150:6, 137:6.

Fast dances are less of a problem. Because of the nature of the fast songs, no feelings need be expressed and both partners may remain in neutral ground. Accepting a fast dance does not have to mean anything serious, yet it can if either of the parties wants it to. Males can be encouraged, discouraged, or left wondering by their partner, most often through body language. If I felt obliged to dance but did not like the male with whom I was dancing I used to avoid eye contact until the song was over. One young female used to express her interest in a male by pretending to play a guitar to the music while they were dancing and encourage him to do the same. Thus a privately shared experience might consolidate a bond between the dancers. Other less subtle methods were also used. Females occasionally grab and reach for the genitals of the male with whom they are dancing or of a man who is on the dance floor with whom they would like to dance.<sup>69</sup> Screaming and yelling during excessively fast dances, often rock and roll tunes, is also a part of the repertoire of things a female might use to show her approval of her dance partner and the evening in general.

By dancing to fast songs people can test one another's level of interest. Fast songs are a safety mechanism that allow for a maximum of discovery without threatening either party. A first invitation to a fast song may be accepted without hesitation by the female and she need not worry about having to accept a second or third invitation should it arise. The evening's dancing can become more complex as the night wears on as people try to determine whether or not previous dance partners are more than casually interested. Musicians are aware of this

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<sup>69</sup>See also Q86A/51:3, m20, "... a 'goose' is a sure hint. Goose - girl grabbing you by the 'ass' or the 'genitals' in a public place, eg. dance hall, games' room, etc."



kind of activity and manipulate their sets so that there is a balance of fast and slow songs throughout the evening.<sup>70</sup> Because of this factor, people may feel rejected or encouraged through both the acceptance of an invitation to dance and the actual dancing (e.g. fast or slow).

### 3.4. Cruising

Throughout the course of the evening there is a constant flow of people up and down the aisles. Whatever their objective may be, the impulse is simply to walk around. Cruising, as I will refer to it, is an integral part of the dance's structure.<sup>71</sup> This term was not used by the people in Welcher's Cove at the dances but it describes adequately the custom that takes place in the club. This custom is the easiest and most efficient method for allowing mutual observation. Cruising is not restricted to either sex, however I will focus on female cruising.

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<sup>70</sup> See Ingrid Fraser, "Public Tradition in an Urban Context; An Occupational Folklore Study of Musicians in St. John's," MA. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1981, 116. "Control over repertoire is of paramount importance to the bar musician. He must constantly negotiate his choice of songs with the audience and, while he knows that 'the manager wants what they [the audience] wants,' he expects the management to allow him to evaluate and respond to the audience on his own terms." Bud Davidge and Sim Savoury of *Simani* point out that they alternate a slow dance, an old-fashioned waltz, a rock song, an accordion tune, and possibly a couple of jigs twice in a one hour set (MUNFLA MS 84-074).

<sup>71</sup> "Cruising" is a term used in Newfoundland and defined as 1. a walk, ramble, trip on foot, or 4. a visit with relatives or friends; pleasurable journey. *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*.

### 3.4.1. The Female Washroom and the Washroom Cruise

Before getting further into the cruise in general, it is necessary to point out the function of the washroom as a female social center. This seems to hold true not just in this club but in others as well.<sup>72</sup> It is a haven where private space can be created for the exchange of information. I have already pointed out that some women, upon entering the club, go first to the washroom before doing anything else. The following is an excerpt from field notes:

From the time they [four females and dates, and one female from my table] arrived it took twenty minutes for them [the females] to do a washroom cruise. . . . They were all standing in a small group by their table obviously discussing something. . . . All five finally went to the washroom [in single file, one after another].

Because the club was not very crowded when they entered, these women may have felt that they needed a more private space to continue their discussion. The talk was clearly not idle chatter. Intensity of the topic was obvious through gestures, glances, and tone. Whatever was being discussed at the table was likely continued in the washroom.

Another incident will exemplify what kinds of things take place in the washroom. Shirley, a young woman friend from Welcher's Cove in her early twenties came into the washroom while I was in there with Jackie, a female friend

<sup>72</sup>On my first excursion outside of St. John's in May 1984, I attended a Saturday night club dance in Terrenceville, on the Burin Peninsula. A fellow student was with me, and in normal fashion the two of us made our first trip to the washroom together. Upon entering there were two other women talking, standing between the sinks and the stalls. As it was a small space we greeted them and they moved back further with their backs to the stalls and we were then facing them. Because the two women had been conversing when we arrived we assumed that all three stalls were filled. After five minutes of chatter among the four of us, a fifth woman came in and immediately went into one of the stalls. My friend and I both looked surprised and started laughing. From the two local women's response (laughter) I realized that the stalls were empty and they then understood that we really went in there to use the washroom and not specifically for a chat, as they seemed to think.

from St. John's who often came out to Welcher's Cove to visit me. Shirley, who had just arrived at the club came bursting into the washroom to show off a hickey on her neck that she had received earlier that evening.<sup>73</sup> Jackie and I responded appropriately, with excitement, and when she finally calmed down we remained in the washroom for a few minutes and talk resumed on less scandalous topics.

During the evening it is not uncommon for one or two females to rush over to a female at another table and demand her presence in the washroom. By mid-summer I too was included in these conferences. Sometimes a girl would simply say "Come to the washroom; I want to talk to you." In some cases the message would be communicated through eye contact and a tilt of the head in the direction of the washroom, or simply by tapping on the shoulder. The topic of discussion was often the male with whom the girl had just danced. Discussions of perceived or real attention from males were had and sometimes simply a five minute break from the stresses and strains of entertainment was needed. The washroom as a social center provides the only space within the club where women may act unobserved (within the limitations of who else is present, friends or strangers) and relax from the rigors of male attentions or even hide from the lack thereof.

Darlene had this to say about the washroom:

I often go into the bathroom if there's a slow dance coming on and, if nobody asked me, well, I always take off to the bathroom; there's no one to the table. I'll always go to the bathroom. I always will.

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<sup>73</sup> "Hickey" is a common term throughout North America for a "reddish mark on the skin caused by kissing." *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Wm. Morris, ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1969).

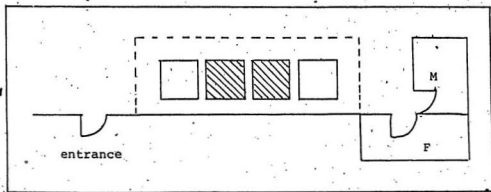
In addition to being used as a social center, the washroom is the termination point for the "washroom cruise." As mentioned above this is not an local term, but it does incorporate the Newfoundland usage of "cruise" as well as identify the washroom as critical in this patterned behavior. Going to the washroom is an excuse for many females to stand up and be noticed as they walk through the club. Such walking is not peculiar to Welcher's Cove and environs but it is used extensively. "A girl would pass by a fellow pretending to be on the way to the bathroom, or to another friend, perhaps a couple of times so that he would notice her and ask her to dance."<sup>74</sup>

As mentioned earlier, tables in the area of the washroom are of high status because of the amount of activity, even though they are far removed from the dance floor. When a female embarks on a washroom cruise the objective is to let others see her without making this appear obvious. A washroom cruise is different from using the washroom purely as a social center in that a true washroom cruise is usually carried out alone. It is *not* a group or pair of women going to the washroom at the same time. A true washroom cruise is solo, hence attention is drawn to one rather than many. It is serious in the sense that the woman cruising walks slowly, deliberately, and rarely stops to chat for very long as she makes her way through the club towards the washroom. One can, of course, make eye contact while walking but most of the young women seemed to avoid any contact at all if they were trying to attract a specific male's attention.

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<sup>74</sup>MUNFLA 70-714.

Once the washroom is reached, the female may then use the washroom for whatever purpose and will reappear and allow the dance crowd a second look at her. The washroom cruise is more often a means by which females allow males to look at them rather than actually trying to make verbal, nonverbal or physical contact. This cruising happens continuously and simultaneously by a large number of women and one can realize the great amount of movement which takes place in the aisles.



not drawn to scale

Figure 3-4: Table Selection

My group of friends usually sat along the back wall because of its proximity to both the entrance door and the washrooms (Figure 3-4). Andrea, a young woman from Smithport whose brother was engaged to Shirley from Welcher's Cove, had an interest in one of the males, Mac, who was sitting at my table. Andrea was with Kelly, a new bride celebrating her marriage that day. A female is "with" another female when they base themselves at the same table. Andrea

and Kelly were based near the upper right hand side of the dance floor. On one of their trips to the washroom Andrea looked towards Mac, without turning far enough to make eye contact, to see if he was watching her. Kelly, who was right behind her, saw that Mac was indeed looking at Andrea, caught his attention, and smiled at him. All the while both women never interrupted their walking rhythm and continued on into the washroom. Time elapsed was about eight seconds. In the washroom, presumably, Kelly passed on to her friend the information that Mac was watching her.

For females, cruising that is internal, that is they are not going to the washroom or outdoors, is normally done in pairs. In addition, if they do have to actually use the washroom, two women will go together and not spend as much time away from their table. The following is a typical example of the kind of movement one can expect from a pair of females who wish to remain active within the club:

One night we [Cheryl and Darlene] were sitting [alone presumably] to the table and we weren't get[ting] any observation from any of the guys. And she [Cheryl] said, "Let's walk up to the bar." So we went up and she got asked for a dance and I walked back. I said, "I'm not standing up here by myself." That's the reason she went up to the bar; someone's sure to ask you dance up there.

The indoor cruise then, is a method by which people may observe the scene without appearing rude by staring. More important it allows others in the club to observe the cruisers. The cruising is an efficient custom that allows for optimal audience observation in a crowded club.

### 3.4.2. "Fresh Air" and the Fresh Air Cruise

One of the most common courtship events during the dances is activity in the parking lot, in vehicles, or behind the building. "Fresh air" is the local phrase which denotes this activity. People very often do go to the main entrance doors to cool down from the dancing. I call this patterned behavior of walking through the club to the front doors a "fresh air cruise." This cruise is made usually to see who else is out there, but mostly to see what is going on in the parking lot and surrounding areas. More important is the connotation "fresh air" has if you leave the building with a male or have arranged to meet one outside.

D: Break time they'll [an interested male] probably ask you to go out like-- G: You know, go outside just to-- D: For, uh, you know! G: A breath of fresh air! [laughter] K: What does that mean? D: Probably go out for a toke<sup>75</sup> or whatever comes naturally. [all amid much laughter and red faces]

Their hesitation and laughter throughout this conversation informed me of what I already suspected. It is not unusual for some females and males to engage in sexual intimacies during intermissions in the dancing. Breaks usually last twenty-five to thirty-five minutes, ample time for limited privacy. In addition to dance participants, the parking lot is usually a hang out for younger people who are not old enough, and do not look old enough to get into the club, as well as for those people who were blocked out by the crowd.

"Dogging", in Newfoundland, is a pastime adolescents usually engage in.<sup>76</sup> This term refers to younger people who are not sexually active but who follow

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<sup>75</sup>Toke is a slang term for the smoking of illegal substances.

<sup>76</sup>See Hilda Murray, "The Traditional Role of Women in a Newfoundland Fishing Community," MA. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1972, 102.

older couples so they may observe physical intimacy. The younger people who socialize around the parking lot at *The Seabreeze* were probably there to see some couples making out.

On one occasion, an unmarried couple from Ontario was with me and various people from Welcher's Cove. The following is paraphrased from field notes:

Carol went out for air and promptly got picked up. A male with whom she was unacquainted asked her "to go behind the building." When she refused he wanted to know why. "Don't you like me?" he said. He then asked her if her "husband" was drunk. Carol felt that he was hoping for an affirmative reply to this question which would then free her to go with him.

What does this exemplify? First of all that a lone female in a locally designated, high activity area is assumed, by some males at least, to be there for more than real fresh air. In this specific case it mattered not that the female might be married. Also significant is the male's query as to the inebriated state of her "husband." Drunkenness is often an excuse for sexually aggressive behavior and in single males it is sometimes the only way they gain enough courage to interact with single women. One male respondent to the questionnaire had this to say:

I find that when one is under the influence of alcohol, one hasn't as much trouble in getting out with a girl because you have more nerve.  
(Q86A/144:8, m18)

Another writes:

It is interesting to note here that the small community where I came from, over the past 6-8 years has been the result of a lot of teenage pregnancies which has given rise to much problem [sic]. Alcohol, I feel, was the biggest cause for both males and females whoring around or whatever one would like to call it. (Q86A/51:10, m20)



Of both kinds of cruising, the washroom or indoor cruise is often the first step towards building a relationship, whether for one night or longer. The washroom cruise's most important function is that it is a venue for observation which may then be used as a tool for relaying messages. Going for "fresh air" may be used to expand or intensify a relationship. An affirmative reply to the invitation for "a breath of fresh air" is a sign of encouragement and approval of the male.

### 3.5. Last Dance

The last dance is a significant moment for determining whether or not there is any sincere interest in one another. At *The Seabreeze* it was almost always a slow song. The song preceding it was, if the crowd was enthusiastic, an excessively fast song. If one had danced to the fast song, chances are the male would try and convince the young woman to stay on the dance floor for the next song, knowing it was a slow one. In general, people return to their seats between songs, even if it is just for a moment, before they resume dancing. This particular technique was often used on me, so I presume it was the local custom for ensuring that one was not left out of the last dance. By mid-August, I often found myself being quite firm about leaving the dance floor after every song, not just the penultimate one. The advantage of this behavior, is of course, beneficial for those people who are still unsure of their feelings. If both stay up on the dance floor, it is likely that they will go elsewhere after the dance, or they will at least know that they can look forward to other encounters with each other. Those people who are more firmly established, whether it is for that night or over a period of

time, reconfirm their feelings for each other simply by dancing together. Those people who dance the last song together also receive a good deal of public attention. It is often this last dance that will notify others of an intensifying relationship. As well, those songs which people dance to at this time are potential identification songs.

### 3.6. Going Home

As the dance winds down into its frantic last few songs, couples make their final decisions as to whether or not they will continue or stop their courtship activity for that night. In some cases, this means going for a drive, either to a take-out or to a local lover's lane. When the music finally stops there is a period of about thirty minutes when people are still in the club finishing up their drinks. The group I was usually with consisted of couples, both married and un-married. This meant that there was less urgency to leave the club and this more relaxed atmosphere lent itself to solo or group singing at the table for another half hour or so. However, for the single participants in the club, activity increased in the front door area.<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, the parking lot became the last possible place where decisions were made as to who was riding home with whom.

I have previously alluded to the car ride to the dance as a mechanism which allows for flexibility in choice for the ride home. Very often the females I knew might go for a drive with a male immediately after the dance or possibly after the second break in the music. They would then either meet up with girlfriends at a

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<sup>77</sup> "... later, she would be subtly by the door, ready to leave so that he [the one she was interested in] would have the opportunity to ask her if she wanted a run home." (MUNFLA 70-714)

take-out or back at the parking lot in twenty or thirty minutes. On occasion, this drive would take place between the time the last set by the band ended and when my group eventually left the club at around 2:00 am. The young women from Welcher's Cove were often seen returning to the parking lot for their official drive home either with the people they arrived with or a different set of friends. Because of the distance involved, it is more practical for the young women of Welcher's Cove to carry on their courtship activities in this manner, rather than expect a male from this area to drive them home.

One night I rode to the dance with Darlene, Glenys, Mary, and Cheryl, who owned a car. By the time we left the club at the end of the dance and had walked to Cheryl's car, Darlene and Glenys had stopped to chat by a car with several males and females already in it. Mary, Cheryl, and myself got in our car and waited to see what Darlene and Glenys were going to do. It took approximately ten minutes for the girls to decide they would indeed go home with the people (mostly males as far as I could see) in the other car. There was much laughter from the three of us as we watched Darlene and Glenys look towards us and wave goodnight as they stepped into the car.

On another occasion, Darlene and Cheryl had accepted rides home with two males who, they admitted later, they did not really know. They knew their names and faces but not much more than that. My group of people left the dance that night and returned home to Welcher's Cove around 2:30 am. As was the custom among some of the people (singles included) a large "feed" was prepared at the house of a married couple who attended the dance that evening.<sup>78</sup> At

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<sup>78</sup>One MUN student calls the visit that takes place after a dance like this the "post-festivity analysis." (MUNFLA 75:55)

approximately 3:00 am a phone call was received from Darlene who was calling from Red Cove, a place at least thirty minutes by car from Welcher's Cove. It is also about thirty minutes from Smithport but on another road. She and Cheryl were at the security gate at the fish plant there and were asking if someone could pick them up and bring them home to Welcher's Cove. Because of the hour, two of us went immediately and brought them back safely. The next day the truth came out that they had, in fact, made a big mistake in choosing the two males they did for their ride home. They told us they did not realize how drunk both of the males were and that they were lucky enough to talk them into dropping them off in Red Cove.

The ride home then, can be a time for privacy, for group or couples' social and sexual activity. It can allow for a couple to get to know one another and it can further a relationship or help the participants make up their minds about a previously indecisive relationship.

### 3.7. Conclusion

Beginning with the preparation early in the week and ending with the dance's conclusion, it is easy to understand why the dances are attended with such enthusiasm. The weekend dance is a time of relaxation and expectation. For Barbara, Glenys, and Darlene, it is a time of intense socialization. Their boredom with their daily lives in Welcher's Cove is one of the main reasons why they begin mental preparation for the dance early in the week. In fact, Darlene once said that before she even leaves the club on a Saturday night she is already thinking about next week's dance. The dance is also a main context for courtship

and for the nonverbal behavior which is treated in Chapter VI. Some of the dance behavior at this club is highly localized and as such is indicative of the nonverbal communication that surrounds sensitive topics like love and sex. The four or five hours that are spent in this context are loaded with questions concerning male-female relationships. For Darlene, Glenys, and Barbara attendance at the dance is a conscious attempt at developing their relationships and ensuring that they are doing the best they can to interact successfully with men.

## Chapter 4

# "Walking the Roads": A Newfoundland Courtship Custom

In Part I of this chapter I describe my impressions of the custom based mainly on participant observation of one particular evening in Welcher's Cove. Part II focuses on emic descriptions and interpretations of the event based mostly on questionnaire responses and some field research in Welcher's Cove. In this way we can understand the function of the custom for the individual as well as the practical aspects of its existence in the community.

### 4.1. The Roads: Welcher's Cove

Walking the roads in Newfoundland is one of the most common customs in which young people participate. This custom is an event known province-wide by a variety of names of which "walking the roads" or "beating the path" are the most common terms. The phrase itself may vary but the activity remains the same. It is, simply, an evening's outing which may last up to several hours during which the young people of a community parade along local roads for socializing purposes.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See James Faris, *Cat Harbour: A Newfoundland Fishing Settlement*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Research Studies 3 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1972) 78.

Walking the roads is basically a fair weather activity, with its peak in the summer months. However, this seasonal activity is also dependent upon the seriousness of the relationship between the participants. Most of the summertime walking is representative of casual adolescent and young adult relationships. The field data is taken from summertime activity. Routes vary according to local geography and layouts of individual communities. Each community has local areas of intense group socialization such as post offices, grocery shops, beaches, and take-outs, as well as areas which are locally known to be safe places for privacy and one-to-one encounters.<sup>80</sup> The custom provides the context for summertime walking, within which adolescent and young adult relationships can be developed.

I did not walk the roads when I first arrived in Welcher's Cove primarily because I did not realize the importance of the practice for its participants. Because the house in which I was staying was not on the main road, I did not always see this specific activity unless I left the community by car. Only after observing this courtship custom for a period of time did I realize the importance of this repeated evening event. If I had known the implications of walking the roads I would have been out of doors with the other young women immediately upon my arrival. First and foremost, walking the roads is an indication to people from within and without the community that one is single and available, or if you are not presently available you are expressing your intention to be so. This is particularly true for people who are about seventeen or older. By not walking the

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<sup>80</sup>Gerald L. Pocius in "Parlours, Pick-ups and Pumphouses: The Art of Privacy in a Newfoundland Community," an unpublished paper read at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society in Baltimore, October 1986, discussed the creation of privacy as a folk art.

roads I was communicating to the people in Welcher's Cove that I was not interested in any other male than the one I had, who was, in their eyes, Mickey. When I finally realized that by participating in this custom I would designate myself a single woman I went out to do exactly that. It was only then that I made a formal, nonverbal public declaration that I was not "going with" Mickey. The evening stroll became for me a relatively painless exercise in understanding male-female relationships in this outport.

The main participants in this event are generally between the ages of thirteen and twenty, with the majority between fifteen and nineteen. There are different kinds of behavior patterns at each end of the age range but I focus on the activities for those people who fall in the middle of the group.

In Welcher's Cove there are approximately twenty-five people who make up the extended age group, with probably half of that total number falling in between fifteen and nineteen. This relatively small number of possible participants allows for multiple small groups, made up from two to eight or nine participants at any given time. The total number of groups varies as well, possibly up to five or six per evening. Very often by 10:00 or 10:30 pm all of the smaller groups have come together in front of the main grocery shop. Groups are initially sexually segregated. However, as the night wears on participants may switch from one group to another. This allows for maximum contact, if it is desired, with all members of the entire age group. This switching also ensures that one person need not feel obliged to stay with one group if he or she does not want to.



The males are usually the most obviously transient participants in every and all groups. The females tend to remain stationary for longer periods of time and switch groups less frequently. The younger males, fourteen or fifteen year olds, are sometimes on bicycles and are normally the most verbal in terms of sexual innuendo or more general teasing. As the night continues, however, shouting, screaming, and banter may increase for both sexes in conjunction with the oncoming darkness and the existence of any sexual tension.

The actual road in Welcher's Cove most often used for the main event is the only road leading into the community and must be retraced in order to leave the community. The portion of the road that is walked upon is approximately one half mile in length. The road enters the community from a steep hill, goes down to the outskirts and then after two horseshoe curves, straightens out and heads directly towards the main shop. There are three favorite areas for socializing: at the outskirts where participants sit on or stand near a guardrail; in the middle section, after the horseshoe curves where a secondary road intersects, and where participants often climb a fifteen foot cliff for a better view; and at the grocery shop before the road continues on to what is called "the backside" of the community. From these three vantage points, nearly all public activity in the community can be observed.

Walking the roads is motivated ultimately by the intense desire to escape from parents' watchful eyes whenever male-female contact is made. This need for privacy results in what may at first appear a very public custom. Walking through a community is, obviously, carried out under direct scrutiny from residents. Nearly every house faces the road at one angle or another. In addition,

most kitchens are set up in such a way as to allow their occupants to look out of small windows without necessarily being seen. The best seat in the house is the one which lets its occupant see as much of the community as possible, but especially the main shop and the wharf.<sup>81</sup>

However, an individual is still physically removed from direct, spontaneous familial observance. It is less important that an individual is seen by adults who are unrelated or distantly related than by his or her own parents. Although the event is intrinsically public, it is, at the same time, an escape from parental observance. Siblings may also be on the road with their corresponding peer groups, often on bicycles or playing street hockey, but in many ways they are on the roads for the same reason, to socialize either with same or different sex friends. Younger siblings will often tell parents what is going on between various couples but in general they are more tolerated and less intimidating than parents.<sup>82</sup>

The community turns something of a blind eye towards the participants, particularly where a newly or well-established couple is concerned. As a couple walks along the roads private space is created by the recognition of them as a couple. If a couple walks along the roads within a community they are normally

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<sup>81</sup> That first evening when my date with Mickey was being arranged, Tom offered me his seat, the favorite one in the house for viewing community activity. Not knowing any differently, I accepted. The kitchen table is situated partially underneath the only window in the room that faces the wharf, shop and most of the houses in the community. When Tom was not in the house the children often fought over that seat. Early on in my stay Tom continued to offer me that seat but I quickly learned that he, as head of the house, was entitled to sit there whenever he was home. By not taking his repeated offers, I declared myself friend, not guest. This refusal also meant that I was aware of and would not interfere with his family hierarchy.

<sup>82</sup> Paris 44.

left alone for at least some period of time during the evening. The publicization of their relationship is manifested through the simple fact that they are walking together in public. As the couple walks along it is as if there is an unbroken sphere surrounding them. As they move so does their private space. Only when they approach a group do they break that sphere.

Once I had made up my mind that I must go out on the roads, I knew that people would be watching and taking notice of me. The evening I decided to make the effort, I talked Jackie into walking with me. Although I interacted quite freely with Darlene, Glenys and Barbara at *The Seabreeze*, I still felt that I was very much an outsider within the community boundaries. Because of this I did not want to go alone. In addition, people who go for long walks alone are not typical. When I first went to Welcher's Cove I used to walk along the cliffs behind Tom's house. Ruby and Iris soon came after me and I discovered that they rarely headed in any direction outside the community, unless they were berry-picking. All leisurely walking, except for couples, is normally directed towards community centers.

The evening walking is particularly a time when single, marriageable people should socialize with each other. With this in mind, Jackie agreed to come out with me. I had seen other women on the roads sometimes dressed in their good clothes, that is, clothes they usually wore to the dances, so Jackie and I put on appropriate things. I had on a short purple skirt, blouse, jean jacket and sandals, while Jackie dressed all in black. The clothes one wears need not be particularly "dance clothes," but they should reflect the woman's attempt at dressing up. By doing this, one realizes that not only is one's presence on the roads important, but the manner of dress is significant as well.

Once when I was on my way to the shop in early July, I saw Glenys and Darlene walking around outside. Because they were wearing dress clothes I stopped and asked them where they were going, thinking they might be headed for the local club. Much to my embarrassment, they sheepishly replied that they were just out "going around." I was always careful after that not to make any remarks concerning their attire because by doing so I was letting them know that I noticed a change in their daily clothing habits.

Use of makeup is also a part of the single woman's repertoire. Most of the young women wear light makeup as part of their daily routine, that is eye shadow, mascara and lipstick but on dance nights and occasionally when they walk the roads, makeup is heavier and more obvious. I generally do not wear makeup but did so when I went to the dances because I felt by not doing so I would have created even more of a division between outsider and insider than already existed.

When Jackie and I were finally ready we headed outdoors about 7:30 pm. We soon realized that it was too early for the activity to begin, darkness had not yet fallen. We walked along a secondary, dirt lane knowing exactly which route we should take, simply by having seen other people walking in these same areas. Even though we had not previously participated in the walking, it is part of community knowledge where most of the young people hang out. As was the case for this event, this knowledge was somewhat superficial and was easily observable. We walked as slowly as possible to make up for our error in judgement as to when we should start out, and then turned left onto the main road. We knew if Glenys, Darlene, and Barbara were home they would see us because all three live

along that route. If they did not see us it was likely that some member of their family would and then tell them that we were out and about.

In Welcher's Cove people frequently and continually look out of their windows so that they can observe community activity. Initially I used to acknowledge these people with a wave or smile but realized quickly that the people outdoors were not supposed to make any form of recognition. My waves were rarely returned. By waving I was informing them that I had, in a sense, caught them watching me. So rather than communicating friendliness, which was my intent, I was being rude.

Along the primary road we passed two younger girls who were about 14, but we did not really know them and only hellos were exchanged. When we reached the main guard rail on the outer reaches of Welcher's Cove we sat down on them. We both felt rather obvious, knowing that this was the first time we had walked in this direction at this time of the evening. Within ten minutes Barbara and Glenys came around the corner walking towards us. At this point I was still unsure as to whether or not they would just say hello and keep on walking or stop and chat. As they came closer towards us, it became obvious that Jackie and I were their destination. They came and sat down by us on the guard rail and light conversation began.

We talked about many different topics that evening before the real activity began. Most of the early conversation was question and answer with the questions coming from Barbara and Glenys and directed at Jackie and me, indicating that they had no familiarity with our personal backgrounds and it was important to them to have some of this information, as the reverse was true for Jackie and me.

Jackie and I spent most of the time describing our families and what it was like where we lived both in St. John's and in our home towns. Glenys pointed out that both she and Barbara had had pen pals for years, but had never met any of them. She also repeatedly said how nice it was to meet new people, implying rather than stating outright that she meant Jackie and me. It was important to both of them to find out something about people from other places.

When Jackie and I had answered most of the questions, she and I then started the same kind of conversation, this time directed at Barbara and Glenys. At first I thought this might seem too personal an invasion, but I realized that if I did not ask these kinds of questions it would be more noticeable than if I did. This was really the first conversation I had with them that did not completely revolve around their latest boyfriends and male interests. It was a starting point for all of us in terms of sitting down and really talking about their attitudes towards men and life in general, and it was this conversation that convinced me that I would be able to interview them formally without worrying about overstepping my bounds.

This conversation went on for about thirty to forty minutes and by this time a collective of young females had accumulated around us. Jackie's and my presence out on the roads had become the major focus for that evening. In addition to popular areas for socializing, specific people may create a geographical focus for a gathering, even if that area is not normally popular. Jackie, Barbara, Glenys and I were the oldest females there and we were deferred to initially by letting us go on with our conversation before the usual topic of men was begun. Eventually we realized that we had to stop talking amongst ourselves and

acknowledge the other young women who were present. We switched, seemingly effortlessly, to more immediate and personal comments dealing with the more appropriate topic, men. Again, this easy switch in topics encouraged me to join in on the conversation, but it also reminded me that at times, I was not an outsider, simply another single female whose prime interest was assumed to be men.

By this time, about 8:15 pm, it was now twilight and night was falling more rapidly and there were more people out and about. The group of females that had assembled consisted of about nine females, most of whom were between fifteen and eighteen. Several young males drove back and forth on bicycles, while males with cars from this and nearby communities began to drive by.

The geographical location of Welcher's Cove is such that it is literally at the end of the main road. Because of this there are a limited number of reasons why a person from outside will come into Welcher's Cove. If the person has no relatives there, one assumes that he or she has friends living in the community, or is on an errand of some kind, maybe to the grocery shop. Beyond these few reasons, there is no actual need to come into Welcher's Cove except, and this is a major exception, to socialize.<sup>83</sup>

One of the important reasons that locations for hanging out in a group are along the main road, (at the entrance to the community, at the first major turnoff, and at the shop) is because if a car goes by with people in it from outside the community, eventually it must return on the same route. Having two opportunities to see and be seen by the same people makes for twice the fun. If

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<sup>83</sup> See Louis J. Chiaramonte, *Craftsman-Client Contracts; Interpersonal Relations in a Newfoundland Fishing Community*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Research 10 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1970) 7.

the occupants of the car are known, the car may stop both times, once, or maybe not at all. Whether they will stop at all is unknown to the young women, and in a sense, it becomes a game which encourages banter both among the women themselves and possibly with the occupants of the car who normally have the windows rolled down and the radio playing loudly.

The occupants of cars who are of special concern here are outsiders who are obviously coming into Welcher's Cove to observe the available local women.<sup>84</sup> This implies that a clear distinction, even though it may be unconscious, is made between exogamous and endogamous relationships. More often than not the occupants were known by at least one or two of the group of females that I was with. There were two young men from within Welcher's Cove who continually raced back and forth in front of us, causing some of the younger women both to curse at them and giggle at the attention. As it got darker, one of them, Joe, became increasingly more reckless and made pretended efforts to run us down with his truck.

When the occupants of the car are unknown to all the people who are on the road, it becomes increasingly more exciting and interesting to watch. This was the case on this particular night. Cars can be seen coming for a fair distance, especially at night, from where we were situated which leads to attempts at guessing the identification of the car and hence, its driver/occupants. Several women tried to figure out who was in the car, but as the car neared it became obvious that none of them really knew. The car drove by, the women smiled at

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<sup>84</sup> I have a male friend, age 31 from St. John's, who calls this "checking out the local talent."



the two young men in the car as they continued on towards the center of Welcher's Cove. The women immediately began discussing who they could possibly have been and finally decided that they might be from Smithport. Their guess eventually turned out to be accurate. The method by which this information was shared was clearly expressive of a group effort to identify the two young men who were in the car.

By this time it was very nearly dark and the nearest street light, about fifty yards away, had come on. It is the last lamp at the end of the community and the guard rail by which they often gather was far beyond its range. The road has many small curves in it, and this often hinders the group from seeing a car until the last minute as it comes out of the community. However, there is a long sloping hill that leads into the community around which the road curves and I was constantly amazed at the girls' propensity for being able to see a car coming well before I could. They were repeatedly able to see car lights shining a good minute or two before I did. Their ability to see even the smallest glimmer of light from an oncoming car increases excitement as it gives them something to talk about in case there has been a lull in activity down in the community. It also encourages them to begin making attempts at guessing who might be coming into the community: perhaps it might either be someone who has not been there for a while, or they may say it might be a particular male, one of their peers' hoped-for boyfriends. By speculating like this, they reinforce each other's already building excitement and are able to tease each other about potential or secured boyfriends. It also gives the woman who is being teased the opportunity to agree with or deny these accusations, often under much laughing protest from the others.

As stated above, about 9:00 pm a car entered the community, driven by a young man with one other male occupant. Both men were unknown by the women, but as they drove by the first time it was obvious from both the group of women and the two young men in the car that each was examining the other.

They drove by rather slowly but continued on into Welcher's Cove. Much conversation about who it might have been took place. Barbara and Glenys hesitantly admitted recognizing them from mutual attendance at *The Seabreeze* and it was eventually decided that they were from Smithport.

It was completely dark by this time, which made identification nearly impossible for me, but again, the young women seemed better at it than I and were probably more used to the physical aspects of this kind of identification process. There was a good deal of talk about where the two men were headed but since no one really knew who they were, it was difficult for them to actually pinpoint their activity within the community. From where we were the community is not visible. It was assumed by most of the women that they were probably going to go to the shop and that within a short period of time would drive by in the opposite direction.

Conversation began again among us and about twenty minutes later it was noticed that a car was approaching us from the community. It was naturally expected that it would be the car that had passed earlier and as it went by it came on very slowly but did not stop until it passed us about thirty yards up the road and then pulled into what is called the "picnic site."<sup>85</sup> They pulled in,

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<sup>85</sup> Many Newfoundland outports have "official" picnic sites as a result of Canada Works projects. These sites are often a fenced in area that include picnic tables, a soccer pitch and, in some places, playground equipment. In Welcher's Cove there is usually a community picnic sometime during the summer.

turned around, parked, and then shut off both the car and its headlights. At this point it was agreed as to who the suspected men were and an excited conversation took place as to why they had stopped, and especially about whom they were interested in. Queries about going over to them began but it was not for another twenty minutes or so until we went over, en masse, to the parked car.

The conversation that took place before this decision was made was full of apprehension. The young women felt they could not go over and initiate a conversation simply because they wanted to meet the two young men. They felt they needed a reasonable excuse to cover up what would normally be seen as assertive behavior. It would have been easier for them to deal with the men if the men had stopped the car along the road. Because the car pulled over and away from them, the women were not really sure that they wanted either to interrupt the men because they did not really know what they were doing in the car, but also because they knew that they would have to make the first move. They would have to make an obvious effort to ask initial questions about who the men were.

The solution that was reached was that somebody would have to be brave and make that initial contact. The problem was that all the young women either said, "No way, I'm not going over," or "What could we ask them once we went over?" In fact, without some group encouragement and teasing, it is likely that this kind of an approach would not take place. In this circumstance, an individual would rarely go over by herself. Next decided was that we would all go over to see for ourselves who these men were but even that took a good deal of cajoling to get everyone to agree. Barbara adamantly refused, but I finally talked

her into coming over by straggling behind the rest of the group with her. It is also possible that Barbara's knowledge of them through the dances at *The Seabreeze* inhibited her and did not want to admit that she knew them. Before we started walking over, it had been decided that Lynn, a sixteen-year-old, would go up to the men and ask them for a light for her cigarette, a classic solution to a classic problem.

All during this time there were younger males going by on their bicycles while the littler ones were tagging along here and there and running around. They constantly flirt with the older females and in some ways are seen not as pests, but as adorable little boys. It is the adolescent males who become the pests and annoy their opposite sex peers with their blatantly obscene talk and teasing. Comments like, "Hey, sweetcakes!" are made by the adolescent males anytime, but especially at night. There were one or two younger girls out but they were generally quiet and kept to themselves, however they do a good deal of listening and observing of the older females who are the main participants in this event.

By now it was near ten o'clock and I was becoming a bit bored by the females seeming incapacity to make quick decisions and by their conversation about a topic which to my mind was repetitive. Where these two new men were concerned, there was a complete lack of initial assertiveness and the females' reaction to the men reflected their desire to remain non-assertive. If the car had stopped nearer to them, there would have been less need for the amount of decision making that had to take place as a result of the males' decision to park away from the group. This then led to a very real quandary as to whether or not the women should go over, and to their creating an artificial need to cover up

their assertiveness. After all the discussions had been completed, which took about twenty minutes, I had given up all hope that they might actually approach the men. It was difficult not to encourage them to go over and talk to them because this was obviously the highlight of the evening: two relatively unknown men had driven into the community and had parked. This seemingly simple occurrence confused the young women and threw them into the unknown. It was only by group consensus that any action was taken.

By the time Barbara and I had reached the car, Lynn had her cigarette lit and she was the only female who was really making any attempt at conversation. The conversation was, as usual, based upon the who, what and where are you from structure. As long as she smoked her cigarette she felt reasonably comfortable, but it was obvious that these women were exceedingly self-conscious about what they were doing. There was a good deal of laughing and giggling but Barbara and I remained somewhat in the background. After about ten minutes of this dialogue between Lynn and the driver of the car, I felt I had heard and seen enough. At this point, Mickey and Mac drove into the picnic site, not as far in as the car from Smithport, but just enough to let me know that I was wanted. I walked over to Mickey's truck and they informed me that they were going to go up to the local club for a beer. I then walked back over and told Jackie about this and we both got in Mickey's truck and left the women from Welcher's Cove and the two Smithport men behind.

For me, this is how that particular evening ended. I had no romantic interest in the two young men so I left the scene, tacitly communicating this fact. I had participated in the event and now felt I had done what was necessary for

me to extricate myself from the association I had with Mickey. Even though I left in his truck with him that evening we were not alone. The participation in walking the roads was a stronger message to the community than any verbal comments I could ever have made. By walking the roads, ipso-facto, showing the young women that I was interested in other men, the community saw that my "relationship" with Mickey was over for good.

I do not know what happened at the picnic site after I left. It can be assumed that at least one of several things happened. (1.) They may have continued the conversation for a few minutes more. (2.) Lynn may have stayed on to talk to them, probably not alone, while the majority of them left to go back to the guard rail or to go home. (3.) Lynn, or even another female may have gotten in the car and gone for a drive. If this took place, normally two females would have gone; rarely would one female go alone.

#### 4.2. Emic Descriptions and Interpretations

In this section I look at questionnaire data and discuss the actual event of walking the roads, popular locations for gathering within various communities but especially, the structure of the event. As well, discussions on community interpretations of the event are presented as they reflect attitudes towards the event by non-participants.

Descriptions of the actual walking vary among the respondents to the questionnaire but essentially the pattern is the same.<sup>86</sup> An individual leaves

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<sup>86</sup>See also Hilda Murray, "The Traditional Role of Women in a Newfoundland Fishing Community," MA. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1972, 158.

his/her house after the evening meal<sup>87</sup> but before dusk (about 8:00 pm) and proceeds to either meet people already on the road or goes to a central location and then walks in a group (sexually segregated at the outset of the evening) hoping to meet other groups. Individuals do not walk alone for long. If there is, for some reason, a lack of companionship, the walk will be terminated rather than continued alone. The following questionnaire responses describe the custom:

Everybody met at a garden near the shack that the males had built. You stood around and talked, and drank beer, people stopping for 20-30 minutes to chat. Then around 10:00 you went for a walk or got walked home. At times there were 15-20 people together walking the path we took. (Q88A/62:9; f18)

A male has this to say:

"You walk up and down about a quarter mile stretch of the road until she appeared \*unexpectedly.\* You always pass her house, but never look in the window, lest she think you were interested. [emphasis his] (Q88A/44:9, m22)

One of the most elaborate descriptions is from a female who grew up in Brigus, Conception Bay, and although her experience of the custom took place in the late 1930s it is an excellent example of the complexity of the event. I quote it at length:

Brigus has a central block of houses around which the road extends. From this road other roads branch off to different areas. The central area was called "the harbour" although it is not near the harbour. You went "down the harbour" after church on Sunday nights and after weeknight worship service on Friday nights and on any other night of the week that you were allowed out. The custom was for the boys (young men) to walk in a counter clockwise direction "around the harbour" and the girls to walk in a clockwise direction, thus groups of boys were always meeting strings of girls. After two "rounds" "around the harbour" and if a boy was going steady with a girl, he would leave his friends and join the group of girls, offering his arm to his chosen

<sup>87</sup> In Welcher's Cove this meal is generally taken between 5:30 pm and 7:00 pm throughout the community. The one shop in Welcher's Cove is closed between 8:00 pm and 7:30 pm.

one. He would then lead her off to some parts unknown (he hoped) for some serious lovemaking. (MUNFLA MS 71-103:32)

Clearly this event is more than just walking around the community in the hopes of meeting other friends. The walk is purposeful and well-planned. The meeting of a specific person is never coincidental, never unexpected. Although the walking is patterned towards very specific houses or shops, the objective is to make the walking appear as innocuous as possible, hopefully confusing adults who may be watching. For participants, however, there is interstitial knowledge which dictates the places walked to, and the amount of time one need spend walking. Adults know of the custom because it is likely that they participated in some variation of it when they were younger, however the specifics of where the youngsters become privately acquainted with one another may remain a secret.<sup>88</sup>

The event has, undoubtedly, one purpose which is to meet "available" members of the opposite sex. This meeting may be motivated by the possibility of a covert, sexual encounter or by a less sexual, more open one.

'On the roads,' 'beating the paths,' 'on the prowl,' all describe the custom of just going out and walking around, at night, either with a girl or looking for one. (Q86A/12, m21)

The same is true in Welcher's Cove. Darlene says:

... probably they'd come up in a car and they'd stop and talk to you and they'd probably ask you to get aboard [get in the car] or go for a walk.

And from the questionnaire:

<sup>88</sup> Pocius points out that these private spaces change as the need arises. The success of the space as "private" remains only as long as it stays a secret between the couple using it. When the secret gets out, inevitable in a small community, new private spaces are sought. Gerald Pocius, "Parlours, Pickups, and Pumphouses: The Art of Privacy in a Newfoundland Community," paper read at the American Folklore Society annual meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, October, 1986.



You would walk around the roads until you saw 'the guy of your dreams.' If he did not talk to you, you usually went home, feeling hopeless. If he even so much as looked at you, you would be on top of the world. (Q88A/2, n.s., n.a.)

In this last example the importance of simply seeing the person in whom you have an interest is far greater than any other motivator. Everyone walks at one time or another and everyone knows this. Such knowledge serves to increase the activity within any given community. Ultimately the individual wants to see and be seen and for this reason walking the roads is a popular activity. Inevitably, especially in the smaller communities, an individual cannot help but either "see" or have the opportunity to initiate conversation with members of the opposite sex. This fact is known by all members of the community, not only the participants. It is an assumption made by both adults, as non-participants, and single males and females.

This fact, that contact between single males and females is inevitable, is often looked upon by adults as a potentially dangerous situation, most notably by parents of females. In some communities and within some families, the practice of walking the roads is discouraged. Females who intend to develop relationships which do not include sexual intercourse may not walk the roads at all for fear of acquiring an immoral reputation. Those females who do not want sex, only sociability, risk community and familial backlash by being present on the roads.

Darlene and Glenys explain it this way:

D: Every night I've got to go out and see what's going on. G: Some guys might come up from Smithport you know. D: I mean, we don't go out as such to get picked up. I mean people get the wrong idea. They say, "Well, you know, they're out looking for just a good time," you know what I mean? But no we don't go out looking for *that*. [emphasis hers] I don't anyway. G: None of us do. D: Just to meet some... new people 'cause there's usually fellas from up around Smithport.

A female says:

We used [the phrase] ~~for~~ "the paths" because we often walked around the paths looking for guys. Once we found them [the males] we were still walking the paths, but with them. However, our parents who sometimes disagreed would often accuse us of being out "beating the roads" which meant chasing the guys or having a date with the guys. It was often an expression of disapproval. (Q86A/1:9, f21)

And from a male:

[On the roads has] been interpreted from my hometown to mean "You're out lookin' for it," meaning a sexual experience. (Q86A/37:9, m23)

It is this potential for sexual contact that at times renders the custom taboo for some and thrilling for others. In many communities it seems that being on the road is the only way for young people to mix relatively freely. If the custom is effectively prohibited by family members, it may mean the exclusion from informal peer contact for years during an individual's growth. To prevent such isolation from peers, many females risk parental censure and thereby increase the possibility of early sexual activity. For the females who take heed of parents' warnings, male-female contact that may eventually lead to a long term relationship or even marriage, will come at a much later age or possibly never.

On the way to the post office one morning Glenys was telling me about another young woman, Brenda, and her boyfriend from Toronto whom Brenda had been seeing for about a year. He had come for a visit to Welcher's Cove and was now going out with Diane, age 18. The point of Glenys' story was that Diane never had an interest in boys, and had never really had a boyfriend before. So rather than feel sorry for Brenda, who had lost a boyfriend, Glenys was happier for Diane, who was now a part of the community social scene. Previous to having a boyfriend Diane had rarely walked the roads. So Diane, who was not highly

social, did not have her first real boyfriend until she was eighteen, late in Glenys' view.

One of the most important functions of this event is that it allows those people who wish to increase their sexual knowledge to do so. In Newfoundland there is an acute lack of factual information about sex among adolescents. Rarely are children and adolescents informed by their parents about sexual matters.<sup>89</sup> In 1981 a MUNFLA questionnaire on pregnancy and related topics was distributed.<sup>90</sup> The majority of the respondents admitted they had not received from their parents any information about sex and that their first exposure to sex education was in the schools around grades ten or eleven.

A female wrote:

Yes, we were taught all about conception and prevention but that wasn't until grade 11. Therefore if you were sexually active before that it was up to you to find some prevention. Also, about the only thing we were told about prevention was to abstain from sex! (Q81A/7:3)

And from a male:

In biology class the teacher took it upon himself to discuss conception and prevention. Before this myself and most of my classmates were pretty ignorant. Most of my learning came from the streets. (Q81A/30:3)

Young adults and adolescents who are sexually active know what they know through experimentation. And where do they experiment? Anywhere away from watchful eyes: in fields, pump houses, under boats, outhouses, crevices in rocks, the woods, and cars. The list is as endless as the imagination, working in conjunction with the local landscape. Part of the danger parents feel is that they

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<sup>89</sup> See also Murray 155-156.

<sup>90</sup> MUNFLA Q81A. See also Don Sawyer, *Tomorrow is School and I'm Sick to the Heart Thinking About It* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1979) 99-108.

know sexual activity is taking place somewhere and somehow. Every year hundreds of single Newfoundland females become pregnant. In addition to this more obvious manifestation, most parents with children in their teens, may well have been sexually active before they married, even though they may preach abstinence before marriage to their children.

Community-wide knowledge of what walking the roads means is clearly expressed through the following incident. Because I was a single female I was expected to walk the roads with various other single females. My presence was, therefore, not extraordinary, although it was not regular. I often went directly to the shop with one of Tom's children but not with a peer, and I rarely stayed longer than fifteen to twenty minutes. One night in September of 1985, I asked Linda, a married woman in her late thirties, to come out for a walk after dark with me. Under much protest and laughing she finally agreed and we proceeded to head towards the main shop. Along the way an older man in his sixties expressed surprise at seeing Linda out, as she was obviously simply walking. He asked her what she was up to and Linda's immediate response was, "I'm out lookin' for a man." All three of us laughed because we knew full well she already had one. It seemed that there was no other possible explanation for her walking around at night. This encounter also shows community recognition of the implications of this custom.

There is unspoken community knowledge that its "children" are learning about sex, and other than showing overt disapproval little is actually done to stop the young people from walking out after dark. One can see, however, through the descriptions of walking the roads that the "how" of this custom is extremely

detailed and community specific. Time limits are often set, "at 10:00 [p.m.] you went for a walk," or "20-30 minutes [for a] chat." This implies that participants know exactly how much time they are allowed to spend on the road. Curfews are also common and when broken, the adolescent is reprimanded, if nothing more. In this respect, time controls set by adults, usually unspoken unless they are violated, are a compromise that allows for adolescent socializing yet keeps the participants aware of ultimate adult control.

There is also no direct confrontation about sexual matters. There is general acknowledgment that the youngsters will learn one way or another, with or without parental input. Very often "nature" is the term used to express sexuality. Doing "whatever comes naturally" or letting "nature take its course" is a common way for phrasing sexually related matters.<sup>91</sup> There is an impression that one does not need to know anything; nature will guide and instruct. This kind of fatalistic philosophy takes pressure off parents should a son or daughter be involved in a pre-marital, teenage pregnancy.

### 4.3. Conclusion

Walking the roads then, is a custom which allows for male-female contact that is potentially sexual. However, sexual activity need not be the result of walking the roads. The event serves a number of functions. (1.) It is the context for unmarried male-female contact within a one-community situation. (2.) It offers participants an opportunity for private, one-to-one encounters, sexual or

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<sup>91</sup>MUNFLA 75-21: 49; Kimiecik, T84-3; see also E. E. LeMasters, *Modern Courtship and Marriage* (New York: Macmillan, 1957) 70.

otherwise. (3). But most important it serves as a mechanism for the development of male-female intercommunity relationships that may not occur elsewhere.

## Chapter 5

# Contemporary Friendship and Love Poetry: Welcher's Cove

### 5.1. Introduction

Contemporary poetry is usually divided by folklorists into "public" and "private" categories.<sup>92</sup> Public most often refers to those genres of poetry that are within a performance context and whose audience may consist of strangers and acquaintances. Within the private realm poetry is restricted to performance within a familial and extended familial context.<sup>93</sup> In folkloristics, studies of poetry deal with either the sung or spoken word. Yet there are other genres of folk poetry that remain non-vocal or non-performative. These genres also circulate within a group, may reflect traditional verbal art and as such are a recognizable sub-genre of folk poetry.

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<sup>92</sup> I'd like to thank Roberta Buchanan of the Department of English, Memorial University of Newfoundland, for bibliographic help during the writing of this chapter.

<sup>93</sup> For an excellent description of spontaneous recitation as a response to an emotional situation (usually involving male-female relationships) in a sexually segregated society see Lila Abu-Lughod, "A Community of Secrets: The Separate World of Bedouin Women," *Signs, A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 10:4 (1985): 637-657. For a study of poem creation and usage in one family see Karen Baldwin, "Rhyming Pieces and Piecing Rhymes: Recitation Verse and Family Poem Making," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 40 (1976): 209-242.

This chapter is based on a study of four friendship and love poems that I collected between October 1984 and September 1985 from Joe, aged nineteen from Welcher's Cove, and from his best friend Greg, also nineteen, from a nearby community. They are often set up as letters with a title centered at the top of the page and end with a closing.<sup>94</sup> They are private folk poems whose circulation is small, they are completely non-aural, that is non-performative, yet their language and uses comprise a distinct kind of folk poetry.

The researcher's role in this custom can be an awkward one because it is based on friendship and trust, not on a well-laid plan of collection and interview. My introduction to the friendship poetry of Welcher's Cove was by pure chance in the sense that I did not solicit it. Initially, of course, I was unaware of its existence. This awareness came through a completely unexpected yet natural occurrence. After spending seven weeks doing field work in Welcher's Cove, I had become a trusted friend of Joe and Greg, both of whom were recipients and authors of many poems. When I returned to Welcher's Cove later that year for three weekend visits, on the second of these Joe and Greg showed Mac and me two of these poems. The primary data for this chapter is based on formal and informal interviews with Joe.

<sup>94</sup>For a thorough discussion of a history of middle class courtship in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries through the use of love letters see: Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984). Because courtship poetry is more commonly known as a public expression studies of this kind are more easily found. See Terri Brant Joseph, "Poetry as a Strategy of Power: The Case of Riflian Berber Women," *Signs, A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5:3 (1980): 418-434. See also Carol J. Compton, *Courting Poetry in Laos: A Textual and Linguistic Analysis*, Special Report 18 (Detroit: Northern Illinois Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1979), for a description of professional lam singers who entertain with sung and chanted courtship dialogues. For an excellent description of Elizabethan court poetry and its contexts see *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, James M. Osborn, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), especially Chapter VIII, "The Pangs of Love."



Contemporary poetry writing among working class or low socio-economic poets has of late received a good deal of attention. As well, regional and occupational poets are now being recognized not only as "folk" poets, but as artists whose messages are important revelations of their respective cultures.<sup>95</sup>

Americo Paredes has suggested that

... we must make a distinction ... between so-called colorful folk speech, in which there is a conscious attempt to be different if not original, and folk poetry of high seriousness, which is expressed in the ritualized language of convention.<sup>96</sup>

Paredes outlines what he feels are the fundamental differences between folk and sophisticated literature but his analysis does not take into account the poetry of a people who have co-existing traditions both of song performance and of written poetry that is rarely, if ever, performed.

In sophisticated poetry ... the tendency is toward more and more subtle and individualized modes of expression once poetry has ceased to be performance and has become an act of private communication between poet and reader.<sup>97</sup>

This statement implies that when a poem is not performed its language must therefore be more creative and individualized, i.e. more sophisticated.

According to Paredes a poem written intentionally for the private realm has reached a level of sophistication different from the folk tradition. These love and friendship poems from Welcher's Cove and the nearby area are both "folk" in

<sup>95</sup> For a useful description of contemporary regional poetry see George Ella Lyon, "Contemporary Appalachian Poetry: Sources and Directions," *Kentucky Review* 2:2 (1981): 3-22; a good occupational study is by Dan Tannacito, "Poetry of the Colorado Miners: 1903-1966," *Radical Teacher* 15 (1979): 1-8; at the 1988 American Folklore Society meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, there was a session devoted to the study of cowboy poetry.

<sup>96</sup> Americo Paredes, "Some Aspects of Folk Poetry" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 2:2 (1964): 213-225.

<sup>97</sup> Paredes 225.

that they are formulaic, and at the same time are "sophisticated" because they express an intimacy that Paredes seems to equate with that particular classification. The poetry that is the subject of this chapter is both "folk" and "sophisticated." No neat division can or will be made between either category.

Rather than divide the study of folk poetry based on connotative notions of "folk" and "sophisticated," Cawelti's concepts of "convention" and "invention" will be applied to this study.

Conventions are elements which are known to both the creator and his audience beforehand. They consist of things like favorite plots, stereotyped characters, accepted ideas, commonly known metaphors and other linguistic devices, etc. Innovations are elements which are uniquely imagined by the creator such as new kinds of characters, ideas, or linguistic forms.<sup>98</sup>

By viewing the levels of creativity and formula along a spectrum as Cawelti suggests it is then possible to allow for a maximum of flexibility in the interpretation of Newfoundland rural poetry while maintaining an organized structure.

George Ella Lyon, a poet from Kentucky, has carried out analytical research on Appalachian poets. Like the contemporary poetry of the Appalachians, Newfoundland folk poetry "is . . . a natural development of expression in a song- and story-fed culture."<sup>99</sup> For this reason then, the love and friendship poetry with which I deal in this chapter is a complex combination of formulaic language and personal insight. The language used is one recognizable as traditional folk verse, whether in sung or spoken contexts, but here used intentionally in a silent reading context.

<sup>98</sup> John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Culture Press, 1970) 27.

<sup>99</sup> Lyon 20.

On the basis of the intended audience, Newfoundland contemporary folk poetry can be divided roughly into the classifications 'public' or 'private.' This chapter is concerned with the unpublished private traditions, poetry created both for and about friends and lovers, girlfriends and boyfriends. The author of a friendship or love poem has more control over his or her audience than does the author of a familial or more public poem. Like familial poetry, each poem targets specific people well known to the author. The recipient (and, usually, the subject) of a poem may show it to selected others, and therefore has the option of extending or restricting the audience for that specific poem.

The non-performance aspect is a common one in Newfoundland where traditional poetry is concerned. In Newfoundland there is a history of poetry that has its roots in publication in newspapers and weekly magazines. Poems have appeared in current newspapers, *The Evening Telegram*, *The Clarendville Packet*, as well as in papers that no longer exist, *The Daily News*, *The Newfoundlander*. Other sources of Newfoundland poetry are regional magazines like *Livvère*, no longer in publication, or more provincial ones like *The Newfoundland Herald*. The majority of MUNFLA manuscripts concerned with traditional written verse fall within a semi-public category. Most of the poems were written by a family member and occasionally they have been published in regional newspapers or in small, privately published collections.<sup>100</sup> Poems are also found in letters, sometimes to relatives and friends. Occasionally the poem is the letter and there

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<sup>100</sup> Three excellent examples of this kind of poetry are found in MUNFLA MS: 74-208; MUNFLA MS: 80-258; and MUNFLA MS: 80-156. For a good example of nostalgic poetry see MUNFLA 86-165.

is no other text in the letter except for the poem.<sup>101</sup> In these published collections the audience usually extends only as far as family and community members.

Themes are of general societal concerns: daily life, the family, religion, patriotism, and the good old days.

Among adolescents and young adults there exists another tradition of shared, rhymed writing. This is the custom of keeping autograph books. Historically, this pastime was a genteel activity for adults... [and] not until the late 1800s did the albums become the province of schoolchildren.<sup>102</sup> In Newfoundland, autograph albums have been a long-standing tradition among adolescents, particularly females. The MUNFLA sources include both contemporary verses and those written, from about 1940 to the present, by the authors' female relations and community friends. Verses are often concerned with the value of the friendship between author and collector, but also often express many cultural expectations for its young women. As well, local places, education and the evils of gossip made for interesting, entertaining verses. In Newfoundland many of the verses are humorous and concern future, anonymous husbands. However, in some cases an author will write a verse and insert the name of the collector, thereby making reference to her current boyfriend.

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<sup>101</sup> See MUNFLA MS: 83-299.

<sup>102</sup> Sylvia C. Hendricks, "The Gentle Pastime," *Indiana Folklore* 11 (1978): 161-173. See also: Alan Dundes, "Some Examples of Infrequently Reported Autograph Verse," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 26 (1962): 127-130; Vance Randolph and Mary Kennedy-McCord, "Autograph Albums in the Ozarks," *Journal of American Folklore* 61 (1948): 182-193; W. K. McNeil, "The Autograph Album Custom: A Tradition and its Scholarly Treatment," *Keystone Folklore Quarterly* 13 (1968): 29-44; and Rina Shapira and Hanna Herzog, "Understanding Youth Culture Through Autograph books, The Israeli Case," *Journal of American Folklore* 97 (1984): 442-460.

Put the lights out in the  
 parlor  
 Put the fire in the grate  
 For Dottie's little darling  
 Will be calling at half past eight.  
 (MUNFLA 72-201)

Preferences and suggestions for the kind of husband or boyfriend are also found:

When you get married don't marry a flirt  
 But marry a man from the Catholic church  
 (MUNFLA 74-96)

Luck to the train that goes down the track  
 and never runs in danger  
 Luck to Gloria who goes out with John  
 and never goes out with a stranger  
 (MUNFLA 74-96)

Hints as to how boyfriends should be handled are also popular:

When you have a boyfriend  
 Leave him at the gate  
 Never ask him to come in  
 Because he always stays too late  
 (MUNFLA 74-96)

Because more females wrote to each other than males to females there are, as such, no love poems found in these albums, although boyfriends were sometimes asked to write in them. The albums are not like a diary which is rarely shown to anyone. Rather, the albums were exchanged during school recess and lunch breaks and even, in some circumstances, left with a friend for several days so that she might take her time and write something particularly meaningful. It was also necessary for an author to peruse a collector's album so that a verse might not be repeated. Like a photograph album today, autograph albums are

really a public or semi-public genre and bring back memories of old friends, school days and experiences.<sup>103</sup>

## 5.2. Primary Exchange: Authors and Recipients

Primary exchange is the initial presentation of the poem by the author to the recipient. This method of circulation is one which exemplifies the nonverbal courtship that occurs in this community. The poetry is used as a mediator between two people who would rather not speak directly to one another. It is a traditional solution to an awkward problem.<sup>104</sup> When the author is inclined to be publicly reticent, a friend will often intervene for him or her. This mediation may include the presentation of the poem by this third party, thereby avoiding a potentially emotional display. Other solutions to the avoidance of direct confrontation include mailing the poems or unobtrusively slipping them to the recipient when no one is looking.<sup>105</sup> Even though in this community the use of the post office is not a particularly private act, it does allow the author and the

<sup>103</sup> For a representative sample of Newfoundland autograph albums and their uses see MUNFLA MS: 68-4; 69-2; 69-9; 69-14; 69-15; 69-24; 69-25; 72-137; 72-201; 74-96.

<sup>104</sup> Cawelti points out that "formula stories seem to be one way in which the individuals in a culture act out certain unconscious or repressed needs, or express in an overt and symbolic fashion certain latent motives which they must give expression to, but cannot face openly." 33. Certainly, these formulaic poems exemplify the need to express oneself in an otherwise unacceptable fashion.

<sup>105</sup> In March 1987 a female friend of mine from Bay de Verde, Newfoundland, received a poem in such a fashion, sometime during the course of an evening's party. The following night the young man phoned to ask her what she thought of the poem and his attentions but at that point she had not yet found the poem and was perplexed by his phone call. She later found the poem in her coat pocket.

recipient necessary social distance.<sup>106</sup> While these methods of circulation are designed to create privacy from the community as well as an avoidance of direct emotional display, the poems themselves are an accepted medium through which these young people can express their emotions.

Both males and females write, but females predominate. Greg and Joe have both written poetry but of the two Greg writes more often. Joe explained:

K: Did you ever write any poetry? J: Who me? K: Yeah. J: Few times. . . yeah, that's to girls I really cared about. K: Do you write a lot? J: Well, like I said, not too often a very special girl comes into your life, right?<sup>107</sup>

His involvement with the custom is more often as recipient rather than as author. I asked him about the girls who write to him.

K: Have a lot of girls given you poetry? J: Most all of them. K: Most all of them!! J: Yes. K: These are girls from where? Welcher's Cove & Amber Cove? J: Everywhere mostly. . . well, whoever you go out with. K: Whoever you go out with gives you poetry? J: Yes.

Although Joe told me that he has "about four dozen" other poems that he would let me see, he was never seemingly able to find them.<sup>108</sup> He also said he has never thrown away any of the poems he has received but when I asked to see them he told me he could not find them. I was a bit surprised when Joe told me how many girls have written poems for him, so later on in the interview I asked him again if all the girls he had gone out with gave him poetry and it became clear that "all" did not.

<sup>106</sup> Chairamonte describes the postmaster as a highly trusted individual. However, the act of going to the post office and returning with mail is one that is always noticed by community members. See Louis J. Chairamonte, *Client-Craftsmen Contracts: Interpersonal Relations in a Newfoundland Fishing Community*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies 10 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1970) 17-18.

<sup>107</sup> All the direct quotations from Joe in this chapter are taken from the same interview in my personal collection, (T85-1.)

<sup>108</sup> Taken from field notes, September 1985.

J: No, not all of them, no. Special ones. K: Special ones? J: Uh huh. K: Now is that they're special to you or they think you have a special relationship? J: Yes, whether they do or not [have a special relationship] they do that [write poetry]. . . I used to go out with a girl, a week or two week, or whatever the case may be, and then she would give me a letter or write me a poem or something like that; right?

We also talked more about the circumstances or the relationship that precedes the giving and receiving of poems.

K: Do you ever receive poetry from girls that you're not interested in? J: Oh yeah, plenty of times, I did lately. K: Oh yeah? When was the most recent one you got? J: Week and a half ago. K: Who'd you get it from? J: Girl in [Brier's Cove]. Bill asked her to the dart dance, right? And I went out with her. I took her away from him. K: Oh yeah? J: And um, I been frigging around with her ever since. [laughter] And, the fourth night I was out with her she gave me this poem. . . It's really pretty good too. K: Yeah? J: name of the poem "You Might Think." K: It's called "You Might Think?" J: Yeah, that was that song by *The Cars*, "You Might Think I'm Crazy."<sup>100</sup> K: Oh yeah. [laughter] J: Yeah, but I broke up with her yesterday evening. K: Oh, geez, that was quick! [laughter].

Most often it seems that the females write within a short period of knowing the male.<sup>110</sup> This kind of serious poetry is indicative of the young women's desire to have special or steady boyfriends. For them a "going steady" relationship centers on traditional romantic notions, of which the poetry is a part. This is not

<sup>100</sup> A popular song on the pop charts that year.

<sup>110</sup> Throughout the recorded history of literacy, love letters have been sent both to encourage suitors and to determine the level of interest between the two people involved. As to the quickness of sending and replying, one of the earliest descriptions of love letter writing is from a 10th century lady-in-waiting in Japan: "A young bachelor of an adventurous nature comes home at dawn, having spent the night in some amorous encounter. Though he still looks sleepy, he immediately draws his inkstone to him and, after carefully rubbing it with ink, starts to write his next-morning letter. . . Then he makes arrangements for delivering his letter. Instead of calling one of the ladies in attendance, he takes the trouble to get up and select a page-boy who seems suitable for the task. . . The messenger returns and nods encouragingly to his master, who thereupon instantly interrupts his recitation and, with what might strike one as sinful haste, transfers his attention to the lady's reply." Clearly this young man's behavior is part of a well-defined custom, indicating a long, long history. From *The Pillow-Case of Sei Shonagon*, ed. and trans. by Ivan Morris (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967) 257.



to say, however, that there are not people who exchange poems in relationships that are emotionally reciprocal: The poems, because they are a somewhat removed expression of emotion (because of their non-vocality) can be used with equal success by couples who are in the early stages of relationships and by those who are well-established.

There is personal interpretation of words that are used in the poems. Joe has developed a word use system that helps him sort out which girls are more "special" than others.

J: Whenever you see there's a poem with "lovers" marked on it, right? . . . it's nothing really that special. K: What do you mean? J: It's like, just something off the tip of the tongue cause you only going out with her for one thing. . . Got to be something like "darling" or "sweetheart" or something like that, right? Something really intimate in order to be a special person, right? It's something that comes straight from the heart, not off the top of your head.

People who are unaware of his word use are also unaware of his ideology. Because Joe has received so many poems he must decide which ones are sincere. His personal interpretation of the use of the word "lovers" reflects his desire to separate false from true emotion. One assumes that other authors and recipients have similar kinds of textual interpretations through which they estimate levels of emotion.

### 5.3. Secondary Exchange: Recipient and Audience

Secondary exchange refers to the recipient of a poem selecting one or two people to whom he shows his gift. Because of my role as researcher, my experience with the poetry is an example of secondary exchange. After completing my initial fieldwork I returned to Welcher's Cove after an absence of two months. I was shown two poems, one a friendship poem and one a love

poem. This discussion will focus on the friendship poem, because at the time it was the more important one. In my case the context for the secondary exchange of both the friendship and the love poem remained the same.

Joe, Greg, Mac and I were seated in a kitchen where the usual (for us) late-night topics of love and life dominated the conversation. We were discussing Greg's most recent relationship, a serious one which had already lasted six months, longer than any of his previous ones. During the conversation he pulled out of his wallet a poem entitled "Greg and Joe" written by his sixteen-year-old girlfriend, Anita, about his friendship with Joe and gave it first to Mac and then to me to read. It is nine stanzas, twenty-five lines.

# Greg and Joe<sup>111</sup>

- |   |   |    |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | Wintertime is a deadly time when                      | 1  |
|   | Joe Butler is on the road.                            | 2  |
| 2 | When the roads are iced and fill with                 | 3  |
|   | snow Good old Joe Butler is still on the go.          | 4  |
| 3 | From Welcher's Cove to Amber Cove his paddle [sic] is | 5  |
|   | to the floor. Greg Murphy is there                    | 6  |
|   | saying, "Give her more."                              | 7  |
| 4 | They drink like fish and boy do I wish                | 8  |
|   | Joe Butler would only slow down.                      | 9  |
| 5 | Now Greg and Joe are slightly touched                 | 10 |
|   | they are also crazy and very tough                    | 11 |
| 6 | When their old men gets angry and mad                 | 12 |
|   | Stella is soft-hearted and very sad                   | 13 |
| 7 | They are two guys people got judged                   | 14 |
|   | wrong   | 15 |
|   | For deep inside they are not that                     | 16 |
|   | strong  | 17 |
| 8 | Inside they have hearts made of gold                  | 18 |
|   | But people still think they are very cold             | 19 |
| 9 | They are the nicest two guys I have                   | 20 |
|   | ever met  | 21 |
|   | If you got to know them you would be                  | 22 |
|   | willing to bet  | 23 |
|   | that those people who don't know them                 | 24 |
|   | "They ain't seen Nothing yet."                        | 25 |

Love

Anita

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<sup>111</sup>Kimiecik, M84-1. All poems presented in this chapter were copied by hand by me. Spelling, grammar and visual presentation were copied verbatim.

In their eagerness for us to read it, they waited patiently in silence until we were finished. As the poem was handed back to Greg, they made comments like "Something else, isn't it?" Greg then replaced the poem in his wallet and conversation resumed.

This situation presents at least two major questions. One: why do two nineteen year old males, who present themselves to their community as rough and unruly, carry poetry in their wallets and show it to others? And two: how does the presentation of poetry between the original recipient, in this case, Greg, and his selected audience, the three of us in the kitchen, affect their relationship?

Joe and Greg are considered "wild" by some of the females in this community.<sup>112</sup> The persona they wish to present is, in many ways, typical of rural youths who wish to rebel from the society in which they live. In this case, the rebellion is often expressed through a general suppression of sensitive emotions, plus fast driving, hard drinking, tales of womanizing, and the ever-present leather jacket.<sup>113</sup> Why then do they carry poetry, something normally considered sentimental and feminine, in their wallets?

Joe's answer to this was that he keeps a poem or two in his wallet simply as "... a keepsake. You can always look back after that." This statement immediately softens the persona he strives so hard to achieve. Very few people in his community would be willing to believe that he is a person capable of deep sensitivity. When he reads one of these keepsake poems he is then reminded of a

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<sup>112</sup> Kimiecik, T84-3.

<sup>113</sup> Throughout the summer of 1984, which was atypically very hot, Joe and Greg often wore their leather jackets open with no shirt on underneath.

relationship that was for him "special," yet his tough image is kept intact because of the private nature of the custom.

Joe's best friend Greg carries poetry for nearly the same reasons. In fact, the very first poem he showed me dealt with this theme of persona versus reality, as the last three stanzas of this poem demonstrate:

- 7 These are two guys people got judged wrong  
For deep inside they are not that strong .
- 8 Inside they have hearts made of Gold  
But people still think they are very cold
- 9 They are the nicest two guys I have ever met  
if you got to know them you would be willing to bet  
that those people who don't know them  
"They ain't seen Nothing yet."

Both Greg and Joe are the proud subjects of this poem and are also pleased that Greg's girlfriend and a selected few people know their real nature. Perhaps it is the security of the knowledge that a tightly controlled group is aware of their private, more emotional sides which further motivates them to place the poetry in their wallets.

The presentation of the poetry by the recipient to a selected friend is one of the most important aspects of the custom, and one with which I am more familiar in my role as researcher. Any poem to be shown to a best friend must bear certain qualities which signify to both of them a special relationship. If a recipient were to show all of his poems to many people it would lessen the importance of each poem. Therefore, when a poem is offered to be read, the recipient and the chosen reader are aware of the importance of both the artifact and the gesture. Until that summer Joe had shown poems to very few people.

Whether the audience is composed of insiders or outsiders to the community is unimportant. What is important is that the relationship between the recipient and the secondary, chosen, audience be conducive to the custom of poem exchange.

Discussion of this poetry does not seem to take place among young males in groups as do other related topics where females are concerned. The presentation of poetry is something only the best of friends practice. Joe says:

[That's] just something me and Greg know cause [we're] best friends.  
That's what we know about each other.

The secondary circulation of these poems depends on the importance of the initial relationship between author and recipient on one hand, and between recipient and his audience on the other.

### 5.3 Love Poems

Of the four poems I have seen, three are love poems whose target was either Joe or his girlfriend, Melanie. They will each be discussed and in the order I was shown them. I will continue now with the second one, "Thinking of You," I was shown on the above-mentioned night. It is written as eighteen consecutive lines.

Thinking of You<sup>114</sup>

I never thought it would come to this,	1
but you're the guy I'll always miss.	2
I wanted you so <u>badly</u> but I would never	3
say.	4
I'll always remember that unforgettable day.	5
I fell in love with you at first glance.	6
But I thought I didn't have a chance.	7
I think of you as time pass by	8
I feel so happy, I'd practically cry	9
I didn't really think I'll see the day	10
That I will feel any other way.	11
You are kind and handsome too,	12
And I'm always thinking of you.	13
I hope you will keep in touch,	14
It's something I'll cherish very much.	15
There's just one thing I wrote to say,	16
and that is <u>"I love you in</u>	17
<u>everyway!"</u>	18

Shelly

This poem is a summary of an intimate relationship that no longer exists. The author does not plead with Joe to resume the relationship, rather she expresses her realistic acceptance of the situation. She writes of her "love at first sight," her happiness when she thinks of him, and even though the relationship is over, she is grateful for having known him.

It is hard to imagine this poem being recited to Joe in a serious manner. The security of the private reading enables the recipient to dwell upon what has been written and what has transpired between him and the author. This poem was placed in Joe's coat pocket when he was not looking. The element of surprise also includes an aspect of pleasure at being deemed worthy enough to be both the

<sup>114</sup>Kimiecik, M84-2.

subject and recipient of a poem. The poems are held in high esteem (after a careful, personal interpretation of the relationship and the language used) and the owners of such a poem are generally proud and thoughtful about the entire situation. As mentioned earlier, a poem which becomes part of a secondary relationship first of all must be thought about by the recipient and must also be kept somewhere on his or her person so that when the opportunity arises it may be shown to others.

In September of 1985 I learned of another aspect of this poetry. Joe had started seeing a married woman who lived in a community that was two hours away by car. Melanie and her husband were separated but were both still living in the same community. Joe knew the problems of this kind of relationship but he was determined to continue seeing her. It was a difficult relationship because of both the proximity of Melanie's husband and the logistics of travel. Whenever possible Joe made the trip to see her but this was rather sporadic.

I had been in Welcher's Cove about a week in September of 1985 but had not yet seen Joe. I knew he had gone to see Melanie but his mother told me she did not know when to expect his return. One night I was sitting with a group of young women in a local social activity area, in front of a shop that was no longer in operation. As usual, various males from Welcher's Cove and elsewhere drove by, one of whom was Joe. After about twenty minutes of driving back and forth, he finally parked alongside another male's car. Not knowing whether Joe would get out of his car and wanting to talk to him, I walked over and got in.

The act by a woman of getting in a male's car is significant. In my case it was a sign of privilege as friend, but more importantly I declared myself



"outsider" to the community. Males who own cars tend to stay in them when parked and hold conversations from their seats. It is expected that females will congregate around the vehicles. When a lone female steps into an unrelated male's car, especially at night, it is a signal that they are romantically interested in each other. However, I was using my position as outsider to break that taboo.

We talked for awhile about each other's well being and then he began discussing his relationship with Melanie. Then he showed me two poems that he was now keeping in his wallet. This time the poems had been written neither by him nor Melanie. Instead, they had been written by two close friends of Joe's. They were about his relationship with Melanie and both were written in the first person, that is, from Joe's perspective. I will discuss the shorter of the two first.

Our Weekend Together<sup>115</sup>

- |   |   |    |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | I wished to myself that this weekend would  | 1  |
|   | never end,                                  | 2  |
|   | But it comes a time that we have to say     | 3  |
|   | goodbye again                               | 4  |
| 2 | I know you have a husband to go back to     | 5  |
|   | As much as I hate to admit it               | 6  |
|   | It's something you have to do               | 7  |
| 3 | This weekend was very special to me         | 8  |
|   | I hope it was for you to, because out of    | 9  |
|   | All the girls that I ever knew it can't     | 10 |
| 4 | compare to the few nights I spent with you  | 11 |
|   | Love you know is a very strange feeling,    | 12 |
|   | But since I've been with you                | 13 |
|   | I think I'm starting to realize the meaning | 14 |
| 5 | Well I hope that some night soon we can     | 15 |
|   | Be together again, because that's what      | 16 |
|   | I'll be thinking of all week until the      | 17 |
|   | weekend                                     | 18 |

Love always

\*Our Weekend Together\* was written by Christy, a sixteen-year old friend of Joe. It is five rhymed stanzas, eighteen lines, and details Christy's understanding of Joe's feelings. It mentions the difficulty of short visits, the presence of Melanie's husband, and the hope for a future weekend visit. It is heavily romantic and expresses both Joe's and Christy's understanding of the situation. If Joe disagreed with Christy's interpretation of how he was feeling he would not have kept it in his wallet. This poem remains unsigned, as if Christy

assumed Joe would sign it and give it to Melanie. It is important to note that in this and the next case Joe has kept the originals, rather than give them to Melanie. In these two instances, the poem is part of a secondary exchange, even though the female subject of the poem is the author's targeted person.

The second one, "To Someone Special," written by Joe's best friend, nineteen year old Greg, is five stanzas, thirty-two lines long.

To Someone Special<sup>116</sup>

- 1 Loving you has filled my heart .1  
 with joy beyond compare .2  
 nothing meant more to me .3  
 than knowing that you care. .4
- 2 That special day when you came into my Life .5  
 I knew that there was another man before .6  
 me who made you his wife .7
- 3 I know I caused a lot of trouble, .8  
 but what else was I to do .9  
 I want to spend every minute of the night .10  
 and day with you. .11  
 But I know that can't be because you live so .12  
 far away, but I wish that we could see each .13  
 other with every passing day. .14
- 4 We liked each other from the very start .15  
 and although someone else has a hold on you .16  
 you'll always hold that special place in my .17  
 heart. .18  
 Those special walks we took to be alone together .20  
 and stop for a moment to hold each other .21  
 As I think about the times we stared into .22  
 each others eyes .23  
 I hoped our love would never die. .24
- 5 Our love I value more highly than Life .25  
 I just wished you weren't another .26  
 man's wife. .27  
 I won't try to hide the way I feel about you .28  
 I don't care what anyone will think, .29  
 But I will always know that if I can't .30  
 hold you every day .31  
 I'll hold you when I can because .32  
 The love I found in you will never end. .33

<sup>116</sup> Kimiecik, M85-2.

This poem is much more detailed and more story-like. As in "Our Weekend Together" it outlines the circumstances of the relationship and expresses sadness at the difficulties facing both Joe and Melanie. Again there exists a poetic language that is typically romantic yet there is a sense of realism as well. Take for examples lines 24-26.

Our love I value more highly than life  
I just wished you weren't another  
man's wife.

Line 24 is a cliché, while lines 25 and 26 seem almost comical in their juxtaposition with line 24 because of the realistic content. These three lines consist of a formulaic description of rapturous love and at the same time summarize the core of the problem, in this case the reality of a classic love triangle. They were, however, written with the utmost sincerity and reveal a practicality and an acceptance of the entire situation.

### 5.5. Conclusion

There are several major themes throughout these poems. First is the juxtaposition between a high romantic, flowery language used to describe love itself, and the less romantic language more often used to describe contemporary, realistic problems. More important however, is the custom itself, which, when analyzed, appears to be part of a long-standing tradition. Although actual texts are few and far between for the folklorist, many people will admit that they wrote such poems when they were young. One man from St. John's in his early forties when asked if he had written love poems said yes, but "mercifully" he did not

have any of them to show me.<sup>117</sup> We also have some indication of at least widespread regional tradition based on Joe's remarks about what best friends know about each other. As well, even if Joe has not received forty-eight poems there is a good possibility that he has a representative sample from young women in the neighboring communities, covering a definite geographical area.

Adolescent folk poetry is a highly private tradition and its functions exemplify this. Although this is a private tradition in that the product circulates between two people, or among a few at most, the practice is public in that its conventions are well known and in that anyone may avail him or herself of it. However, the poetry itself maintains the privacy so absolutely necessary for the conveyance of such intimate emotions without disturbing community standards.

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<sup>117</sup>Personal communication, Jan. 12, 1986.

## Chapter 6

### Newfoundland Courtship Gestures

#### 6.1. Gesture Study in the Social Sciences

Within folklore, the study of gestures is a relatively unexplored field. In *The Study of American Folklore*, Brunvand summarizes the main works, but they are not many and are predominantly pre-1960; the only exception to this is a pair of articles by Robert Barakat in 1969 and 1973.<sup>118</sup> Studies thus far have primarily been collections and descriptions, usually historic-geographic in outlook. Archer Taylor's presentation of the Shanghai gesture, written in 1956, is still a primary reference work for what little folkloristic material there is on the genre.<sup>119</sup> Francis Hayes published in 1957 an extensive bibliography on gesture but there is no comparable work for the ensuing decades.<sup>120</sup> There is however a more recent dictionary of gestures but it is fundamentally concerned with geographical

<sup>118</sup> Robert A. Barakat, "Gesture Systems," *Keystone Folklore Quarterly* 14 (1969): 105-21; "Arabic Gestures," *Journal of Popular Culture* 6 (1973): 749-93.

<sup>119</sup> Archer Taylor, "The Shanghai Gesture," *Folklore Fellows Communications* 166 (Helsinki, 1956).

<sup>120</sup> Francis Hayes, "Gestures: A Working Bibliography," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 21 (1957): 218-317.

distribution rather than a contextual or functional analysis.<sup>121</sup> Gestures have also been collected as one aspect of occupational lore. Levette Davidson in 1950 summarizes gesture languages for at least ten different groups.<sup>122</sup> The paucity of theoretical materials seems to indicate that although body language as part of a performance context has been looked at by folklorists, those body movements that are consciously employed have not been analyzed to any great degree.<sup>123</sup>

The definitions of the genre are based mostly upon a survey of gesture collections. Barakat, in 1969, uses a definition and classification based on a paralinguistic model. Davidson writes that he looks at "consciously made and socially understandable gestures and signs."<sup>124</sup> His methodology, however, culminates solely in ethnographic analysis.

There is a vast amount of information on gesture in related disciplines but folklorists have not taken full advantage of these works. The student of traditional gestures can only benefit by looking at social science literature in order to realize the scope of gestures as one part of an extensive communication system. One need also stress that these systems have both conscious and unconscious aspects that are culturally learned. Gestures, then, as a sub-genre of body language, need to be interpreted from a larger theoretical framework.

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<sup>121</sup> Betty J. Bäml and Franz H. Bäml, *A Dictionary of Gestures* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1975).

<sup>122</sup> Levette J. Davidson, "Some Current Folk Gestures and Sign Languages," *American Sociologist* 25 (1950): 3-9.

<sup>123</sup> Wilfred W. Wareham's study, "Social Change and Musical Tradition: The Role of Singing in the Life of a Newfoundland Traditional Singer," MA. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1972, is a good exception.

<sup>124</sup> Davidson 3.



The categorization of actual body movements has been approached by a variety of psychologists, sociologists, linguists, and neurologists.<sup>125</sup> Within these disciplines it is well understood that body language (inclusive of gesture) is predominantly a learned behavior and, therefore, susceptible to cultural variation. However, social scientists have devoted most of their study to those body movements which although culturally learned are unintentional or unconscious. Body posture and movement responses to emotion (eg. fear, anger) have been well recognized for several decades now as important components of everyday life. Within folklore, there has also been research done on body movements that are part of the performance context but even these are not always as detailed as one would like.

Of interest here is that the body movements that do receive analytical rather than ethnographic consideration from folklorists are more often those which are unintentional (styles of walking, for example).<sup>126</sup> It is ironic that consciously employed gestures have been collected yet remain unstudied.

This study of Newfoundland courtship gestures focuses on those body movements which are intentional and controllable. For this reason, the gestures

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<sup>125</sup>For an excellent survey of the material see: Aaron Wolfgang, ed., *Nonverbal Behavior: Perspectives, Applications, Intercultural Insights* (Lewiston, New York: C. J. Hogrefe, 1988), especially the articles by Heiner Ellgring, "The Study of Nonverbal Behavior and its Applications: State of the Art in Europe," 115-138, Nancy M. Henley and Marianne LaFrance, "Gender as Culture: Difference and Dominance in Nonverbal Behavior," 351-371, and Adam Kendon, "Did Gesture Have the Happiness to Escape the Curse at the Confusion of Babel?" 75-114; for more classic approaches to the material see: Ray Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context, Essays on Body Motion Communication* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970); Albert Scheflen, *Body Language and Social Order, Communication as Behavioral Control* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972); MacDonald Critchley, *The Language of Gesture* (London: E. Arnold, 1939).

<sup>126</sup>Barakat, "Gesture Systems," 108-109.

must then be seen as communicators of some kind of message. Viewed from this perspective, one must then ask what message or messages are carried through this particular system. In order to comprehend the function of the entire courtship gesture system, it is necessary to see how such communication systems (both verbal and nonverbal) work.

## 6.2. Newfoundland Communication

An introductory look at linguistic theory will help place the Newfoundland courtship code in a contextual framework.

In 1972 William Labov expressed his previous avoidance of the term "sociolinguistics."

I have resisted the term sociolinguistics for many years, since it implies that there can be a successful linguistic theory or practice which is not social.<sup>127</sup>

At the time of that writing, he felt that linguists no longer had to argue about what they could or could not study. The importance of his remark indicates a line of thinking that has clearly become taken for granted:

... the speech varieties employed within a speech community form a system because they are related to a shared set of social norms. Hence, they can be classified according to their usage, their origins, and the relationship between speech and social action that they reflect. They become indices of social patterns of interaction in the speech community.<sup>128</sup>

The relationship between social activity and language use, or non-use, is of importance for this study.

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<sup>127</sup> William Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972) xiii.

<sup>128</sup> J. Gumperz, "The Speech Community," in *Language and Social Context*, ed. Pier P. Giglioli (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1972) 220-21.

Basil Bernstein, although heavily critiqued,<sup>129</sup> describes what he calls a restricted code:

X [It] is a specific form of social relation. In the case of a restricted code (structural prediction), the speech is played out against a backdrop of assumptions common to the speakers, against a set of closely shared interests and identifications, against a system of shared expectations; in short, it presupposes a local cultural identity which reduces the need for the speakers to elaborate their intent verbally and to make it explicit. In one sentence the extent to which the intent of the other person may be taken for granted, the more likely that the structure of the speech will be simplified and the vocabulary drawn from a narrow range.<sup>130</sup>

Bernstein applies what is essentially folkloristic thinking to various aspects of his theory, but he focuses the application of the restricted code entirely on the working class. Folkloristic theory, however, would encourage the application of the above remarks to any of the socio-economic classes; but more importantly for any cultural group, whether it is based on economic distinctions or ancestral background, in Gumperz' terms, the speech community.

In analyzing linguistic phenomena within a socially defined universe, however, the study is of language usage as it reflects more general behavior norms. This universe is the speech community: any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage.<sup>131</sup>

The importance of Bernstein's sociolinguistic theory is its coherent description of what in folklore is formulaic, or structural. Rather than consider

<sup>129</sup>For a thorough discussion of Bernstein's elaborated and restricted codes see: Harold Rosen, *Language and Class: A Critical Look at the Theories of Basil Bernstein* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972).

<sup>130</sup>Basil Bernstein, "Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences," special issue, "The Ethnography of Communication," eds. John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes, *American Anthropologist* 66:6 (1964): 60-61.

<sup>131</sup>Gumperz 219.

this as linguistic redundancy one can see that his analysis of conversation and paralinguistic behaviors results in what may be considered traditional, formulaic behavior.<sup>132</sup> The woman who is asked to dance through the conversational approach as described in Chapter III, knows exactly what is happening and what is expected of her because of her cultural knowledge of the approach. Her behavioral responses (both verbal and nonverbal) will reflect this.

Dell Hymes describes in detail various cultures and their use or non-use of language.

Often one reads of the role of language in transmission of culture, the social heritage, but among many peoples the great bulk of adult roles — and skills are transmitted nonverbally.<sup>133</sup>

The importance of his work for this study is the revelation that different cultures place emphasis on different aspects of their cultures. Some prefer silence, others highlight oration (and hence, leadership), proverb use and other traditional verbal genres.<sup>134</sup> Henry Glassie, working in Ireland, points out that that culture is less concerned with material things than with verbal capabilities.<sup>135</sup> Gerald Pocius has made a similar kind of observation in Newfoundland.

I would claim that *social* energies in Newfoundland (perhaps even drawing on its Celtic background) are manifested more in verbal and

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<sup>132</sup> The term "redundancy" here should not have negative connotations and is one that Poyatos explains as follows: "The concept of redundancy has been traditionally misused in everyday language as well as in serious research. . . . For what appears to be redundant is, most of the times, only complementary, i.e., supporting, emphasizing, or contradicting the essential message." For a fuller discussion of this concept see Fernando Poyatos, "Linguistic Fluency and Verbal-Nonverbal Cultural Fluency," in Wolfgang 439-441.

<sup>133</sup> Dell Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics; An Ethnographic Approach* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974) 127.

<sup>134</sup> Hymes 30-35.

<sup>135</sup> Henry Glassie, "Folk Art," in *Folklore and Folklife*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972) 271.

customary behavior than in objects.<sup>136</sup>

His distinction of the placement of cultural energies suggests that Newfoundland seems inclined towards "verbal and customary behavior." I think it is possible to go one step further and concentrate on Newfoundland culture on a verbal/nonverbal continuum, with structured behavior following one or the other of these directions. In Newfoundland there are, obviously, specific contexts for either of these emphases. House parties are often conducive to singing,<sup>137</sup> walking the roads is nonverbal customary behavior. Each functions in a distinct way, but both are aspects of the same culture.

Verbal elaboration is not encouraged in everyday interaction, nor does it give status and prestige to the speaker.<sup>138</sup> When the conversation leads to turn-by-turn talk and then to turn-by-turn narrative the situation is conducive for longer, more systematic speech acts and due respect is then given to the speaker.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Gerald L. Pocius, *House and Land, Community and Region: Shared Spaces in a Community*, unpublished manuscript, 1987, chapter 8:20, emphasis his.

<sup>137</sup> See Wilfred Wareham, "Towards an Ethnography of Times," diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1982.

<sup>138</sup> For a clear description of social transactions see: Eric Berne, *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), chapter 3, "Procedures and Rituals," 35-40.

<sup>139</sup> This follows Martin Laba's statement that "... a conversation may turn into a narrative occasion, a speech event into a speech act, which does not necessarily suspend the conventions of conversation; but rather incorporates them into the emergent stylized act of narration." Laba has explored in depth the interface between conversation and narrative. Rather than separate the two into context (conversation) and text (narrative) he feels they are more closely related and not so easily extracted from one another. Martin Laba, "Narrative and Talk, A Study in the Folkloric Communication of Everyday Conversational Exchange," diss., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1983, 203.

It is important to keep in mind general emic interpretations of language use. In Newfoundland there are certain times when talk is important, as when Tom would speak at length on the condition of the inshore fishery, usually in the evening hours, thereby exhibiting not only his knowledge but his oratory skills as well. I once witnessed his wife make an attempt to break into such a monologue; she was actively discouraged from doing so. More than once I sat in Tom's kitchen with Iris on my lap, simply listening to what was being said about the current state of affairs of the inshore fishery. A volatile topic like this one meant that only those whom Tom considered knowledgeable had the right to join in the discussion. In his eyes, this immediately eliminated women, but particularly, an unfamiliar like myself.<sup>140</sup> Although on this subject I had many questions, I dared not ask them when Tom held the floor. It would have interrupted his flow of knowledge of the subject and would have demanded that he spend his time explaining in detail things a rural ten year old might know.

Talk is less important when children entered the house, in which I was staying. Children often came into the house and simply sat in the kitchen. If I did not draw them into conversation it did not matter; they would stay for ten or fifteen minutes and then leave, having observed that I was washing dishes, reading, or doing whatever chore was at hand. Unless I initiated conversation, they would sit quietly, giggle amongst themselves, or if they became bored before

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<sup>140</sup> The contemporary view of women in the fishery is confined to their work in the fish plants. For an excellent discussion of the decline of women's role in the fishery see Marilyn Porter, "Women and Old Boats: the Sexual Division of Labour in a Newfoundland Outport," in *The Public and the Private*, eds. Eva Gamarnikow, David H.J. Morgan, June Purvis, Daphne Taylorson (London: Heinemann, 1983) 91-105.

I engaged them in talk, they would leave with no hard feelings.<sup>141</sup> I could then control their behavior in the sense that if I were truly busy reading or writing, I simply smiled a hello, did not say anything and they eventually went away. If, on the other hand, I talked to them they would stay as long as conversation was kept up.<sup>142</sup>

In Newfoundland there is a high frequency of social interaction.<sup>143</sup> Because so many communities have remained relatively small, interaction with neighbors is inevitable.<sup>144</sup> In small communities, one ordinarily does a good deal of socializing on a daily basis. Gerald Pocius, doing fieldwork in a Newfoundland outport, describes one of the manifestations of this frequent interaction. As an example he uses the lack of greeting and salutation when people meet as indicative of their shared knowledge that future contact is an assumption taken for granted.

... residents do not feel a necessity to verbally mark their arrivals and departures when interacting, the beginnings and ends of their contacts. Hellos and goodbyes are not exchanged, but each contact is part of the daily flow of life. People know that they will once again socialize and converse in the not too distant future, perhaps in another place, and therefore there is no need to verbally begin and end

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<sup>141</sup> See Melvin Firestone, *Brothers and Rivals; Patrilocality in Savage Cove, Newfoundland* Social and Economic Studies, No. 5 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1967) 125.

<sup>142</sup> One of the other techniques I used when I wanted some time to myself was to tell the children I was tired and then go upstairs supposedly to take a nap. They would eventually leave the house but several of them used to tease me about sleeping so much, especially in the middle of the day.

<sup>143</sup> See Gerald L. Pocius, *House and Land* chapter 8:22; Melvin Firestone, *Brother and Rivals; Patrilocality in Savage Cove* Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies 5 (St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1972) 118-119.

<sup>144</sup> 46.9 % of the respondents to Q86A came from communities with populations of 3000 or less. Of this 16.1% were from communities of 1001-3000, 14.7% from 501-1000, and 16.1% from 500 and under.

interaction.<sup>145</sup>

Parting is not parting; it is simply a brief period of time between gatherings.

James Faris, when describing the socialization process for outport children, concludes the following:

Children are taught to avoid close personal relationships with their peers, that emotional expression is to be avoided, and that any exposure can lead to exploitation. At an early age they begin to learn the values placed on predictable behavior and perfected response, and experience early the caution, reserve, inhibition and formality characteristic of adult Cat Harbour behavior. Even the universal physical familiarity prior to marriage is accompanied by a remarkable lack of emotional expression.<sup>146</sup>

Regional awareness of this nonverbality is not in only academic writings. In 1966 Harold Horwood, a Newfoundland writer, expressed Newfoundland outport reticence in his novel *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday*. He describes the return from prison to his home community of a young man had been wrongly accused of homosexual molestation of a sixteen-year-old boy.

One by one, some of them awkwardly and shyly, the other men on the wharf laid down what they were doing, came up to Christopher, and, following Thomas Gilmore's lead, offered a handshake and a word of greeting.

Elias Pallisher was not among those who did so, nor was Solomon Marks, but a large enough cross-section of the people had tendered some symbol of their good will to make it clear that, contrary to expectations, Christopher was not going to be treated as an outcast. Moreover, the whole demonstration had obviously taken place without the slightest premeditation, out of the good will that came so natural to those people, and as a symbol of their regret at having been in the wrong. Not one of them would ever be able to say to Christopher, as Brother John had said to Eli, "I'm sorry. I did you wrong. I pray you to forgive me." They were not articulate in the manner of John McKim,

<sup>145</sup>Pocius, chapter 8:2

<sup>146</sup>James C. Faris, "Validation in Ethnographic Description; The Lexicon of Occasions in Cat Harbour", *Man*, n.s., 3 (1968): 119.



nor able to rise to a verbal confession of their mistakes, but they could admit them openly and spontaneously, with faces and hands that were far more eloquent than their tongues. These were men who in any case performed most of their speech with their hands: lived by them, spoke with them, communicated with them, prayed with them, fashioned the patterns of their lives by them. Their hands were fluent, and even poetic, while their tongues were often clumsy and uncouth.<sup>147</sup>

When I was staying in Welcher's Cove, I was forced to adapt my concepts of privacy and conversation to my new environment. I found that people may enter your house at will.<sup>148</sup> If the door to the house is locked it simply means that you are not at home. Interaction is the norm, not the exception. People who isolate themselves or who pursue solitary pleasures (excluding sexual activity) are the exception. My long, solitary walks into the woods (out of the community) were tolerated but probably not well understood. I was obviously discouraging social interaction during those walks.

Perceptions of privacy or what was, in my opinion, lack of privacy, are interwoven with concepts of daily social interaction. This awareness of community interaction can be seen in the speech patterns that are fraught with common knowledge of people, places, and things. Conversation is normally based on assumptions of previous knowledge. For instance, I had to learn kinship relations through a process of delicate interrogation when the situation seemed conducive to such questioning. "Who belongs to whom" is one of the many topics that a child learns, not from asking directly, but from constant contact and listening. Faris makes this conclusion:

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<sup>147</sup> Harold Horwood, *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday* (Toronto: Paperjacks, 1975; orig. Doubleday, 1960) 354.

<sup>148</sup> James C. Faris, *Cat Harbour* 76, 145; Pocus, chapter 8:39.

It seems perfectly congruent to me that in a society which accords esteem to the successful transmission of 'anything strange,' we find such a marked lack of exchange of information which is considered culturally mundane and common, even to the degree of lack of verbal exchange in learning processes. In fact, the absence of verbal learning is coincidental with a local symbolism characterized by codable cues with high meaning capacities, and is used extensively in lieu of verbal exchanges.<sup>149</sup>

Initially in my dealings with Mickey, I always managed to ask him about the day's fishing, a fair topic of conversation but one that allowed little room for elaboration. The size of the catch and the size of the individual fish were a standard subtopic, as were the conditions of his and Tom's hands, nearly arthritic from the constant exposure in sea water. However, as the summer progressed and the fishing activity decreased, so did my ability to carry on any kind of dialogue with Mickey. I ran out of questions and Mickey ran out of answers.

Marilyn Porter, carrying out research in Aquaforte on the Southern Shore, Newfoundland, describes this same sort of formulaic conversation.

Whenever I returned after a few days away, my landlady's opening remarks all had to do with the fishing, how many pounds her son had that morning, what it [the fishing] was like in Renewes, or if it was bad, 'it's so quiet it's like a place in mourning.'<sup>150</sup>

Faris also experienced this kind of Newfoundland communication.

During the first week of my arrival, I forced more than one woman off the road into deep snowbanks simply because they wanted to avoid acknowledging the encounter. When one does meet, the exchanges are most commonly about the weather or the condition of the sea, and usually the reply is the same, no matter what the initial comment. My introductory greeting of 'It's awfully cold today, isn't it?' was often met with 'Best kind'... or 'Yep, the sea's some heavy' - a reply one would expect to a query about the condition of the sea.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>149</sup>Faris, *Cat Harbour* 151.

<sup>150</sup>Porter 99.

<sup>151</sup>Faris, *Cat Harbour* 144.

Although I was not used to such formulaic conversation, I quickly learned that rather than forcing speech, I was better off remaining silent.

A Newfoundland friend of mine who grew up in St. John's but is now living in Conception Bay complained to me once when I visited her that she had no one to talk to in her community. She realized that conversational elaboration was not an option open to her. She told me, unsolicited, that she felt that most people she knew in her new community thought that talking about an idea was "weird."<sup>152</sup> In order to talk about ideas, a different kind of vocabulary as well as a very specific attitude must be present.

The highly formulaic and topical structure of day-to-day conversation is a sign of the comprehensive information that most people share in this community. Who belongs to whom and who is sleeping with whom are two interrelated topics on which people spend a good deal of time speculating. Kinship (and thus parentage), the weather, people's health, fishing, the woods, unemployment and employment, and upcoming social events and related activities are the basic topics for daily conversation. However, because the number and kinds of topics are limited people constantly repeat and reformulate the same conversations. These topics are naturally variable among male, female, and different age groups, but nonetheless the same kinds of topics are continually reiterated. This repetition is apparent also in the syntax and vocabulary. A few examples at the word level will explain this. "How's the fish?" "Not bad, boy." or "Some weather?" "Bad, isn't it?" are two typical examples of both topical and verbatim repetition. Non-

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<sup>152</sup>Personal communication, February 1987.

creative verbal performance or small talk is repetitive and not spontaneous. There are, of course, topics which remain unspoken. Serious courtship, as opposed to ephemeral relationships, is in fact, such an unspoken topic.

Verbally taboo topics, however, must be dealt with in some fashion. I would argue that courtship is dealt with by both participants and community members in a predominantly nonverbal system. This is not to say that there are not people who will take on the task of talking about ideas or more involved, sensitive topics. There were several such people I met who did, but their status within the community was questionable. They were considered different, and to some extent immoral. These three people, each of whom I developed close relationships with, were the people I depended on for personal insights on male-female relationships. One was a young woman, Stella, who was separated with two children and who was living two communities away. She lived at this distance from her home community because she could not tolerate what she saw as the narrowmindedness of the people from Welcher's Cove. This same young woman had devised a technique whereby she could padlock her door from the outside while she remained inside. By doing this she created privacy for herself but also did not offend those people who might stop by to visit and would, otherwise let themselves in.<sup>153</sup> Another of these more verbal people was Joe, my main informant for Chapter V. I once heard Linda say that she speculated that Joe was not really a Butler, thereby explaining to herself and to me his wild, different behavior. Linda attributed his deviancy to his biological father's, rather than his

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<sup>153</sup> See Firestone 129-130.

apparent father's, characteristics which were then passed on to Joe. The third more vocal person was Joe's best friend, Greg, also a subject of the chapter on poetry. These three people were close friends and it became obvious to me that they needed each other's support because they were different. They spoke more freely about personal matters to me than any other people I met that summer. Their attitudes towards life, less restrictive in general than most of their neighbors, were reflected in the way they spoke of their lives.

People who are verbally freer at a personal level are in a traditionally deviant role. Stella, Joe, and Greg were viewed as fringe community members. I feel that there is a connection between their blatant disregard for community sanctions and their loquacity in their dealings with me. The three of them had reached a point in their lives where they no longer cared what the communities thought of their personal behavior. More often than not when they did something that would traditionally be considered immoral they encouraged each other by saying, "Let's really give them something to talk about."<sup>154</sup> Faris, in *Cat Harbour*, also writes of deviant behavior.

If one is to adopt . . . a reversed or deviant role . . . even briefly and ritually . . . such a role or such behaviour must be defined as deviant or reverse in some way by the experience and tradition of the individual adopting it. . . . Deviations from the limited role alternatives available locally must be within the conceptual scope of the 'outport' individual.<sup>155</sup>

Certain kinds of deviancy are socially tolerated within a culture but still treated as deviancy. The three people mentioned above adopted such roles; Stella often

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<sup>154</sup>From fieldnotes.

<sup>155</sup>Faris, "Validation" 120.

joked about being called the local whore and placing a red light outside her front door to let her neighbors know that she knew what they thought of her. Joe and Greg were considered the "wild" boys of the immediate region and did not bother to discourage this image because in their own minds they understood themselves and chose actively not to conform.

Among social psychologists there is a general consensus that in cultures in which verbal communication is not dominant, there is a corresponding increase in nonverbal communication.<sup>156</sup> This verbal/nonverbal ratio can be applied to rural Newfoundland when discussing certain aspects of male-female relationships. A closer look at gestures must be made before we delve into the specifics of the Newfoundland courtship code. One main psychological perspective is used here as a base for a folkloristic approach.

Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Freisen (both psychologists) have written extensively on nonverbal behavior. Although their use of jargon is at times awkward for those outside that discipline, they have developed a detailed and useful approach towards the understanding of nonverbal behavior. Of concern here is their article entitled, "The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage, and Coding," which reveals a depth and complexity of nonverbal behavior that has hardly been touched by folklorists.<sup>157</sup> Ekman and Freisen have separated out five categories of nonverbal behavior which provide for the study of Newfoundland courtship gestures a larger analytical context.

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<sup>156</sup> Michael Argyle, *Bodily Communication* (London: Methuen, 1975) 200.

<sup>157</sup> Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Freisen, "The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage, and Coding," *Semiotica* 1 (1969): 49-98.

The first of their divisions is *emblems*. Emblems are defined as those nonverbal acts which have direct verbal translation, or dictionary definition, usually consisting of a word or two, or perhaps a phrase. This verbal definition or translation of the emblem is well known by all members of a group, class, or culture. . . . An emblem may repeat, substitute, or contradict some part of the concomitant verbal behavior. . . . The use of an emblem is usually an intentional, deliberate effort to communicate.<sup>158</sup>

Clearly, most traditional gestures that have been described by folklorists fall into this category. It is this category in which I feel the courtship gestures belong. We may not consciously translate an emblem, but if asked to do so we probably could.

The second category is *illustrators*. These are "movements which are directly tied to speech, serving to illustrate what is being said verbally."<sup>159</sup> Ekman and Freisen classify this category further into six subgroups which have as uniting factor the concomitant verbal behavior. "They are directly tied to content, inflection, loudness, etc."<sup>160</sup> There are two basic differences between emblems and illustrators. The first is the illustrator's dependency on verbal communication and the second is the illustrator's less intentional use -- the person may not be as aware of what body communication he has exhibited.

*Affect displays* are the third major category. These are largely but not exclusively facial movements in direct response to an outside stimulus. In reality, these movements are "the behavior consequence of the affect, rather than [the]

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<sup>158</sup> Ekman 63.

<sup>159</sup> Ekman 68.

<sup>160</sup> Ekman 69.

display of affect itself.<sup>161</sup> For example, responses result in disgust, anger, sadness, and fear affect displays. These kinds of emotional stimuli may result in facial affect displays. Of importance to folklorists is that facial expressions of anger, for instance, may be universal, but what actually provokes the anger will be culturally based.

Category four, *regulators*, are those

acts which maintain and regulate the back-and-forth nature of speaking and listening between two or more interactants. These tell the speaker to continue, repeat, elaborate, hurry up, become more interesting, less salacious, give the other a chance to talk, etc.<sup>162</sup>

Like the illustrators, regulators are directly related to verbal behavior, but regulators control the pace of the conversation rather than acting as vehicles of the immediate verbal communication of the speaker.

The last category is *adaptors* which are

movements . . . first learned as part of adaptive efforts to satisfy self or bodily needs, or to perform bodily actions, or to manage emotions, or to develop or maintain prototypic interpersonal contacts, or to learn instrumental activities [but which have now become part of normal interaction].<sup>163</sup>

Three kinds of adaptors are distinguished, all of which are usually unintentional. In fact adaptors may perhaps even be consciously concealed when, upon being triggered, they are noticed by the person using them. They are rarely intended to communicate but are rather more habitual. Communication by adaptors is not at the sentence level (as emblems), nor at the conversation level (as regulators) but rather at the level of individual personality.

<sup>161</sup> Ekman 71.

<sup>162</sup> Ekman 82.

<sup>163</sup> Ekman 84.



Gestures in one culture may mean nothing at all in another, or something entirely different as a result of cultural variability. In cases where words are not or cannot be used, the gestures are substitutes for, rather than reinforcers of, language. The implementation of a courtship gesture system is a manifestation of a cultural need to communicate nonverbally.

### 6.3. Nonverbality and Its Implications in Welcher's Cove

#### Courtship Practices

Certain aspects of life in Welcher's Cove are both verbally taboo and of maximum interest; serious courtship is one such topic.<sup>164</sup> In my experience there was a decided lack of verbal activity between Mickey and me while at the same time there was a good deal of teasing by friends. I had concluded that Mickey could treat me only as he would any other woman in the same situation; he could only behave towards me in a way that was familiar to him. Despite the apparent lack of verbal outlets I felt there must be some mechanism within the culture that allows for the expression of such discouraged topics. I could not understand how or why Mickey felt I was interested in him until it was suggested to me by Mac that I look at my own nonverbal behavior. It was then I started accumulating specific data, most often at the dances, on exactly how people communicated their romantic interests.

Males and females may talk to their same-sex peers about their love lives,

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<sup>164</sup> See also Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Premier, 1959), 70-71.

but in general, serious courtship talk does not go beyond that.<sup>165</sup> Darlene says about her conversations with her female friends, "My number one topic is men!" When she said this both Barbara and Glenys agreed heartily. Their awareness of men as a constant, valid topic of discussion helped me enormously as I proceeded with my research. Rather than be seen as an outsider, I was simply viewed as a single female whose prime interest *should* be men. My interest in both my "relationship" with Mickey and in other male-female relationships was perfectly acceptable and normal. This topic of conversation remained confined within my female friendship circle in Welcher's Cove, which meant that I had no similar information from males in that same social circle. I was, however, able to talk with Joe and Greg about their male-female relationships. The discussion of serious relationships normally takes place in single-sex groups.

In general, in rural Newfoundland direct confrontation between parents and courting children, or between couples is avoided until the relationship has become serious for both partners.

...my parents avoided mentioning relationships between boy[s] and girl[s] in front of the children. We would never mention, for example, that we had a girlfriend. (MUNFLA 68-26)

The conscious avoidance of the discussion of male-female contact becomes even more apparent when one realizes that a couple is very often determined to keep public knowledge of their relationship secret.

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<sup>165</sup> Conversely, less serious relationships are characterized by frequent and constant sexual teasings by family and community members. For a detailed description of the same kind of exchange see Carolyn Ellis, *Fisher Folk; Two Communities on Chesapeake Bay* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky, 1986) 23-25.

A friend of mine who was born in the United States but now lives in St. John's told me that her younger brother, who was fourteen when they moved to Newfoundland, often talked about the differences between the United States and Newfoundland in male-female relationships. He told her that the couples who were publicly affectionate were not the ones who were "going out," rather, it was the people who stayed on opposite sides of the room at dances who were more likely to be involved in more serious relationships.<sup>166</sup>

It is not unusual for a relationship to go on for months before the couple declares, often nonverbally, that they are in fact seeing one-another. Walking the roads as a couple for the first time is one such indicator in Walcher's Cove; driving to dances as a couple, alone or with another couple, is also an early indicator of a serious relationship; as is going to church together for the first time.<sup>167</sup>

Parents very seldom know who their sons and daughters were [sic] dating unless the courtship became serious. (MUNFLA MS: 73-76:20)

This statement implies that it is the duration of the relationship that gives the secret away, rather than any discussion between children and parents.

Courtships would be kept secret from the parents until eventually they would be found out and the girl would get some indication from her parents as to how they felt about the young man. (MUNFLA MS 73-95:28).

Again, it is the seriousness of the relationship, manifested through its duration,

<sup>166</sup> See also Sherry B. Ortner, "Gender and Sexuality in Hierarchical Societies: The Case of Polynesia and Some Comparative Implications," in Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, eds., *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 382.

<sup>167</sup> This practice is not confined to Newfoundland. In my own home community (pop. 1800) in New York State this was often the first public sign of a long-term commitment.

which informs the parents that a courtship is in progress. In this way, neither one of the couple involved will feel that he or she has been responsible for giving away their secret. Undeniably, some parents know what their children are up to; but the way in which couples attempt to keep their relationship secret exemplifies how male-female contacts are viewed not only in Welcher's Cove, but throughout much of Newfoundland.

Courting couples at any stage, but especially early on in the relationship, communicate nonverbally. Serious discussion of the relationship is discouraged and the use of an unspoken code reflects both the participants' unwillingness to discuss their emotions with each other as well as reflecting a societal attitude towards nonverbality where courtship is concerned. It is the intense desire for secrecy that has led to the creation of a complex system of gesture use in Newfoundland courtship.

#### 8.4. Newfoundland Courtship Gestures, Introduction

In this thesis, Newfoundland courtship gestures are considered to be emblems as defined by Ekman and Freisen. The gestures are all nonverbal acts that carry a specific message. The message normally functions in one of four ways, depending upon the existing relationship between the male and female who are signalling. The emblem may (1.) initiate an encounter between two people who were previously unacquainted; (2.) propose sexual activity; (3.) a combination of (1) & (2); and (4.) reinforce an already established relationship. The majority of responses from the questionnaire describe emblems which function as *initiators* (message one). Others are *qualifiers* and still others are *intensifiers*. Initiators

are normally non-touch, qualifiers may involve touch between the two parties, and intensifiers more often, but not exclusively, are touch acts. All three groups overlap one another and so they are presented in this study as they are used by specific people (respondents to the questionnaire) rather than as part of an exclusive category.

The Newfoundland emblems can also be translated directly to "I'm attracted to you; are you attracted to me?" or in its simplest form "Interested?" posed as a question. In cases where sexual activity is being proposed, an emblem may simply translate to "Sex?" also posed as a question. The emblems are substitutes for verbal language. They aid in the avoidance of a direct verbal confrontation of a sensitive topic. In Newfoundland, participants in courtship are well aware of this effort:

Today, I find personally, that the only sure way to know if someone is interested in you is *once you've made eye contact* you would go over and talk to her. . . . Unless she comes right out and says 'do you want to go to bed' [which] doesn't happen very often but it has happened to me once. It's not the normal way things happen. [emphasis mine] (Q86A/49:10, m19)

Most courtship emblems are of a question and answer-type; the person who uses an emblem is often quite literally asking a question. The response of the person at whom the emblem is directed reveals "yes" or "no". According to the questionnaire responses, Newfoundland females do a good deal of signalling to initiate a new relationship. Their use of emblems must reveal their interest in a specific male without actually verbalizing it.<sup>168</sup> They must not be too direct.

<sup>168</sup> This information is based largely on the questionnaire data. There are however many women, particularly in a dance context, who are aggressive and feel no need to cover up either their intentions or their actions. See Chapter III, *Dance*, 63.

Although there are females who will speak to a male about their interest in him, most females indicate nonverbally in order to attract a male. It is female (usually, but not always) encouragement that often allows a relationship to begin. From a male:

Girls act in a way where they don't really come out and say they want a date but they deliver signals that tell the boy to ask her for a date. (Q86A/89:5, m19)

And from two females:

Females flirt so that the male will ask her out. (Q86A/68:5, f18)<sup>169</sup>

The female should send off signals which encourage the male to ask but not ask the male herself. (Q86A/18:5, f19)

In this way the emblem can serve two functions. It substitutes for verbal communication and allows females to be active participants while appearing to remain seemingly non-assertive.

The amount and kind of information that may be released through the use of any courtship emblem reveals the level of efficiency of that particular gesture in a specific situation. Any emblem is based on interstitial knowledge and may mean something or nothing to any given person. In this respect, an emblem may be said to have an efficiency level. If an emblem is used but misinterpreted by the receiver (eg. because of unfamiliarity with the emblem) the emblem may be said to have a low efficiency level. When the emblem is known by both sender and

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<sup>169</sup> In a recent book on black culture in America, the author describes flirting: "The problem of rejection is not made easier by women who see flirting as an art or weapon. Some men use cues such as an inviting smile or sustained eye contact as invitations to make further advances. Women who use that kind of body language without the necessary meaning attached to them are seen as setting up men for rejection. . . . One result is the complaint by some women that 'men don't like to flirt nowadays. They just ask directly for sex.'" Robert Staples, *The World of Black Singles; Changing Patterns of Male/Female Relations*, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies 57 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981) 47. In addition, these questionnaire responses reflect the more urban, middle class phenomena of "dating."

receiver its usefulness as an indicator of interest increases and the emblem may then be said to have a high efficiency level. This means that an individual's knowledge and use of an emblem ultimately determines whether or not the emblem may be used successfully. Even if a negative response, often no response, is given to a signal its efficiency level as an indicator of interest is still high.

The contexts conducive to signalling vary but the functions remain similar. The setting for this kind of communication is simply anywhere that there is a need for privacy. Most often emblems are used in group situations. We have these responses from the questionnaire:

Often if two people are holding hands and are surrounded by a lot of people talking, the hand signals like squeezing or scratching the palm is often a way to let the other person know that you're very aware of their presence. (Q86A/158:2, f18)

For example this guy wants to go out with this girl and they are at this dance. One sitting on one side and the girl on the other side of the room. They may look at each other and the guy would probably blow a kiss to the girl or wink and smile which means he is interested in her. (Q86A/160:6, f18)

Sitting at a party, or crowded room 'the scratch on the palm of the hand' would indicate that he/she wants to leave the crowd and be alone. (Q86A/80:2, f18)

Most of the emblems can be used in any context but there are some that are more useful in certain situations. For instance, there are signals that are used at dances but would not be used anywhere else. The way a dance partner is held is a common indicator of interest yet clearly it could not be used out of the context of dancing.

Many of the following emblems can be used at one time or another in a joking manner. Both males and females use some of the emblems in this way towards strangers and well-established friends may gesture to one another based on the assumption that it is not to be taken seriously.

The winking that I've done has been purely just to watch the man's reaction, to see if he's embarrassed. (Q86A/61:4, f21)

A group situation also is conducive for joking around:

I never winked at a stranger unless I was kidding around with a group of people. (Q86A/52:4, f18)

And between well-established friends:

[the palm scratch] has been done just to get a smile out of your partner or friend. (Q86A/1:2, f21)

Emblems can also be used as a joke between two male friends who are obviously aware of the more serious connotation and thus the joke value is immediately apparent to both of them.

But it [the palm scratch] is not serious. Usually among friends done in a joking manner. Sometimes [it is used] between two male friends as a joke. (Q86A/47:2, f20)

The meaning or verbal translation of emblems remains the same regardless of the function which might be to amuse or to exchange information. This potentially dual function reinforces the notion that Newfoundland courtship gestures may be viewed as emblems. When the emblem is used as a joke, people must know the serious interpretation of the gesture in order to understand the joke value. This study, however, focuses on the serious uses of the gestures.

Thirty-nine Newfoundland courtship emblems have been extracted from the questionnaire. Many of these are closely related, but yet were designated as intentional, communicative acts by the respondents (see Table I).

Each emblem will have different uses for different people. Certainly not all of the emblems described are used by all people. There are emblems that are well-known to some but which have never been heard of by others. Negative answers to specific questions in Q86A are not included in this discussion but they



Table 6-1: Newfoundland Courtship Emblems

Newfoundland Courtship Emblems	
Non-touch Acts	Touch Acts
smiling	tickling
eye contact	palm scratch
blow kiss	hand on thigh
blink	hand on knee
wink	squeeze hand
drool	blow in ear
demurral	kiss on cheek
flutter eyes	kiss on forehead
tilt head	pinch rear-end
lick lips	place hand on other's chin
raise eyebrows	rub other's index finger
rub crotch	deliberate bumping into
play with own hair	place hand on other's rear-end
play with earrings	step on toe deliberately
cross legs to expose them	squeeze other's elbow when shaking hands
bend down to expose breasts	leave hand in a convenient place to be held
drink with cherry, roll on tongue	deliberate body contact
stare at other's genitals	grabbing the other's genitals or rear-end
finger circles rim of glass	circle with thumb and index finger, middle finger through
blow smoke in other's face	

are equally representative for any future research that might include statistics on actual use, or on geographical distribution.

In this section the most common emblems are discussed in a sequence that reflects their typical use, that is, in order of intimacy. This sequence is based on responses to the questionnaire. Deliberate eye contact, and specialized forms of eye contact: staring, winking, and the demurral are presented first. Smiling will be looked at as a facial expression that overlaps, in general, with eye contact.<sup>170</sup> These are the most common first indicators that express an interest between two people. The next major division of emblems involves non-touch acts which occur in close proximity. Emblems like blowing smoke into someone's face, tracing the rim of a glass with ones finger, and, for females, crossing ones legs (when wearing a skirt) are some examples of this category. Finally, I look at emblems which signify interest based on touch between the two people involved. The palm scratch, and other deliberate acts of placing ones hands on specific parts of the other's body, involve a complete awareness of interest from both parties. This section, based on the questionnaire responses, shows how clearly, and articulately people can describe exact interpretations of their own body communication and the contexts in which they use it.

A person may be more assertive than usual earlier in a relationship if he or she feels it would be beneficial.<sup>171</sup> In general, the less knowledge there is of a desired person, the longer it might take to establish a relationship. However, the converse may also be true when dealing with people who are unacquainted.

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<sup>170</sup> This study does not deal overtly with gender differences in nonverbal communication but Henley and LaFrance in Wolfgang, *Nonverbal Behavior*, present a good overview; for their discussion on gender related smiling see 354.

<sup>171</sup> Goodenough outlines five "universal needs" that are dealt with differently in various cultures. Ward H. Goodenough, *Cooperation in Change* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1963) 65-66.

Because there is a lack of knowledge of the person greater risks may be taken. For example, a male may make a more direct overture so as to determine immediately if there is any possibility of reciprocated interest. If there is not he can then move on and try someone else.

#### 6.4.1. Non-touch Emblems/Eye Contact

People look at each other primarily to collect information rather than to send it; the eyes are receptors, a means of receiving another's N[on]V[erbal] signals. Nevertheless when a person looks at another, this can be decoded by the other person in a number of ways, so opening the channel becomes a signal.<sup>172</sup>

Eye contact, or mutual gazing, is probably the most important first communicator of interest between Newfoundland males and females. Rarely is a relationship started without testing the other person by using deliberate eye contact. Females are capable of "giving a guy the eye" (Q86A/154:6, f18) while both males and females are said to be "giving you the eye". (Q86A/109:6, f19) "The eye" in any situation is simply trying to catch a person's attention through the use of one's eyes and can be used in many non-sexual situations. Prolonged staring is used in this way as an intensifier. Very often the desire to make eye contact occurs in situations where it would otherwise be considered rude. Dances and parties are the most referred to contexts where this kind of eye contact is carried out.

The most important nonverbal signal, as far as I'm concerned, is the meeting of the eyes. It seems that a lot of times you can tell whether a man is interested in you by the way he holds your eyes. (Q86A/42:6, f20)

<sup>172</sup>Argyle 229, emphasis mine; see also Argyle and Dean 292.

I find if my eyes contact a female's set of eyes at various times and she is without an escort then I will have no problem going over and introducing myself and see how things go from there. (Q86A/19:6, m21)<sup>173</sup>

Eye contact on its own is not enough; acknowledgment of that contact by both parties, usually determined by the length of contact, is of prime importance. The duration of eye contact is explained by concepts of "staring." Staring demands a more assertive, blatant attempt at trying to make eye contact. Gazing, as in Argyle's and Dean's definition, is not quite adequate; the person who is being stared at must eventually reciprocate, or the interest will not be interpreted as mutual. The emblematic question "Interested?" has been answered in this case in the negative.

Just plain looking at a guy often tells him you are interested. Keep eye contact with him and when he stares straight back at you, for a period of time; he too is interested. (Q86A/1:6, f21)

A nineteen year old female describes it this way:

You can usually tell if someone is interested in you by the way or how long they look at you. (Q86A/40:6, f19)

From a male:

Usually if a girl is staring or looking at you frequently she is very interested. (Q86A/60:6, m19)

And finally, from a female:

Some people if they are interested in a person stare at her/him until the person gets the general idea that you're interested in them. (Q86A/80:6, f18)

The combination of staring and smiling also seems to have a high success rate as an indicator of interest:

A nonverbal signal still used by myself and others is a direct stare accompanied with a smile. (Q86A/63:6, f18)

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<sup>173</sup>See also Kimiecik, T84-3; Q86A/150:5; 67:5; 15:6.

Stare at a girl and if she stares back with a slight smile on her face she is interested. (Q86A/92:3, m18)

Making eye contact and smiling is much more subtle [than winking] and usually gets results. (Q86A/98:4, f18)

Intentional smiling as one of the first indicators of interest is also described this way:

Usually the smiling of the opposite sex before you wink, just to get their attention first. (Q86A/110:4, f22)

... smiling at someone. . . shows you notice them. (Q86A/142:4, m18)

Winking, a combination of eye contact, and facial and emotional expression, is sequentially one of the next emblems that may be used to pursue a developing relationship.

I have never winked at a male. But many times they have winked at me. I would assume these winks contained sexual innuendoes. (Q86A/47:4, f20)

A male describes his non-use of this emblem, but acknowledges his awareness of it:

I have never winked at a girl before. But if a girl winks at me that I have never met before, I would know what she meant by it. (Q86A/112:4, m18)

Winking seems to be used early in a relationship and helps alleviate a sense of insecurity when trying to express interest. From a male:

Very often the "wink" is the best form of initial contact. When you go up to talk to the girl later, you feel as if you know her a little and don't feel so shy. (Q86A/95:4, m10)

This young man is obviously able to discern the steps he takes to introduce himself to a female that he may know only vaguely, or not at all. This same feeling is described by a female:

Winking is also a way to express mild interest. It doesn't necessarily mean a date, but if he winks back it gives you a little to go on if you should happen to be talking to him. (Q86A/158:4, f18)

Not only does this emblem help express interest but it also serves as a mechanism which helps to smooth over the nervousness of making a later, lengthier contact.

As to its effectiveness, this young woman has no doubts:

At the end of a dance, I winked at this guy as he was helping to remove electrical equipment. He noticed (as it later turned out) and called me the next day. We started dating and have been going together nearly a year. (Q86A/128:4, f18)

In addition to mutual gazing, there exists in Newfoundland, the demurral, a specific and highly communicative emblem that indicates interest. Although several women alluded to it in the questionnaire, the following response was the most detailed:

I usually engage in eye contact, looking and looking away, tilt head to side and down, and look up quickly and back down, as if shy! And then go for a solid stare with head back, sometimes an eyebrow raised beckoningly. (Q86A/47:6, f20)

Related to the demurral is an attitude of non-assertiveness that was treated in Chapters III and IV, but deserves a reminder here. This emblem expresses most succinctly some rural Newfoundland women's opinion that they should act "feminine, not "forward" when trying to express interest.<sup>174</sup>

I feel it is males who do the asking. I would never ask a male for a date. I think it is his job. If he is interested he will ask, if not then there will be no date. (Q86A/80:5, f18)

[one signal used is] for a female pretending you're shy by giving him demure looks. (Q86A/18:6, f19)

There are, of course, many females who do initiate relationships in more direct ways, but the demurral seems to have a direct correlation to a very specific attitude.

One signal used was acting coy, mainly female use only. (Q86A/38:5,

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<sup>174</sup> See also Stanley Brandes, *Metaphors of Masculinity: Sex and Status in Andalusian Folklore* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980) 84.

(38)

Believe it or not the act of fluttering your eyes and acting shy and docile is still very much in use today. For many girls it's a form of flirting. (Q86A/42:5, f20)

Eye contact, inviting body position, tilting head are often female actions. (Q86A/47:5, f20)

#### 6.4.2. Non-touch Emblems

Most of the non-touch emblems (initiators or qualifiers) can mean "I'm interested in you. Are you interested in me?" Some are more subtle than others and may express a degree of interest or a very specific kind of interest. Most are more explicitly sexual than eye contact or facial expressions. Deliberately licking one's lips (a specific facial movement, but more explicit) when the interested party is watching and blowing smoke in the other party's face are two examples of advanced intimacy and occur normally in fairly close proximity. The contexts for this are sitting at the same table in a club, standing near one another in a group situation, or generally, any middle stage after initial contact but before a final decision has been made as to whether or not the relationship will continue. If one has made it to this second stage sexual or emotional intimacy is more likely than not to occur.

Non-touch acts were the least frequent kind of act described by the respondents of Q86A. However, all of the emblems that make up this category are quite sexual and in that respect deserve some mention. Not all people will use such explicit emblems, but they do exist in certain relationships and may possibly be more useful in very brief, short-term relationships.

Blowing smoke directly into the face of a person in whom one is interested is a good example of an emblem that needs close proximity in order to be carried out successfully.

I am a smoker, and I've often used the practice of blowing smoke beneath a female's chin area as well. (Q86A/5:6, m20)

I have heard that if you blow smoke into a guys face it means you are available. (Q86A/13:6, f24)

I heard that if a guy or girl is smoking a cigarette and they blow smoke in the face of the opposite sex then that person wanted to go to bed with you. (Q86A/48:6, f20)

Blowing smoke is one such emblem that has a distinct meaning even if it is used in jest:

Blowing smoke in a person's face [is] asking for [a] sexual relationship. I [have] never seen this done, only in fun by friends. (Q86A/118:6, f20)

A related emblem indicating sexual interest is simply:  
-asking for a light [cigarette]. (Q86A/89:6, m19)

Although this was not mentioned often, asking for a light is a method by which people will create an opportunity to interact with someone. In Chapter IV, "The Roads," I described several young women from Welcher's Cove who, in order to introduce themselves to two young men, decided that one of their group could ask them for a light for a cigarette.<sup>175</sup>

Although only two women described the following, it, too, is a common emblem:

Crossing your legs so that the knee is exposed is a signal. (Q86A/18:6, f19)

Female signals: crossing her legs, especially while wearing a skirt or dress and exposing some [of] her leg. (Q86A/159:5, f18)

Schefflen, in *Body Language and Social Order*, describes this behavior although he does not call attention to it as a deliberate act. The following is a caption to one of his photographs in *Body Language*:

This woman shows high tonus quite visibly. She accentuates the high tonus by crossing the legs, pressing the upper calf against the lower

<sup>175</sup>See Chapter IV, 14-15.



knee and flexing the foot. The fully-developed leg positioning is used by models in "cheese-cake."<sup>176</sup>

For females, intentionally exposing their breast may also be used to express their interest in a specific male:

bending down or over so that the male sees down her top.  
(Q86A/159:5, f18)

Associated with drinking behavior are the following emblems:

When having a drink with someone, that person runs his/her finger around the rim of the glass several times. (Q86A/27:6, f24)

When you have a drink with a cherry in it, roll the cherry on your tongue while looking at him. (Q86A/52:6, f18)

Another drink related gesture was described to me by a male friend from St. John's. When the woman he is with has a drink with a cherry in it he takes it out of her glass or asks for it, puts the stem in his mouth and ties it in a knot with his tongue. After he ties it into a knot, he takes it out of his mouth and gives it to the woman.<sup>177</sup>

Blowing a kiss at someone can be done from greater distances as well as in close proximity.

... if a guy looks at you and makes a soft kissing sign then he is interested in you or is sizing you up with sex in his mind. (Q86A/48:6, f20)

Blowing a kiss and watch[ing her] reaction. (Q86A/162:8, m18)

... a guy would kiss at a girl if he was interested. (Q86A/106:5, f18)

Intentional licking of the lips is a common suggestive movement as well:

The signal of taking one's tongue and running along their lips or sticking it out, I consider to be female. (Q86A/56:5, m19)

The main signals I have seen used to determine if a person [is interested] are mainly facial (such as raising of the eyebrows, licking your lips and just staring at the person, etc.). (Q86A/45:6, f17)

<sup>176</sup> Schefflen 17.

<sup>177</sup> Personal communication, August 1986. I also know of two women from Ontario who do this.

A girl may wet her lips with her tongue or smile while biting her bottom lip. (Q86A/148:5, m19)

Female signals: . . . licking her lips while looking at the male she is interested in. (Q86A/159:5, f18)

#### 6.4.3. Touch Emblems

These emblems (intensifiers) are the most sexually and emotionally explicit of all and in general are used after the above two kinds have already been implemented.<sup>178</sup> They all demand a degree of proximity that is closer than the non-touch emblems.<sup>179</sup>

They normally cannot be used across great distances such as a dance floor. Except in the case of deliberately bumping into a person in whom one is interested, the question of mutual interest has already been established and acknowledged by both parties.

"Accidental" bumping into a person is an emblem that people will use very early in a developing relationship. It does, however, involve physical contact between two people.

I have heard of deliberately banging into someone you would like to get to know but that would be all it would imply. (Q86A/46:3, f21)

I have heard of bumping into a person just to get his attention. (Q86A/52:3, f18)

. . . bumping into a person deliberately would seem to be more of a signal of interest and is usually sure to get you noticed at least. (Q86A/98:3, f18)

Banging into that person (supposedly by mistake) [to get their attention]. (Q86A/80:6, f18)

<sup>178</sup> Concerning "touch" Argyle writes: "Touching seems to have a primitive significance of heightened intimacy, and it produces increased emotional arousal. However, the precise meaning of a particular form of touch depends on the culture, and is learnt." 287.

<sup>179</sup> Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966) 119-120.

Deliberate touching is probably one of the best indicators of reciprocal interest. Most respondents admitted that simply sitting or standing near someone, or touching them lightly is a good way to express one's own interest. They also pointed out that unless the touch is returned in one way or another they can determine whether or not the other party feels the same way about them. Specific placement of hands on the other's body can also indicate a degree or kind of emotion, that is whether it is more sexual or more emotional. One, however, does not preclude the other.

In the past I recall sitting by a guy who sat very close to me, touching. Because I didn't move he felt that I liked him equally as much, which was true. (Q86A/1:6, f21)

Simply brushing up against a person shows interest; if he is interested he will do the same. (Q86A/50:6, f20)

Make contact with them or be near them such as sitting close to them. If they move they are not interested but if they stay they are interested. (Q86A/56:6, m19)

Touching, then see if they touch back. (Q86A/88:6, f18)

A technique which is used quite often by the people I know is at a party you sit next to someone and rest your leg against theirs (or your shoulder or arm). If you feel they are tense or pull away, you can forget it. But if they also edge over, you have hooked in. (Q86A/161:6, m18)

Females tend to make physical contact with a person that they're interested in more so than males. Girls touch the male's arm or sit close to him, etc. (Q86A/98:5, f18)

Usually any contact of smoothing the skin means a great fondness for and sex (on the mind) would not be a surprise. (Q86A/149:2, f18)

Specific hand movements and hand placement are also important.

At dances males usually do the asking and to send a signal guys usually hold the girl very close [and] put his hand on her behind. (Q86A/60:5, m19)

Traditionally clicking or whistling [are] totally male signals. ... also pinching someone's ass. (Q86A/85:5, f22)

Guys tend to use more sexual advances like patting a girl's bum or rubbing her leg. Many girls also do that but most are more discreet by holding his hand or just sitting near him. (Q86A/158:5, f18)

... putting her hand on his knee [is a female signal]. (Q86A/150:5, f18)

Place one's hand on their chin. If the opposite sex is interested they will do the same. (Q86A/50:2, f20)

Placing the hand on the person's thigh is a sure signal. (Q86A/150:2, f19)

One hand signal was that if you were sitting next to a guy he would probably put his hand on your "upper" leg. (Q86A/50:2, f18)

One technique reported by a female is this:

Girls often leave their hand conveniently placed so that a boy can take it if he wishes. (Q86A/65:6, f18)\*

Squeezing, as an intensifying gesture was also reported.

I have heard of a guy squeezing a girl's hand for a date and if the girl was interested she would squeeze back. (Q86A/119:2, f24)

Another signal I've heard of is: the squeezing of the elbow when shaking the hand. (Q86A/24:6, f19)\*

A girl may squeeze a guy's arm. (Q86A/66:5, f18)

Deliberately stepping on someone's toe as an expression of desired sexual activity also had a few users, although many said it was something that happened more often with adolescents.

I have heard that there would indeed be no trouble to get a date with the girl if she stepped on your toe. (Q86A/68:3, f18)

Stepping on the toe I have heard she wants you but I don't think it means all night. Maybe she just wants to get a little closer to the guy. (Q86A/77:3, f19)

More of a mild sign of interest than an open confirmation but sex would "be on the way." (Q86A/156:3, m18)

Many of the emblems discussed here are well-known throughout North America. However, I found the palm scratch fascinating because I had never heard of its existence until I began researching this topic.<sup>180</sup>

This would usually happen when a girl and boy are holding hands, while kissing. The boy (usually) will rub the palm of the girl's hand, meaning "I would like to take you to bed." If the girl rubbed back, then the thing was sure to happen. (Q86A/2:2, n.s., n.a.)

<sup>180</sup> See also Wareham, "Times" 104.

I heard about this technique from a female friend who had the unfortunate incident of this happening to her with a much older family member who appeared quite serious about it. (Q86A/58:2, f18)

If a girl asks you for a dance at a night bar and she wants you to spend the night with her, she will scratch the palm of your hand. If you agree to you just stay dancing and talking until you leave the night club and go to her place. (Q86A/89:2, m19)

The signal didn't only specifically mean having intercourse in my relationships. It was a sign sometimes that two people want to go out with each other not only to have sex. It has on occasion though happened to me and I did take my hand away. (Q86A/115:2, f18)

I was at a dance and a girl that I was not dating did scratch my hand, it was a signal that she was interested in me, but because of the circumstances was unable to find out if she wanted intercourse which I regret now. (Q86A/127:2, m20)

When I went to St. Pierre I met a girl and while holding hands I did begin scratching her hand. I had only met her that night and she asked me if I knew what it meant. I didn't but she didn't pull her hand away. (Q86A/161:2, m18)

I am fairly shy and do not usually come "right to the point." I use many non-verbal clues, such as the one explained above, to determine if somebody is interested in me, such as at dances. I only use this as a start. I look at a person's face for surer signs. (Q86A/162:2, m18)

## 6.5. Conclusion.

Courtship emblems in Newfoundland serve several functions. They substitute for and supplement language use when dealing with sensitive topics like male-female relationships in general or for sexual activity. Because rural Newfoundland is a somewhat reticent culture in general, the courtship gesture system allows for expression in an otherwise restricted environment. This expression can either be related to an emotional attachment or to a more explicitly sexual advance. In this intensely social culture the emblems also help to conceal relationships until they are either confirmed by the parties involved or ended, or perhaps never even begun. A failed attempt at interaction, is for some people, best left unacknowledged.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

In Welcher's Cove children learn early the kinds of verbal and nonverbal communication that exists in their community. As they grow older they learn which contexts are appropriate for either kind of communication. Young children are aware of topics that are appropriate for discussion; serious issues of sexuality within male-female relationships are not. However, sexual innuendo and teasing are the norm where non-serious opposite sex relations are concerned. Children learn at an early age to adopt "proper" sex roles and as early as age six are able to distinguish clearly the behavior of married and unmarried people.<sup>181</sup> The majority of this information is passed on through observation and a thorough understanding of their culture's nonverbal communication.

As they grow older, the children separate firmly their private and public emotions. This is not to say that emotions and passions are not expressed.

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<sup>181</sup> More than once I watched Tom's daughter, Iris, put on her father's boots, jacket, and cap after supper and imitate accurately an older man in the community through choice of topic (fishing) for discussion, body language and tone. Her parents were often torn between reprimanding her for "making fun" and laughing at her uncanny accuracy. Another time Iris and Tom's youngest son, Nelson, age 8, were walking ahead of me in the dark on the way to the shop when Iris linked her arm through his. Nelson exclaimed, "What do you think we are, an old married couple?" and promptly disengaged himself. See also John Williams and Deborah Best, *Measuring Sexual Stereotypes* (Beverly Hills: Sage Press, 1982) in their chapter on the development of children's sex role stereotypes. They note that children learn different trait stereotypes at different ages. In the United States sexually-related ones (they mention women's flirtatiousness) come in early adolescence.

Outbursts of anger between mother and child are followed by the mother's gentle, but persistent teasing until the child realizes that she is still a member in good standing within the family. Adolescents are keenly aware of sexuality, as it is a fact of life when living in close quarters. In Tom's house there are four bedrooms upstairs, none with doors that can be shut, and throughout the night a night light stays on. Children are aware of parental sexual activity and it is often joked about. They may not be active verbal participants in the sexual banter but their presence during the conversation makes up for any lack of awareness.

Female adolescents are fully aware of their desirability as females and learn early that a primary function of their lives is preparation for eventual child bearing. At any given moment there may be unmarried pregnant teenagers around and they know that in several years they are likely to be pregnant or married, or both. Likewise, male adolescents are aware of their role as males and are often more verbal than their female peers when it comes to sexual teasing and banter. Many times they approach women who are slightly older than themselves, publicly proving to themselves and others that they are receptive to the idea of sexual intimacy. By the time they are fifteen or sixteen both male and female adolescents have often begun opposite-sex sexual activity.

In a small community it is not difficult to find out who is sleeping with whom and in fact a good deal of leisure time is spent talking about both marital and nonmarital affairs. Not all information is public knowledge and surely a good deal of it is speculation. Often when a young girl becomes pregnant, which is an overt, public fact, there is a reconfirmation of previously stated but covert "facts." Most important for some people is that more serious relationships are

kept as hidden as is possible to avoid the more lighthearted verbal teasings and the resultant embarrassed reaction.

Related to this attempt at concealment is that it is likely there are opposite sex relationships occurring without most members of the community knowing about them. It is also the case that people in Welcher's Cove often assume sexual activity is taking place between two people, even when it may not be. Because there is a great distinction between male and female social spaces any crossover in those spaces in public view is noted. Young women do not gather down by the wharf; most of them, including myself, learn quickly and early to avoid it because it is a male-dominated space. Young women would be considered forward and flirtatious if they congregated here where potential sexual partners could be found. Unless an unrelated male and female are seeing each other on a regular basis, contact in public areas is avoided. Interaction instead often takes place outside the community proper, in cars, at dances, or elsewhere.

By studying unrelated, male-female relationships, courtship can be viewed as a system of communication that is designed in this community to serve several functions. Because of the sensitivity of the issue, male-female interaction, the culture has developed customs and behaviors which balance the lack of certain kinds of verbal communication. Specific contexts, dances for instance, are encouraged as venues for opposite sex interaction whether it is for serious or casual encounters. Walking the roads has very clear rules governing its occurrence as well as creating an intra- and intercommunity mechanism for the development of male-female relationships.



Writing and receiving love and friendship poetry serves as a nonvocal expression of intimate emotions whether they are romantically based or not. Personal insights on oneself and on others can be expressed through this custom. Because of the private nature of the content of the poems, and to some degree the exchange of the poems, people reassure themselves that their most important feelings are expressed and only to the "right" people. This cautionary attitude cannot be seen as surprising when one begins to understand the dynamics of small community interaction. For many people socializing is regular and expected, not pleasant or unpleasant, just ordinary.

Most elaborate of all is the code of behavior that is learned, understood and manipulated by both males and females to determine levels of opposite sex interaction. An individual's lack of knowledge of the system reinforces the code user's sense of community and unity. It is a system of communication designed to ease tension that might be created if attempts at verbal articulation of sensitive topics were made. It is an efficient system within this homogeneous society and knowledge of the code helps determine levels of interest.

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## Appendix A

### Newfoundland Courtship/Dating Customs MUNFLA Q86A

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gain information on contemporary courtship in Newfoundland. Courtship and dating play major parts in our everyday lives, especially between the ages of 13-25, but yet there is very little information on how people meet each other and how they interact. This questionnaire focuses on nonverbal communication between two people who are more than casually interested in each other. These nonverbal signals are referred to as a "code of courtship behavior." The questionnaire also includes a section on verbal expressions as they relate to courtship. Because male/female relationships are so much a part of our daily lives it is important that we make every effort to try and better understand just how it is we communicate with one another.

1. Have you ever heard of or used the phrase "up for sale" as it relates to dating behavior? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Here are two examples of its use: "If a girl walks on the right side of her boyfriend it will be commented on that she is "up for sale", meaning she is free to go out with another male. Another example follows: "Sometimes if the girl changed her mind about going out with you she would stay on your right side. This meant you had her up for sale and any fellow could come and take her from you". If you have experienced

this or know of the practice or the phrase please explain its use in your community.

2. Have you ever used the following in order to determine whether or not a male or female was sexually interested in you? "If a boy wants a girl to have intercourse with him he will scratch the palm of her hand, if she does not want to she pulls her hand away, if she does she scratches back or rubs her thumb against his". Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ If yes please explain the circumstances or give any other similar hand signals.

3. Have you ever heard of or done the following for dating purposes? "If a girl stepped on your toe [deliberately] it was a sure sign that she was interested in you. There would be no trouble to get a date with the girl and according to belief she would sleep with you that night". Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Any other comments?

4. Have you ever winked at a person in whom you were interested in order to see whether or not they would wink back, meaning they were interested in you? "...wink at a girl and if she winked back you had a date". Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Additional comments?

5. Are there signals that you feel are male only or female only? Do females ever initiate such signals or is it the males who always do the asking? Please explain.

6. Please describe in detail any other similar kinds of non-verbal signals you have either used in the past or are currently using, which help you determine whether or not a person may be interested in you. Also include items you may have heard of but do not necessarily use yourself.

7. Associated with courtship and dating are expressions and phrases used either by the couple or members of their community. The following are examples of such phrases: "take company", "chattin' him", "talking", "beating around".

All four depote a male/female relationship that is of a private nature. Have you ever heard of or used these or other expressions to refer to personal relations between males and females? Yes ☐ No ☐ Which ones?

8. In a similar way there are words used which imply an intimacy between two people, or express sexual activity: "Gulching" and "grassing" are two such words. Have you ever used these or other words in this manner? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what are they?

9. "On the paths", "on-the roads", "vannicking", "beating the roads" are phrases used to describe social activities which take place along roads and lanes, usually during evening hours. Very often this socializing is the only time young people can walk together in couples or in groups without too much interference from adults. Did you ever use this time as an opportunity to meet a male/female in whom you were interested? Yes ☐ No ☐ Did you have a phrase which you used to describe the walking? Yes ☐ No ☐ If yes, what was it? Can you briefly describe the event?

10. Any other information you feel is relevant to courtship and dating that you would like to write about is welcome and would be appreciated.







