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Craig T. Palmer and Peter R. Sinclair

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Expecting to Leave: Attitudes to Migration Among High School Students on the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland

CRAIG T. PALMER and PETER R. SINCLAIR

THIS STUDY EXAMINES the attitudes and intentions of young people at a moment of restructuring in the history of the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland. Do they expect to leave? Do they want to stay? What distinguishes those who plan to leave from those who expect to remain? Answering these questions will contribute to understanding the social impact of the economic downturn of the 1990s, brought on by the crisis in the cod fishery.

The current population of the northwest coast of Newfoundland is primarily descended from people who relied on cod and other marine resources since the area was settled during the middle of the nineteenth century, somewhat earlier in a few locations. The geographical isolation of this area helped produce distinctive patterns of fishing techniques, land inheritance, and other activities. These started to change with the introduction of new fish harvesting technology, particularly the use of draggers by some of the population during the 1960s and 1970s. Even greater change occurred with the decline in cod harvests in the late 1980s and the subsequent moratorium on cod harvesting since 1993 (Felt and Sinclair 1995; Palmer and Sinclair 1997).

This paper examines how these events have influenced the activities and future plans of high school students in the area as identified in a survey conducted in three high schools in December 1998. We will show that a strikingly high percentage of students planned and even wished to leave the area. However, there was no link between their attitudes and direct family involvement in the cod fishery. Neither were migration plans and participation in various traditional activities correlated. We do report evidence that the intention to migrate may be accompanied by a

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breakdown in the traditional pattern of male-only inheritance of land and houses. Possible implications of these findings for the future of this area are discussed.

RELEVANT MIGRATION RESEARCH

"Migration, especially in the process of regional economic development, urbanization, and industrialization, is both an important cause and effect of social and economic change" (Shaw 1975:1). Research on migration has pointed to a variety of relevant factors of unequal importance in different places and at different times. As a result, generalizations about the determinants and scale of migration are difficult to establish.

Thus we find that there is disagreement about the relationship between economic status of individuals and out-migration. Not surprisingly, many "economists have found consistent relationships between measures of the rural economy and the out-migration rate" (De Jong and Harbison 1981:283); i.e., poor economic conditions in an area usually correlate with high out-migration. However, considerable variability is found when the focus is on individuals rather than regional characteristics. For example, Mueller (1982:115) states that "[m]obility rates are highest among those with low incomes, and the rates generally fall as incomes rise." This is consistent with the finding by Wilson-Figueroa *et al.* (1991:201) that poor Hispanic youth are more likely to migrate than those who are better off. However, this decline of mobility with increased income may be reversed once the highest income levels are reached, when mobility may actually rise (Mueller 1982:115). With respect to education, Haurin and Haurin (1987:162) found that youths "migrating from depressed regions tend to be more highly educated males," while Wenk and Hardesty (1993:77) point out that often "[r]ural youth from economically prosperous families are able to escape by obtaining college degrees and moving to urban areas." Seyfrit (1986:204) also reports that "[s]tudies have shown that out-migrants from rural areas tend to be disproportionately younger, better-educated, and more-skilled people." (See also Bogue 1969; Mueller and Lean 1968).

Shaw (1975:27) concludes that the importance of occupation as a factor in who moves among those living in specific socio-economic contexts "depends heavily on contrasts between the sending and receiving areas." Although many "migration studies show that rural outmigrants do better economically than nonmigrants" (Wenk and Hardesty 1993:76; see also Long and Heltman 1975), improvement in local job opportunities will not necessarily reduce out-migration from rural areas. Thus Seyfrit (1986:199) found "no support for the beneficial retention hypothesis" in her study of high school seniors in rural Utah. Many are pulled by other factors rather than simply pushed out of their area of origin by lack of job opportunities.

Such inconsistent findings are one reason several authors stress the importance of noneconomic factors in explaining the decision to migrate (Wenk and Hardesty 1993:78; House *et al.* 1989; Jobes *et al.* 1992). Thus Seyfrit (1986:207) states that:

> the literature on migration ... indicates that young people in the United States often intend to leave their home communities after graduating from high school, frequently as much in search of new experiences as of employment opportunities ... [and] Murdock et al. (1984) found that for young people, noneconomic rather than economic factors are more powerful predictors of migration.

For the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland, Sinclair and Felt (1993) noted that many young people looked on temporary migration as part of the process of growing up, almost a rite of passage. In addition to a desire for adventure and new experiences, Graves and Graves as quoted by Harbison (1981:234) make the obvious but very important point that migrants are "drawn from those least tied" to the community. Reporting on youth migration from the Scottish Borders region, Jones (1999) refers to the importance of the sense of belonging and community, which helps to explain why some but not all young people leave the local area, independently of common structural pressures and opportunities. That is, those with more sense of local identity tend to stay.

Gender is another factor that has been found to influence migration rates in important, but often different, ways. Most researchers now see gender as an important variable, and some argue for the necessity of separate models to account for male and female migration. Despite the importance of this variable, there seems not to be a simple relationship between gender and the likelihood of migration: "Although it has been generally held that males are more migratory than females (i.e., more exploratory, less confined by traditions, etc.), current research indicates that not only is sex of less selectivity than age, but that it is less uniform over time and place" (Shaw 1975:20). More recently, Haurin and Haurin (1987:166), referring to the United States, found that "in the states that are losing population, there are substantially more male than female out-migrants," and Mueller (1982:113) reports that "... males have higher mobility rates than females." However, Seyfrit (1986:204) claims that rural out-migrants are more likely to be women than men. Evidently, gender is an important variable in migration patterns, but its exact effect varies from case to case. Thus Chan (1981:324) concludes that in any specific case study "[i]t is important to know whether there are sex-role constraints and what economic and noneconomic factors are considered important."

Family size and inheritance patterns have also been identified as factors influencing migration:

> If inheritance is partible (that is, family holdings are divided among all siblings), the presence of a large number of siblings in the household increases the likelihood that

> an individual's share of the family land will be insufficient to support an independent household. Thus family size, or more precisely, number of siblings, may act as a 'push factor'" (Harbison 1981:232-233).

Also, primogeniture encourages migration of children, except for the oldest male child, but partible inheritance reduces probability of migration provided the farm can provide adequate support (Brown and Sanders 1981:154). Hence, a general positive relationship between large families and likelihood to migrate is expected (Harbison 1981:232).

Home ownership also tends to have an inverse relationship with migration. For example, "Speare (1970:449) considers home ownership and life-cycle stage as possible determinants of residential mobility in the United States ... [and] he reports that mobility goes down with increasing age and duration of residence" (Harbison 1981:235). In Bonavista, Newfoundland, home owners in 1994 were more likely than others to plan to remain in the area over the next five years, but once age was taken into account (few people under 25 owned their own home), the effect of home ownership disappeared (Sinclair forthcoming).

Perhaps the variable having the most consistent relationship to migration is age, with young adults nearly always the most likely to migrate. This is one reason why studies of young people just approaching this high migration phase of the life cycle are particularly valuable. However, such studies of *potential* migrants encounter the problem of knowing to what extent the stated intention to migrate corresponds with actual migration. Although the two are obviously not identical, "[i]n recent years, however, it has become increasingly clear, particularly through the research of Fishbein and Ajzen, that 'behavioral intentions' do have significant predictive power for behavioral outcomes" (Seyfrit 1986:201).

Although research on migration intentions is much rarer than on those who have completed a move, several previous studies have focussed on the plans of Newfoundland residents. House *et al.* (1989:122-123), in a study of return migrants to the villages of Anchor Point and Bird Cove (villages on the Great Northern Peninsula), concluded that out-migration had only a slight negative impact on the viability of local communities, mainly because the range of local employment was so limited and most migrants did not have capital assets that might otherwise have been invested locally. They also noted that most men moved for employment whereas women moved for social reasons, mainly to be with male partners (129). In 1990, Hamilton and Seyfrit (1994) compared high school students in two rural areas, one in which there was a major oil industry development and the other dependent on the fishery. About half expected to leave at some time, though a majority of these also planned to return. Essentially, there was no difference between the two areas in the percent who expected to live most of their lives locally or elsewhere in Newfoundland. Being female, hoping for a professional job and to attend university, as well as having weaker local social ties appeared to make

migration more likely (Hamilton and Seyfrit 1994:573). Ommer and Sinclair (1999) investigated the plans of residents of the Bonavista Peninsula, a fishery-dependent region, in 1994. They found that 79.6 percent of those under 25 expected to leave the area within 5 years. In contrast with Hamilton and Seyfrit's results, local social ties and gender failed to distinguish leavers from stayers. Nor was current level of education relevant. Leavers were more likely to stress the economic disadvantages of the area and to express a desire for higher education. Thus, even with reference only to rural Newfoundland in the 1990s, previous research shows inconsistent results. We now investigate the situation among high school students on the Great Northern Peninsula at a time and place when the local economy was especially depressed.

YOUTH MIGRATION, 1951-96

Our study of young people's attitudes towards migration takes place in an area that has experienced substantial out-migration. Leaving has long been a response to limited local opportunities, although many also return (Sinclair and Felt 1993). Evidence of the extent of this migration comes from the age structure of the population at successive census dates since 1951. First, we compare the number of people aged 10-14 in each initial census year with the number aged 20-24 ten years later. In this ten year period some of the 10 to 14 year olds will leave, but others may move into the area. Thus the number who are 20-24 years old will change as a result of both in-migration and out-migration. Because mortality is extremely low between 10 and 24 years of age, it can safely be assumed that almost all observed changes are due to migration.

As indicated in table 1, young people have been leaving the area for decades with the peak since 1951 occurring in the 1950s when 44.2 percent of the 1951 age cohort disappeared. Initially, young women were more likely to leave, perhaps because they had less to hold them than the men, many of whom still expected to participate in the inshore fisheries for cod, salmon and lobster. By the 1960s more men were leaving, when the old salt fish trade and inshore catches of cod were in serious decline. The 1970s and 1980s brought greater prosperity to some fishers and more employment for both women and men in the area's fish plants. Outflow of youth was cut almost in half by the 1970s before rising again almost to 40 percent between 1986 and 1996. In this period, we find no significant difference in migration experiences of young men and young women.

TABLE 1: Percent Change in Size of the 10-14 Age Cohort after 10 Years
Great Northern Peninsula

Period	Males	Females	Total
1951-61	-37.9	-50.5	-44.2
1956-66	-27.8	-33.1	-30.5
1961-71	-43.0	-39.8	-41.4
1966-76	-28.9	-33.5	-31.8
1971-81	-26.3	-21.7	-23.2
1976-86	-28.9	-18.6	-22.7
1981-91	-32.7	-30.2	-30.7
1986-96	-41.8	-38.8	-39.3

Source: Census of Canada, various years

The timing of youth out-migration is best identified by looking at the age group most likely to move in any five year period. These are the people 15-19 in the base year, who will be 20-24 in the next census year. The pattern is similar. We observe that the period 1991-1996 is the second highest on record with a 35.2 percent net decline, still lagging behind, albeit close to the 37.1 percent loss of 1966-71. If the students we survey carry out their intentions, the next few years will see a significant acceleration beyond even this high figure.

One critical difference between the present period of population decline among the young and that of the past is that this area once had a high birth rate with the result that those staying in the area were able to maintain the local population, which actually increased until about 1980. The recent trend of out-migration in conjunction with a much lower birth rate means that the survival of many communities is threatened.

Table 2: Percent Change in Size of the 15-19 Age Cohort after 5 Years
Great Northern Peninsula

Period	Males	Females	Total
1951-56	-13.9	-33.0	-23.3
1956-61	-18.0	-28.0	-22.8
1961-66	-22.1	-23.1	-22.6
1966-71	-38.1	36.0	-37.1
1971-76	-15.0	-18.1	-16.6
1976-81	-20.3	-14.2	-17.4
1981-86	-22.5	-12.2	-17.6
1986-91	-26.9	-25.7	-26.3
1991-96	-36.6	-33.7	-35.2

Source: Census of Canada, various years

METHODOLOGY

A four page questionnaire was provided to the principals of the three high schools in the central part of the west coast of the Great Northern Peninsula (hereafter GNP). Each had agreed to arrange for its distribution in class. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was assured. A letter to parents and guardians explained the study and provided an opportunity to refuse to have their child take part. The survey was then administered by high school staff to the students during December, 1998. A total of 295 (87%) of 340 students enrolled in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades completed questionnaires. The first author worked as an anthropologist in this general area for two years (1990-1992) and for short periods in later years. This qualitative work provides useful background, but the present paper reports only on the quantitative information from the survey.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first consisted of background information on the students (e.g., age, grade, sex), including questions about the occupation of their parents with special concern to identify their participation in various sectors of the fishery. The second section inquired about the student's plans after high school. This part included questions about both desire to stay in the area and their expected ability to do so. We also asked about students' expectations of inheriting land and/or a house from their parents. The third section asked the students to indicate whether or not they had participated in various

activities from self-provisioning (e.g., hunting, fishing, making jam, sealskin boots) to entertainment (e.g., snowmobiling and mummering — the practice of visiting neighbouring houses at Christmas while in disguise). Most but not all of these activities have a long history in the area.

THE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

We expected that more of the high school students we studied would intend to leave the peninsula compared with the census-derived figures of actual out-migration in the past. In an earlier study (1988) Sinclair and Felt interviewed 554 people, 18 years and over in 250 peninsula households. In the previous year, 31.1 percent overall and 69.2 percent of those 18 to 25 years old reported they had considered moving away to another region. It is uncertain whether they actually expected to move or whether they did move later. Conducting our new research during a period with bleaker prospects, we certainly expected a high proportion of these even younger people to report their intention to leave. This prediction was met (Table 3). Indeed, the percentage expecting to leave the GNP seems exceptionally high (83.4 percent of males and 84.4 percent of females). There was clearly little difference by gender, in contrast with results obtained by Hamilton and Seyfrit (1994) but similar to those reported by Ommer and Sinclair (1999) for the Bonavista area in 1994-95.

TABLE 3: Attitude to Living on the Great Northern Peninsula by Gender

Gender	Percent who	
	*wish to stay on the GNP	expect to leave the GNP
Men	57.7	83.4
Women	44.0	84.4
Total	51.0	83.9

*Chisq. p. <.05

We anticipated that many more students would expect to have to leave the area than would want to leave it. This was based on past surveys showing high levels of life satisfaction (Felt *et al.* 1995), and high levels of desire to stay in the area (Palmer and Sinclair 1997). However, our prediction was not met as barely half expressed a desire to remain (table 3). Significantly more young men wanted to

stay than young women. There is no obvious way to account for this difference, but it is consistent with earlier research that showed men more satisfied with life. There is no clear economic advantage to young men over young women. Perhaps the men are especially attracted to one of the key features of the peninsula — opportunity to work with and extract resources from nature. Nevertheless, even 43.3 percent of young men wished to leave. During the period of our survey, Palmer detected a pervasive atmosphere of decay and hopelessness.

Young men, especially the sons of dragger skippers, could be more attracted to staying on the peninsula because of the possibility of participating in fishing. Dragger fishers, especially skippers and owners, have experienced greater economic success over the past several decades than small boat and longliner fishers. Assuming that this general trend is expected to continue as the fishery reopens, and that the sons of skippers could anticipate positions in the dragger fishery, we hypothesized that these young men would exhibit a greater desire to stay in the area and feel better able to do so. Our evidence does not warrant such an interpretation. Indeed, none of the questions concerning parents' occupations, including the participation of fathers in different sectors of the fishery, correlated with either the expectation of leaving or the desire to leave. Similar to the results of Hamilton and Seyfrit (1994) these students were much less likely than their parents to plan to work in the fishing industry in the future. Thus, only 19.9 percent of young men and 2.1 percent of young women expected to work at fishing or fish processing after leaving school, compared with 47.1 percent of fathers and 25.6 percent of mothers who were engaged in these occupations at the time of the survey.

Inheritance patterns could also have an impact on the attitudes of senior students. In general, we might consider that those who expect to inherit land and homes would have more incentive to stay, but the data do not permit a clear-cut conclusion (Table 4). Although there is evidence that expecting to inherit land is related to a desire to live on the peninsula, this does not mean that most inheritors of land and houses think they will be able to remain there. We believe that the despondency about employment is strong enough to overcome the positive effect of inheritance.

Are there any gender differences in inheritance patterns and in their impact on migration plans? Perhaps men are more likely to want to stay because they are more likely to inherit property, although we did not expect that the differences in inheritance practices would be as marked as in the past when it was usual for males to be the sole inheritors of houses and land. This expectation rested on Palmer's observation that the traditional pattern was starting to be questioned in 1990, and that:

TABLE 4: Attitude to Living on the Great Northern Peninsula by Inheritance

Inheritance Expectations	Percent who	
	Wish to live on the GNP*	Expect to remain on GNP (NS)
Land		
Expect all land	68.8	20.8
Expect part of land	49.6	15.0
Expect no land	38.9	13.3
Expect parents' house	56.0	15.2

N=285
*chisq. p. <.01

> [i]f the changes in fishery technology over the past 25 years have led to subtle, yet significant, changes in traditional patterns and attitudes toward land-inheritance and patrilocality, the apparent collapse of the Gulf of St. Lawrence cod stocks will almost certainly have a much more dramatic impact in the next few years.... [T]here is almost certainly going to be a continued out-migration of many sons and daughters from the area. This, combined with the relatively small size of most families, means that if land is to be inherited at all, its inheritance by daughters will have to become more frequent (Palmer 1995:162-163).

What does the evidence show? Young women were less likely to expect to inherit all their parents' land (20.4 percent compared with 32.9 percent) but were *more* likely than young men to expect to inherit part of their parents' land (37.7 percent males, 46.5 percent females). Young women were also *more* likely to expect to inherit their parents' house (47.0 percent males, 57.4 percent females). Overall, there is evidence for change in inheritance patterns in recent years.

TABLE 5: Expectation of Inheritance by Gender

Inheritance Expectations	Gender	
	Males	Females
A: Land*		
Expect all land	32.9	20.4
Expect part of land	37.7	46.5
Expect no land	29.5	33.1
B: Home (NS)		
Expect parents' house	47.0	57.4

Chisq. p. = .0555; N=288

That said, the impact of inheritance was greater for males with respect to migration and attachment to the peninsula. This becomes evident when we look at inheritance and attitudes for the young men and young women separately (Table 6). For both sexes the percent wishing to remain on the peninsula rose with the extent of expected land inheritance but the link was much stronger for men and not quite statistically significant for women. With respect to their estimate of the probability of being able to remain, the relationships did not reach the required significance level, but for men was in the expected direction.

It is plausible that those who are most involved in the activities, many of them practised for generations, that are connected to subsistence work and the local natural environment would want to remain in the area more than others and would be more likely to think they would be able to do so. First, we note that participation in such activities was widespread among these young people and continues to be gender segregated. Table 7 shows the percent of respondents who reported participating in 25 activities, which are presented here in the order in which they were asked. It is evident that gender differences exist in all but three activities, but substantial minorities of young women did 'male' things like jig for cod, hunt moose or snare rabbits, while some young men baked bread or canned jam. The most popular activity for both sexes was berry picking, closely followed, for men, by snaring rabbits.

TABLE 6: Expectation of Land Inheritance and Attitudes to Migration by Gender (%)

Gender	Expected Land Inheritance	Wish to Stay on the GNP*	Expect to be able to Stay on the GNP*
Males	None	44.2	9.3
	Part	55.6	16.4
	All	75.0	22.9
	Total	58.6	16.4
Females	None	34.0	17.0
	Part	44.6	13.8
	All	58.6	17.2
	Total	44.0	15.6

* Chisq. p. for males = .010, for females .110 (NS)
** Chisq. p. for males = .216 (NS), for females .868 (NS)

TABLE 7: "Traditional" Activities
by Gender of Respondent

Activity	Percent Participating	
	Males	Females
Jigging for Cod***	79.5	45.1
Snaring rabbits***	92.1	48.5
Baking bread***	32.5	68.3
Planting potatoes**	70.2	51.4
Picking berries	93.4	97.9
Snowmobiling	51.9	48.1
Dog sledding*	11.3	4.2
Work on cod dragger***	17.2	1.4
Work on shrimp dragger***	16.6	0.7
Work on scallop boat***	17.9	3.5
Gillnetting for cod***	25.2	3.5
Fishing with cod trap***	26.5	6.3
Catching lobster***	60.9	26.1
Building lobster traps ***	54.3	21.8
Work in fish plant***	22.5	4.9
Canning jam**	22.5	38.0
Hunting moose***	80.1	33.1
Sawmill***	55.6	7.0
Knitting***	5.3	45.8
Sealing***	31.8	1.4
Can or freeze seal meat**	17.2	6.3
Skinning seal***	20.5	2.8
Making seal skin boots	4.6	1.4
Help build house***	76.8	21.1
Mummering**	76.8	48.5

** Chisq. p. <.01
*** Chisq. p. <.001

To evaluate the connection of these practices with migration plans, we constructed a simple index based on the sum of the scores on each of the 25 activities, where 1 indicates participation and 0 no participation. A score of 1 to 6 we defined as low, 7 to 10 as medium, and over 10 as high. As indicated in table 8, there was no connection with migration plans. Once more, the economic push and perhaps the attraction of more urban settings were more powerful than other local sources of attachment. Separate examination of each item in the index leaves our conclusion unchanged because only 1 of 86 possible connections between the activities, sex and migration plans was statistically significant. (Women who plant potatoes were more likely to feel able to remain on the peninsula.)

TABLE 8: Index of Participation in "Traditional" Activities by Gender

Gender	Index of Participation in Traditional Activities	Wish to Stay on the GNP	No.	Expect to be able to Stay on the GNP	No.
Males	Low	45.5	22	17.4	23
	Medium	59.6	47	16.7	48
	High	60.0	80	16.3	80
	Total	57.7	149	16.6	151
Females	Low	41.4	70	11.4	70
	Medium	48.1	54	18.5	54
	High	41.2	17	23.5	17
	Total	44.0	141	15.6	141

No relationship is statistically significant.

CONCLUSION

If the actual future behaviour of the high school students in this study corresponds with their stated desires and expectations, northwest Newfoundland will experience an unprecedented level of out-migration, even for this area, which has had a history of high migration rates. We recognize that out-migration is not a new characteristic, but its extent may now threaten social viability in some areas. Of course, we also

agree that those wishing to pursue most forms of post-secondary education would necessarily have to leave, for some time at least.

Young women may be as likely as young men to migrate, and about as likely to inherit land and a house if they stay, thus ending the previous pattern of male-only inheritance of land and houses. Family histories of participation in particular aspects of the cod fishery will also have little to do with which individuals migrate. Nor will the extent of participation in traditional activities help predict who will leave. Attempts to lessen this migration, or to at least reduce its consequences for the area, will be further complicated by the large number of young people who not only expect to have to leave the area, but even desire to do so.

Unfortunately for the vitality of this area, if the findings of Seyfrit (1986) and Hamilton and Seyfrit (1994) can be generalized, the development of a more prosperous, natural resource-based economy will not have a major impact on youth out-migration. This will only be stemmed by a much wider range of occupational choice and cultural facilities. This is not to dismiss efforts to build sensibly on local resources, without which hardly anyone would be able to remain. Such development, along with tourism, also provides the possibility of continuing a long established pattern of leaving and returning a few years later (Sinclair and Felt 1993). As out-migration proceeds, and assuming the birth rate remains low, declining population will challenge the capacity of the province to provide services to those who remain, especially education for the young and adequate health care for the elderly. At this time, the people of the Great Northern Peninsula face a challenge as great as any in their history.

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