Gay Steel Mill:

Queer Oral Histories of Deindustrializing Cape Breton

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Abstract

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Liam Devitt

Queer history in Canada has often centred around metropolitan areas, like Toronto and Montreal, usually foregrounding social movements. This means that queer histories of the periphery are often overlooked, and that histories of metropole are taken as representative of the national context. In this thesis, I examine queer oral histories of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Through these oral histories I aim to complicate dominant narratives in both queer history and histories of deindustrialization in Canada. Cape Breton is a former steel and coal region in Nova Scotia that underwent a comparatively slow, state-managed deindustrialization in the latter half of the 20th century. Today, like in deindustrialized areas across the world, the "structure of feeling" of industrial life remains, despite plant and mine closure. Often, histories of deindustrialization center around a mythologized white male (and indubitably heterosexual) breadwinner, centering not just workers, but the specific function that masculine industrial labour played in the social reproduction of the Fordist accord in the household. By taking up the life stories of queer people, we can critically examine this centring of the nuclear family in deindustrialization studies. In the first chapter, I offer a theoretical and historiographical intervention arguing for a queer investigation of deindustrialization. In the second chapter, I apply this line of thinking to oral histories of Cape Breton queers, arguing that these narrators' desires for queer history and queer future are ultimately filtered through the prism of deindustrialization's half-life.

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Introduction

In 1991, the AIDS Coalition of Cape Breton was founded.[1] Cape Breton Island, a small industrial region, was a far cry from the perceived hotspots of the AIDS epidemic, metropoles like Toronto, Montreal, or New York. It did not have the cosmopolitan queer nightlife of these cities, and little activism that could be called "gay liberation" manifested in any visible way. In short, Cape Breton is not the place a historian would ordinarily look if they wanted to say interesting things about the AIDS crisis, or even queer life in general. Yet, there are histories here, and histories that I contend are not only ones to be told but are ones that can reshape our understandings of queerness in (post)industrial communities, and in 'regional' settings more broadly.

Peter Steele, a Caper longtime active in the LGBT community on the Island, recounted to me the story of the AIDS Coalition's foundation:

> [When I came back to Cape Breton from Halifax], this was before any sort of gay community here. I became a founding member of the AIDS Coalition of Cape Breton. And through that, I came to know a lot of guys who lived elsewhere, who left here after high school, and contracted HIV wherever they lived, and when it developed to AIDS, they moved back here. Some moved back to be with their families, some moved back to be taken care of by their families, and a lot of them moved back here because it was cheaper to live here than where they lived. And it was at a time where you were paying for medication for yourself. So, it was more financially feasible for them to be living here, even if they weren't living with their family. We had members on the board that had AIDS and have since passed away.[2]

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[1] "Our History," accessed December 17 2022, https://www.allycentreofcapebreton.com/about/background-and-history.

[2] A note on terminology: Throughout this thesis I use many different words to describe the type of sexual and gender diverse people whose histories I am interested in, whether it is gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, queer, two-spirit, or one of the acronyms that bind these and other identities together. I refrain from using one specific term in all cases to describe these people, for certain letters in the acronym (often the T, B, Q and 2S), are excluded or otherwise not part of L or G communities. Further, due to its status as a reclaimed slur, many of the people I spoke to for this project have a complicated relationship to the word 'queer.' Given the word's history, it is sometimes unwise apply it to figures in the past that may not have used the word to describe themselves. Further, as Judith Butler notes, queer as a word must never be take to "fully describe" those who might fall under its umbrella—and as a category it must be continued to be

In essence, Cape Breton was confronted with people coming home to die—coming home to unwelcoming families, a medical system particularly ill-equipped to treat them, and a place that for one reason or another, these people had willingly left. Was it to escape homophobia, channelled through schools or churches? Was it to get a safe job free from discrimination—was it to simply *get* a job? And then, when they come back, what's there for them?

This anecdote encapsulates many of the tensions and questions at the heart of this thesis. A closeted community in a region far from the fabled gay metropole is confronted with a disease that makes invisibility more and more untenable. The journey between home and Away, a familiar movement for many Maritimers, queer or not, is complicated by the morbidity of the situation.[3] This complication might make the current trend of Capers coming back from "Away" to retire on the island sound a bit too morbid, or perhaps sinister, but this is not my intention. My point in bringing up this anecdote here is twofold: to set the scene of what any sort of organized queer community might look like in 1980s Cape Breton; and to illustrate how queer community, organizing and life is not divorced from, but rather enmeshed in, the overarching social forces that have shaped 20th century Cape Breton. To be specific, this would be industrialization, migration and deindustrialization.

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questioned. As a rule, I use whatever words that someone uses to identify themselves as, and I use the most accurate and appropriate words to describe a community, that fits with the reality of the community and the terminology used in the period. This leads to something a bit messier and less simple, but this is the best way to encapsulate the tensions of identity and community with respect. Peter Steele, interview with the author, November 27 2022. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 233.

[3] For more on oral histories of migration in Atlantic Canada, see Gary Burrill, *Away: Maritimers in Massachusetts, Ontario, and Alberta: An Oral History of Leaving Home* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

In this thesis, I argue that the formation of queer community in Cape Breton is inseparable from the interlocking crises of deindustrialization and the AIDS Crisis. From this, the oral histories I collected view queer community through the prism of deindustrialization's half-life. These stories destabilize fixed notions of industrial masculinity and show how deindustrialization's "half-life" stretches into the margins of society. To do this, I situate oral history interviews of 2SLGBTQ+ Cape Bretoners in the history of Cape Breton's industrial decline, as well as the broader literature encompassing deindustrialization and queer lives. These life stories complicate standard narratives about the post-war social democratic compromise, laying bare its inequities and inaccessibility, while showing how its residual structures of feeling still hold importance. Indeed, as John D'Emilio argues, industrial capitalism and urbanization are responsible for the emergence of what we might consider a 'contemporary' 'gay' community.[4] Then why have scholars not explicitly examined how the decline of industrial capitalism has shaped queer communities? Histories of deindustrialization attempt to make sense of the profound change that the upending of this compromise—or the Fordist accord, to explicitly tie this arrangement to industrial production—had on communities, with a strong focus on the sense of loss that deindustrialization caused. Loss of community, of livelihood, and of identity. Often, those that are mourned in this way, are the industrial workers themselves. Perhaps, scholars might remember their wives and children—for these workers, when spoken of as a collective are almost always coded as men. In this thesis, I ask who gets to be mourned, and who has the dubious distinction of being included in deindustrialization's 'half-life'?[5]

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[4] I examine D'Emilio's thesis here in much greater detail in Chapter 1. John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (London/New York: Routledge, 1993).
[5] Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Working-Class Writing about Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

Cape Breton, community, crisis and closets

Cape Breton has a storied industrial past. The north side of the island, centered around the city of Sydney, was once a major coal and steel producing region within Canada. The southern side of the island was also a coal region, but the industrial integration and prominence earned the north side of the island the moniker of Industrial Cape Breton.[6]

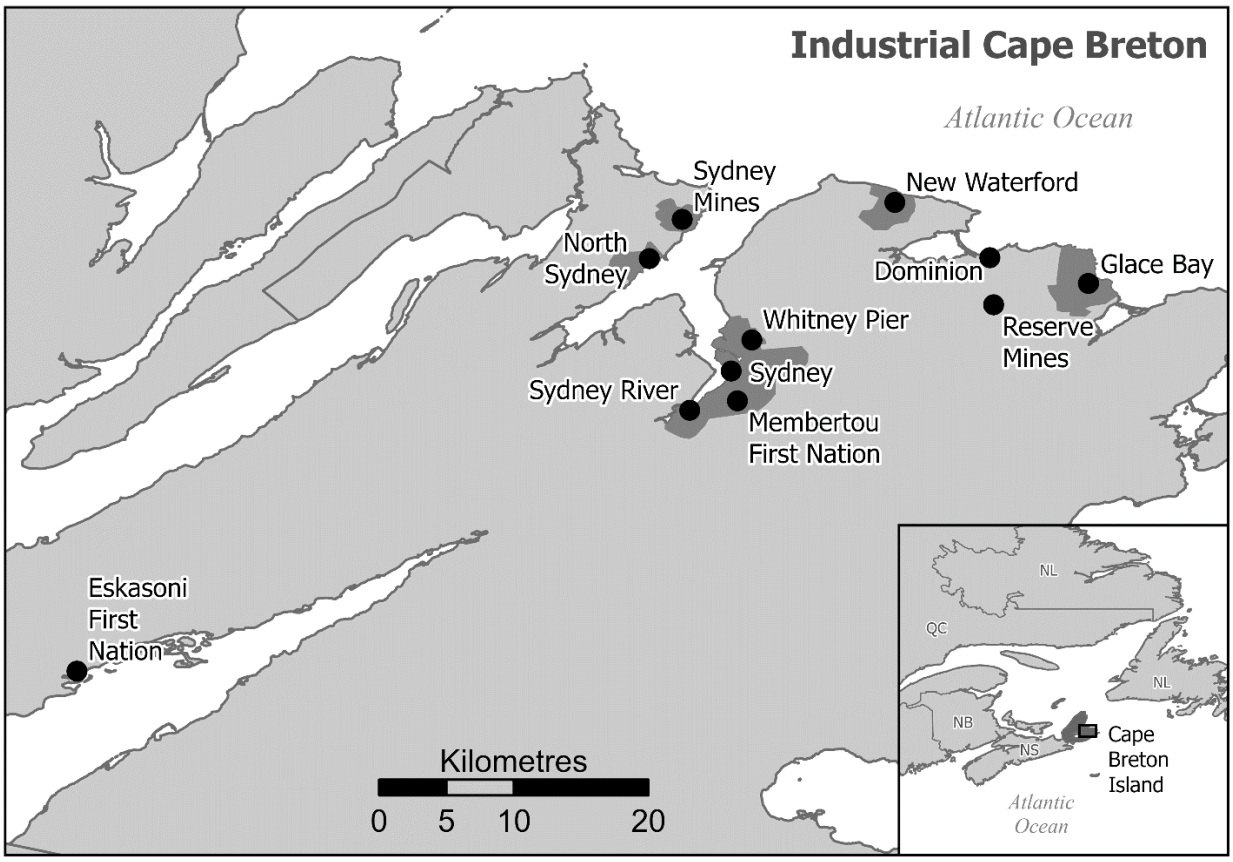

Figure 1: Map of Industrial Cape Breton and environs. Coalfields shaded in grey. Courtesy of William Gillies.

Following the end of the Second World War and the establishment of the postwar economic order, both steel and coal began to falter. Both industries, vertically integrated under the Dominion Steel

[6] For a history of Cape Breton coal from the late 19th century to the 1930s, with a focus on Dosco's predecessor, the British Empire Steel Corporation (Besco), and the story of its rise, fall and broader relationship to industrial development in the rest of Canada, see David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation," *Acadiensis* 7, no. 1 (1977), http://www.jstor.org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/stable/30302516.

and Coal Corporation (Dosco), were shaken by the shift in industrial planning post-war that put more emphasis on industrial integration with the United States. Dosco executives, perhaps seeing which way the wind was blowing, ceased modernization efforts and capital investment in the steel industry. As Lachlan MacKinnon argues in *Closing Sysco,* a history of the decline of the steel industry in Sydney, this was "part of a purposeful corporate strategy of deindustrialization and disinvestment based on planned obsolescence."[7] With the industrially integrated steel industry floundering, the accompanying coal industry floundered too. After protest from the people of Cape Breton, culminating in 1967's Parade of Concern, federal and provincial governments stepped in, nationalizing the coal and steel components of Dosco, respectively, into the Cape Breton Development Corporation (Devco) and the Sydney Steel Corporation (Sysco). While now two separate entities, the tenet of vertical integration was still maintained—in so far as both new Crown corporations' mandates were to manage the inevitable deindustrialization of both industries. By the latter decades of the 20th century, both industries had downsized and declined, with the demolition of the Sysco plant beginning in July 2001.[8] Despite the apparent finality of industrial closure, the "half-life" of deindustrialization lingers—whether in the environment, like the Sydney Tar Ponds or former Coke Oven site, or in the moral economy of the region. It is in this so-called "postindustrial" moment that I come to Cape Breton, and it is in this moment that the narrators of the oral histories I collected are reflecting back on the industrial past.[9]

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[7] Lachlan MacKinnon, *Closing Sysco: Industrial Decline in Atlantic Canada's Steel City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 22.
[8] MacKinnon, *Closing Sysco*, 180.
[9] For a complication of the finality of "postindustrial" and how the industrial lingers, see Cathy Stanton, "Keeping "the Industrial": New Solidarities in Postindustrial Places," in *The Deindustrialized World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, ed. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017). For discussion of working-class environmentalism with the Tar Ponds and Coke Ovens sites, see chapters 5 and 6 of MacKinnon, *Closing Sysco*. For the initial definition of moral economy, see E.P. Thompson,

Cape Breton, in part because of its industrial past, in part due to its relative geographic isolation, and in part because of its cultural identity focused on the trappings of Scottish settlers, has a strong sense of regionalism. Ian McKay, in *Quest of the Folk,* examines how this Celtic folk identity with an emphasis on nature and pastoralism, was reconstructed by tourism boosters and the culture industry to obscure Nova Scotia's industrial past.[10] In Cape Breton, this tension between folk identity and the industrial is visible, in both past and present. Take for example the Devco-produced 1977 short film *Song of the Seasons,* depicting Devco's efforts to further Celtify the islands by importing Scottish sheep—all accompanied by beautiful late 1970s synthesizers.[11] In Cape Breton, even the coal company was invested in this, to use McKay's language, "antimodernist" folk revivalism. I would be remiss to mention that this specific identity is a settler one and is bound in colonization—whether by the Celtifying of landscape in the folk-agrarian vein, or the industrial vein, which is bound up in what Steven High calls "mill colonialism."[12] The idea of who Cape Breton is and is for is inextricable from colonization, and every effort to examine Industrial Cape Breton must not only be cognizant of that fact, but also attempt to weave that understanding into their analysis. Indeed, as Fred Burrill argues, settler colonialism is naturalized in Canadian labour history, and a more explicit examination of how working-class and labour

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"The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present*, no. 50 (1971), http://www.jstor.org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/stable/650244.

[10] Ian McKay, *Quest of the Folk : Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 4.

[11] Grant Crabtree, "Song of the Seasons," (Canada: Cape Breton Development Corporation, 1977).

[12] For how de/industrialization is embedded in settler colonialism, see Steven High, "Deindustrialization on the Industrial Frontier: The Rise and Fall of Mill Colonialism in Northern Ontario," in *The Deindustrialized World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, ed. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).

histories are tied up in the machinations of the Canadian settler colonial project is needed.[13] In short, Cape Breton's identity is unique, and inextricably tied to industrial development, folk-agrarianism and settler colonial nation-building.

What then, of the queer community? On this island characterized by a certain type of settler identity and an industrial moral economy, how do queer and trans people come together? These questions are central to this thesis and are ones that I discuss at length in Chapter 2. With Cape Breton, as elsewhere, it is unwise to think of a singular queer or LGBT community—though it may be tempting. The artificial construction of a community by insisting there is one where there might be none is something to avoid. Who is in community with whom? Who sees themselves relating to another? This is not a problem specific to Cape Breton, or even queer and trans people. To call this thesis a 'community history' without caveat is something that I am uneasy with. For a large portion of the timeframe that I examine in this thesis, a community did not exist, or at least was incredibly fractured.

As I discuss in Chapter 2, an official community that could stake claim to being *the* gay and lesbian community of the island would only emerge in the late 1990s. Before then, secrecy was the name of the game. The 'closeted' nature of queer people on Cape Breton, combined with the island's already small population, are almost certainly the main factors as to why their histories have not been preserved in the formal archive or written about by historians. Unfortunately, this is a reality that cuts across doing queer histories outside of major cities. The classic metaphor of 'the

[13] Certainly, colonialism is not the categorical focus of my project, and I interview almost only white settlers, but considering that Cape Breton is not only unceded Mi'kmaq land, and that industrialization on this island is part and parcel of the dispossession of Mi'kmaq land, this intervention is important. Fred Burrill, "The Settler Order Framework: Rethinking Canadian Working-Class History," *Labour / Le Travail* 83 (2019).

closet,' though flawed and problematic in how it imposes a finality to the act of coming out, and creating a strict binary between 'in' and 'out of the closet' when in fact certain expressions of queerness may be seen as permissible despite being 'in' the closet depending on social context, still holds relevance in Cape Breton, especially in the immediate postwar era to the emergence of an 'official' lesbian and gay community in the 1990s. Thinking back to Peter's story of the AIDS Coalition, we can see how crisis, whether we speak of deindustrialization, migration or AIDS, forced gays, lesbians, queer and trans people to come together to address them, and make community themselves. With that, this thesis asks how have these crises shaped how 2SLGBTQ+ people in Cape Breton articulate their sexual, gender and class identities?

The post-war compromise—for whom?

Scholarship on deindustrialization and labour history in the postwar period can be interpreted as a reflection on the failures of the postwar social democratic compromise. By this, I am referring to the Fordist accord centered around a robust welfare state, relative labour peace, full employment, and industrial production in so-called Western liberal capitalist democracies.[14] Looking back upon this period in our current moment of austerity, neoliberalism, and precarious work, some of us might feel a certain nostalgia for a time in which getting a stable job was a guarantee, rather than a gamble—this is not something I am immune to. However, as Jefferson Cowie argues in the US context, this compromise was indeed an exception to the longer history of capitalism. Cowie writes that the enactment of this compromise was "less the linear triumph of the welfare state than the product of very specific, and short- lived, historical circumstances,"

[14] For a brief introduction to the postwar era in Canada, see Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherdale, "Introduction," in *Creating Postwar Canada: Community, Diversity, and Dissent, 1945-75*, ed. Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherdale (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

specifically the "trauma" of the Great Depression and the Second World War.[15] Cowie's argument in properly historizing this interregnum between the Gilded Age and the age of neoliberalism is particularly relevant to this undertaking as it denaturalizes the industrial past as something certain. Instead, the industrial past and the cultural superstructure that worked within and through it, become contingent. Contingent in the economic sense in that the specific economic conditions to sustain the welfare state and Fordist accord only existed for a short period of time, and indeed culturally contingent in how gender, race, and settler colonialism served as mediating factors. This contingency can be summed up in a simple question: who was the post-war compromise for?

The horizon of much scholarship on deindustrialization is a social democratic one, as Fred Burrill has pointed out.[16] When scholars focus so much on the damage that the rupture of the welfare state and industrial closure has done to communities, there is a natural impulse to look at what happened before with nostalgia, or at least a feeling that there could have been a future in which this loss might not have occurred. Again, this is something I sympathise with deeply, but I think always looping back to what this compromise achieved and the moral economy it created may paper over what it did not achieve and who was excluded from that moral economy. Getting the fabled stable union job and the accessing a cradle-to-grave welfare state was mediated by a variety of factors, not the least of which includes gender, sexuality, race, ability, and proximity to the heterosexual nuclear family, which served as a conduit for how these benefits were distributed.[17] As political scientist Leah Vosko argues, the standardized labour relation of the post

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[15] Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception: The New Deal and the Limits of American Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 9.
[16] Fred Burrill, "Divisions of Labour, Uneven Development, and Lumpenization: Bringing Marxist Political Economy Back into the Study of Deindustrialization" (Transnationalizing Deindustrialization Studies, Bochum, Germany, August 18 2022).
[17] For an examination of family and the welfare state in the neoliberal milieu, see Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York:

war compromise was contingent on other, precarious labour—labour that was often gendered and racialized.[18] By taking the lens of deindustrialization studies to those who fell at the margins of the postwar compromise, rather than at its centre, we might see a different story unfold—and perhaps we might reach for different, perhaps more radical solutions. Before such a project is embarked upon, I will situate this thesis in historiography, and elaborate on some of the theoretical scaffolding necessary for this undertaking.

Queer history at work

I situate this thesis within the literature of queer labour history.[19] While this thesis does not explicitly examine trade unionism, which some schools of labour history implicitly take to by synonymous with the idea if labour itself—this thesis is deeply concerned with how working-class experience of deindustrialization is complicated and deepened by an examination of queerness.[20] While queerness and labour are closer together than further apart than it may seem, recent works like Anne Balay's *Steel Closets,* Phil Tiemeyer's *Plane Queer* and Miriam Frank's *Out in the*

Zone Books, 2019). For family, women and labour in postwar Canada, see Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

[18] Leah Vosko, *Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of a Precarious Employment Relationship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 21-23.

[19] For a survey of this emerging subfield, see Sara R. Smith, "Queers are Workers, Workers are Queer, Workers' Rights are Hot! The Emerging Field of Queer Labor History," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 89 (2016), http://www.jstor.org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/stable/43956686.

[20] This isn't for lack of trying—trade union records in Cape Breton from this era are remarkably (or unremarkably, depending on perspective) void of any discussion or mention of 2SLGBTQ issues or lives. While my narrators discuss their experiences with trade unionism in Chapter 1, there is not enough there to make this thesis more categorically 'about' unions—as much as I would desire such a history to be written, or to even exist in the archive.

Union work to tie queerness and labour together, expanding on the work of Allan Bérubé's theorization of "queer work."[21]

Queer historian Allan Bérubé, outlined a theory of "queer work" in his history of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union. To Bérubé, queer work is work that is "homosexualized" in the same way that work might be gendered or racialized.[22] In the case of Bérubé's scholarship, service jobs on racially segregated American passenger ships in the 1930s is an example of this. In the case of some passenger ships white gay men occupied jobs ordinarily done by racialized people or women because of the segregation of the time. In this environment, white gay men not only found community with each other, but in struggle for justice in the workplace, indeed banding together with marine workers of colour in their union against segregation.[23] Michelle O'Brien revisits Bérubé's theorization in her essay "Trans Work: Employment Trajectories, Labour Discipline and Labour Freedom," arguing that what makes queer work queer is less about sexual desire, and more about gender expression.[24] Indeed, Bérubé's gay stewards were doing traditionally feminized labour like cooking and cleaning, as for them it was more permissible.[25] From this, O'Brien argues that if we understand how gender and sexuality intersect in the

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[21] Anne Balay, *Steel closets: voices of gay, lesbian, and transgender steelworkers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Miriam Frank, *Out in the union: a labor history of queer America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2014); Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

[22] Allan Bérubé, ""Queer Work" and Labor History," in *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community and Labor History*, ed. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011), 261.

[23] Bérubé, ""Queer Work" and Labor History," 268.

[24] Michelle O'Brien, "Trans Work: Employment Trajectories, Labour Discipline and Labour Freedom," in *Transgender Marxism*, ed. Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 49.

[25] For a discussion of how gender, sex, and sexuality interact in the discursive and material, see the preface to Butler, *Bodies that Matter*.

workplace in Bérubé's theorization, the lives of transgender workers can also be incorporated into this analysis. In short, the way that gender expectations and expectations of heterosexuality intersect and are discursively elided can tell us how queer and trans people are regulated into and away from certain types of labour, and when they can and cannot find community, space, and liberation within these types of work. To do this, I contend that labour historians must engage with queer and feminist theorists and historians, something that until recently, many Canadian labour historians have been reluctant to do.

In the Canadian labour and working-class historiography of the 1990s, the growing incorporation of postmodernist theory, (particularly poststructuralist feminism) was seen by some critics like Bryan Palmer as a perceived threat to the primacy of class, and a certain interpretation of Marxist analysis.[26] Women's and labour historian Joan Sangster decried the intervention of Joan Scott's program of "gender history" as something that only pretends to move to a "higher plane of analysis," yet consistently gets away from the lives of actual women.[27] The polemics of Palmer and Sangster were of course met with a rebuke from labour and working-class historians more open to a conversation with this type of theory.[28] While certainly, I agree with Palmer and Sangster in so far as certain types of poststructuralist analysis can serve to obscure or elide the material conditions of a particular historical moment in favour of a strong focus on language. Further, queer

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[26] Bryan D. Palmer, "Critical Theory, Historical Materialism, and the Ostensible End of Marxism: The Poverty of Theory Revisited," *International Review of Social History* 38, no. 2 (1993), http://www.jstor.org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/stable/44582244.

[27] Joan Sangster, "Beyond Dichotomies: Re-assessing Gender History and Women's History in Canada," *Left History* 3, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1995): 111; Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[28] Karen Dubinsky and Lynne Marks, "Beyond Purity: A Response to Joan Sangster," *Left History* 4, no. 1 (1996); Franca Iacovetta and Linda Kealey, "Women's History, Gender History and Debating Dichotomies," *Left History* 4 (1996).

theory, as Matt Brim shows in *Poor Queer Studies,* was and often continues to be a product of elite US universities—often divorced from the lives of working-class queers, in and out of the academy.[29] But as Nan Enstad argues, polemics that argue strongly in favour to a return or retrenchment of a certain type of historical materialism over some type of effete culturalism, might have the side effect of valuing a certain type of masculinist history over others.[30] To use Enstad's metaphor: "materialist mud" in boots rather than French heels.

My aim in invoking this debate is not to relitigate the historiographical debates of 1990s Canadian labour history—that would be a masochistic endeavour serving no-one—but rather to situate my intervention within a historiography that has been reticent to incorporate poststructuralist feminism, which is of course an important precursor to contemporary queer theory. This thesis is deeply committed to recovering and making sense of queer working-class lives. Certainly, queer theory, as much as it might be imagined as a discrete intellectual formation with ideological coherence, is not the only way to think about the lives of queer workers—nor should it be. As such, a theorization of queer and trans work that not only engages with key Marxist theorizations of labour and class, but also with queer and feminist understandings of labour and class is needed, and that begins with talking about one of the most nebulous but most important ideas: working-class experience.

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[29] For discussion of the elitism of queer theory in its Ivy League-form, see especially chapter 2 of Matt Brim, *Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020). https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478009146.

[30] Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 1-2.

Starting with EP Thompson's germinal *The Making of the English Working Class,* labour and working-class histories have attempted to retrieve working class experience.[31] Experience, in the Thompsonian theorization, is the means in which class consciousness is formed.[32] This is contrary to a more Stalinist and workerist understanding that workers become working class simply because their class position will ultimately lead them to the "correct" understanding of class conciousness. Thompson contends that workers, through their own agency, and what they feel, think and reflect upon, create their own understanding of class. This is not divorced from a Marxian understanding of the material conditions of the working class, but simply an elaboration of it.

Thompson's history of class formation has been rightly critiqued by gender historians like Carolyn Steedman and Joan Scott, for not examining the role of women.[33] In *The Making,* class formation and its corollary— "experience," are things that male workers do and have, but not women. As Steedman argues, the hegemony of Thompson's interpretation of working-class formation in England left gender and women's history to be something that only happened to, with and on middle-class women.[34] Of course, many historians since have written works on the role of gender in working-class formation, not the least of which is Steedman's own *Landscape for A Good Woman.*[35] Then where might Thompson and his legacy fit into the life stories of queer Cape

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[31] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).
[32] To see a good analysis and reflection on Thompson's theory of class formation presented in simple terms, see William H. Sewell, "How Classes are Made: Critical Reflections on E. P. Thompson's Theory of Working-class Formation," in *E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Harvey J. Kaye and Keith McClelland (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 52-53.
[33] Carolyn Steedman, "The Price of Experience: Women and the Making of the English Working Class," *Radical History Review* 1994, no. 59 (1994), https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1994-59-108, https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1994-59-108; Scott, "Women in *The Making of the English Working Class*."
[34] Steedman, "The Price of Experience: Women and the Making of the English Working Class," 112-14.
[35] Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

Bretoners? As Butler argues in *Bodies that Matter,* "although heterosexuality operates in part through the stabilization of gender norms, gender designates a dense site of significations that contain and exceed the heterosexual matrix. Although forms of sexuality do not unilaterally determine gender, a non-causal and non-reductive connection between sexuality and gender is nevertheless crucial to maintain."[36] Put simply, what Butler means is this: gender and sexuality are linked closely but are not mapped 1:1. Thus, the practices and performances we enact and cite, form both sexuality and gender. So, if we take gender to be crucial in histories of class formation, we must necessarily ask how sexuality—how queerness—shapes class formation and working-class experience.

How then, do historians get at 'experience'—with it being such a nebulous category? Further, how might historians get at the intersection of class formation and the formation of queer subjectivity? It is through my oral history work that I attempt to recover queer histories of labour and class identity in Cape Breton. This focus on oral history allows me to get at histories of labour and queerness without an institutional perspective or limiting my examination of working-class experience to certain parts of the labour movement. After all, many of the industrial workplaces so deeply tied to the labour movement like coal and steel, might not have been safe, enjoyable, or accessible places for all queers. To think more about experience in the case of Cape Breton, we must also think about the geographical circumstances that shape how queers interact—in and out of cities.

Queer history in "the region"

Queer history has almost always focused on cities, and for some good reasons. As British historian Matt Houlbrook writes, "the city and sexuality appear culturally and conceptually

[36] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 182.

inseparable."[37] Cities are centres of queer intellectual, cultural, political and sexual life. Historians like George Chauncey and his work *Gay New York,* or Nan Alamilla Boyd's *Wide-Open Town,* or Matt Houlbrook's *Queer London,* in narrowing in on these great metropoles, have produced incredibly significant works of queer historical recovery, specifically as it relates to the formation of the contemporary gay male (imagined) community.[38] Canadian queer, lesbian and gay history has often focused on the metropole as well, specifically the city of Toronto. Until the release of Valerie Korinek's *Prairie Fairies* in 2018, Canadian queer historians had rarely ventured outside of cities like Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver.[39] Korinek broke with this pattern, examining the Canadian Prairies, looking at (comparatively) smaller cities like Winnipeg and Edmonton and their rural environs. Her intervention demonstrated that not only is there fertile historical terrain on the Prairies, but that an examination of the periphery can tell us new, interesting, and significant things about queer life.

Nevertheless, a metropole-focused approach is the dominant geographical frame of queer history, especially in Canada. The significance of the metropole and of urbanization is underscored by John D'Emilio in "Capitalism and Gay Identity," and as I mentioned earlier, D'Emilio's theorization forms a great deal of the theoretical foundation of this thesis.[40] But cities are not the only place queer people are from or must go to. The classic narrative of leaving the homophobic—

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[37] Matt Houlbrook, "Cities," in *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality*, ed. Matt houlbrook and H.G. Cocks (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 133.
[38] George Chauncey, *Gay New York: gender, urban culture, and the makings of the gay male world, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: perils and pleasures in the sexual metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
[39] Valerie J. Korinek, *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930-1985* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).
[40] D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity."

possibly deindustrialized—small town, exemplified in the 2000 film *Billy Elliot* or the Bronski Beat song "Smalltown Boy", to go to the welcoming—or at least less violent metropole is classic for a reason. It's a life that many have lived. However, there are risks in confining queer life, possibility and flourishing to the city, and consigning areas deemed rural or regional to always already be a place that must be left.

J. Jack Halberstam coins the term "metronormativity": the idea that queer and trans life mainly exists—or should exist in urban environments. Halberstam criticizes this idea strongly and argues that rural spaces offer possibility for queer and trans life—and that urban queers often disregard this. In their examination of the urban queer responses to the 1993 murder of young trans man Brandon Teena, they write:

> Obviously, the small town can accommodate some performances even as it is a dangerous place for others—for example, an exhibition of normative masculinity in a transgender man may go unnoticed while an overt and public demonstration of nonnormative gendering may be severely and frequently punished. Urban responses to Brandon's decisions also misunderstand completely the appeal of the small town to certain subjects. […] the rural queer may be attracted to the small town for precisely those reasons that make it seem uninhabitable to the urban queer.[41]

Of course, Teena's tragic murder lays bare why urban queers might consign the rural to be a place that is only of violence. But as Halberstam argues, this interpretation ignores why Teena decided to stay and live in rural Nebraska. To put it simply—people should not have to leave their homes to have a fulfilling life. I explore the tensions of queer migration in Cape Breton in Chapter 2, through the oral histories I collected.

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[41] I speak at greater length on the pitfalls of metronormativity in Chapter 2 of this thesis. J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 43.

Early in this project, I spoke with a man working in queer community history in mainland Nova Scotia. He asked me if I was planning on working with any queer and trans youth from Cape Breton—to teach them their history. I said I was open to the idea and wanted to make sure this research gave back to the community. He urged me to work with youth, saying something to the effect of: "they have to know that they can leave—that there's a better life elsewhere." At the time, I went along with it—said something like "yes, that's so important." To be clear, I have nothing against this man, or even this sentiment. Personally, I moved from a small city in southern Alberta to Montreal—I've done metronormativity, and for me, it worked out great! But I reckon that queer and trans teens in Cape Breton already know that they can leave. People leaving, whether for better jobs out west, or queers leaving for the fabled urban community, is already part of Cape Breton's story—I don't need to tell them that, they might have already lived it. If anything needs to be said to young queers in Cape Breton, its that queer life can, and indeed should exist where they are.

Methodology and oral histories

There is an expected dearth of archival sources on this topic for a variety of reasons, but mainly because I'm examining a small, secretive, and aging community, nested in another small and aging community. This thesis, like others before it that examine the lives of working-class people and/or queer people, makes use of oral history interviews. With these interviews, I am able to get at the emotional and affective texture of 2SLGBTQ+ life in Cape Breton. As famed oral historian Alessandro Portelli argues, the orality of oral histories—the fact they are communicated with speech that has tone, intonation, accompanying body language and rhythm—are key to their interpretation.[42] These more subjective values are often papered over in transcription, flattening

[42] Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Alistair Thomson Robert Perks (London: Routledge, 2015), 49-51.

things into a 'readable' text, complete with punctuation and square brackets, forcing oral speech into something that might more resemble written language. Further, oral histories are conveyed in terms of narrative—with events and experience being transformed into a story to be told.[43] With this, Portelli notes that oral histories tell us much less about what an event actually was, than what it means to the narrator.[44] Thus, using oral histories as a fact-finding tool might not only be ineffective, but also missing the point. In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I examine queer working-class experience, class formation and community formation, through the emotional meaning conveyed in these oral histories.

In that analysis, I am indebted to Ann Cvetkovich's *Archive of Feelings.* Cvetkovich outlines a methodology for analysing queer cultural texts and can be applied to oral histories. Cvetkovich's 'archive' is a metaphorical one—beyond but not divorced from brick-and-mortar archives. It is a collection of ephemera and cultural products with an eye to the marginal and the almost forgotten—memorabilia hidden in boxes in the closet, posters of events long past, classified ads in queer zines—all sorts of traces that show queer desire, longing and trauma. As Cvetkovich writes: "the archive of feelings is both material and immaterial, at once incorporating objects that might not ordinarily be considered archival, and at the same time resisting documentation because sex and feelings are too personal or ephemeral to leave records."[45] In a collection of queer oral history interviews, this queer emotional desire is apparent: to have your story chronicled, not only for posterity, not only for your community, but also to keep the things that are immaterial contained in something, somehow. Cvetkovich turns to documentary film as a way of linking the items in an

[43] Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 51-52.
[44] Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 52-53.
[45] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, sexuality and lesbian public cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 244.

archive of feelings together in a way that preserves meaning, specificity and queer desire. With oral history, we can create a similar kind of multivocality, not only within preservation, but in combining narratives together to get at the real texture of history.

Of course, it should be noted that oral history is not like other historical sources for many reasons, a key one being how exactly the source was formed, in relationship to the past and present. In an interview, narrator and interviewer both control the space—the interviewer facilitates the environment, and the narrator decides what and how the story is told, while the interviewer's questions guide them. Michael Frisch calls this "shared authority," placing emphasis on the relationship between the narrator and the interviewer—and how this relationship is negotiated and how it shapes the interview.[46]

I come to interviews from the perspective of an outsider. While I am queer, I am not from Cape Breton. I have no satisfying answer to the question I was asked more than a few times by Capers: "Who's your father?" While my father is a great guy, he grew up in Calgary, Alberta, like me. Calgary, the financial nucleus of Alberta's oil industry, is one of the places that attracted Capers when industrial decline really set in. How ironic is it, that when the oilpatch declines, and I leave Alberta for Montreal, I somehow end up in Cape Breton? Seeing the boom and the bust of the oil industry attracted me to histories of industry and their fall. Working on a community-based exhibition on 2SLGBTQ+ histories of Southwest Alberta brought me to think more about queer life away from the metropole, in rural areas and those deemed "regional."[47] All of this, combined with the encouragement of my supervisor, brought me to look at Cape Breton.

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[46] Michael H. Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).
[47] "Inqueeries: 2SLGBTQ+ Histories of Southwestern Alberta," 2019, accessed December 17 2022, https://www.galtmuseum.com/exhibit/queer-histories.

The Cape Breton regional identity I mentioned earlier in this introduction is an identity I do not share, and one that I am assuredly on the outside of. Prior to beginning fieldwork, I worried that my status as someone who, despite my deep interest in the history of the area and my own queerness, would always be seen as an outsider. Thankfully, I've gotten to know some of the history, culture and people that make up Cape Breton, but my life experience is much different from that of my narrators, and that shapes the character of how their stories are told, and what is and is not said. I do not wish to imply that we only study the histories of people we are just like—rather I'm arguing that the relationship and the sharing of authority within the interview space is shaped by shared or not shared experience.

Further, there are many considerations to doing oral history with 2SLGBTQ+ people. Certainly, oral history has great methodological significance in queer historiography with many of the major works in the field, like *Gay New York, Coming out Under Fire,* and *Wide-Open Town* using it to great effect. As Nan Boyd writes, queer oral histories, particularly when analysed in the context of queer theory, show how past and present intermingle in queer ways. As Boyd writes:

> As a speaking subject, it is nearly impossible for oral history or ethnographic narrators to use language outside the parameters of modern sexual identities. Na cannot remove themselves from the discursive practices that create subject positions. The narrators' voices must, therefore, be read as texts, interpretation, and their disclosures should be understood as part of process of reiteration, where identities are constantly reconstructed very limited sets of meanings.[48]

The word "queer" serves as a good example of what Boyd talks about. As Butler writes, part of being made queer is the appellation of that word onto someone, or others like them from a point of creating shame—it is performance structuring a social relation.[49] Then the word is reclaimed,

[48] Nan Alamilla Boyd, "Who is the subject? Queer theory meets oral history," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17 (2008): 179-80.
[49] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 178-81.

becoming part of what Butler calls the "public severing of that interpellation [of being made queer] from the effect of shame."[50] This shift in performance that Butler describes can be historicised through gay liberation and the activism of the AIDS crisis. Then when a narrator uses—or even refuses to use—such a word like that to describe themselves or others in an interview, there is a queer dialogue between past and present. While those words and subject positions may not have been used or even existed in the past that the oral history conjures, they might be used to describe it, creating a dialogue and contrast within the story. Again, this ties into Portelli's point about oral histories being more about meaning than simple facts. I discuss how shifting queer subjectivities influence how these stories are told in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Through oral history, we can recover and revisit stories that might have otherwise been lost. In this project, in a region that is understudied, I feel a strong commitment to not only do this project, but to preserve as much history as I can in doing it. I hope that I am not the last to do this type of work in the region, I believe more will come after me, and I hope that I am not as arrogant as to say that this thesis is the beginning and end of all of it—but this work is infused with a certain sensibility not unlike that of Thompson. That these stories are not confined to the "enormous condescension of posterity"—or God forbid consigned to fade away—but to help shape a more complex understanding of queer life, desire, and history in Cape Breton.[51]

This thesis is composed of two chapters. The first is chiefly a historiographical and theoretical intervention. In this chapter, I examine the historiography of deindustrialization and how it relates to queer theory and history. I hope to lay out an agenda for research into queer life amidst deindustrialization that rests not only on a representational argument, but also on the

[50] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 178.
[51] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 13.

assertion that through looking at queer lives, our study of deindustrialization can be broadened, complicated, and bettered. The second is the case study, based primarily on oral histories of queer people from Cape Breton. In this chapter, I hope to put my arguments from the previous into practise. I will engage with archival sources as well as oral histories, showing how queer life in Cape Breton is deeply tied to deindustrialization. Ultimately, I wish to show how queer community developed in an industrial, non-metropolitan community, and how the collective memory of this nascent queer community is and was negotiated, and what futurities and histories it imagines.

Chapter 1: "Dad, why did you bring me to a gay steel mill?" Notes towards a queer study of deindustrialization

In "Homer's Phobia," a 1997 episode of television staple *The Simpsons,* Homer is afraid of the influence his new gay acquaintance John (voiced by none-other-than John Waters himself) may have on his family.[52] Particularly, Homer is worried that his son Bart, enticed by John's flamboyancy, may stray from heterosexuality. To prevent such a *disaster*, Homer takes Bart to a steel mill. Homer thinks that surely, the bastion of American working-class masculinity that is the steel industry will set Bart on the straight path. But of course, this is a steel mill where all the workers are complete queens. In fact, the mill turns into a disco when the workers are on break. The reason the joke works is that industrial labour and queerness are seen as complete antitheses of each other. One is regimented, masculine and honest, whereas the other may be informal, gender non-conforming, and deceitful. Thus, it is telling that much of the scholarship on deindustrialization does not examine queer people. As if queer people could not be the workers in these factories, mills, and mines, or if they could not be affected by the massive economic, social, and cultural shift of deindustrialization. Of course, queer people are everywhere—and as historian Anne Balay has examined in her work *Steel Closets,* they worked in the steel industry.[53] As Moe tells Homer later in the episode: "Where have you been, Homer? Entire steel industry's gay. Eh, aerospace too, and the railroads! And you know what else? Broadway."

In this chapter, I will examine the connection between literatures on queer history, queer theory, and histories of deindustrialization. What insights can queer theory and history bring to

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[52] *The Simpsons,* season 8, episode 15, "Homer's Phobia," directed by Mike Anderson, aired February 16 1997.
[53] Anne Balay, *Steel Closets: Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender steelworkers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

studies of deindustrialization? What insights can a renewed focus on labour in the deindustrialized/ing moment bring queer studies?[54]

Deindustrialization in North America and Western Europe roughly coincides with pivotal moments for LGBTQ communities, namely the rise and fall of gay liberation, the onset of the AIDS epidemic and neoliberal restructuring.[55] In the 1980s and 90s, LGBTQ people fought for their lives, just like industrial workers fought for their jobs. Scholars generally have examined little of this resonance, save for the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) solidarity group during the 1984-5 Miners' Strike in the United Kingdom.[56] Still, that great moment of solidarity is often portrayed as the urban queer reaching out to the downtrodden rural straight miner.

What then, of the queer worker? How might have LGBTQ people have been affected by deindustrialization? How might it have affected they way they lived, worked, organized, and related to one another? This chapter is not going to answer those questions directly, but rather examine the challenges that such lines of inquiry entail for queer historians and historians of deindustrialization. Indeed, I shamelessly adapt the subtitle of this chapter from feminist poet and

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[54] I use queer studies here to refer to a transdisciplinary study of queer lives, of which queer theory and history are a part. I use this term to keep the use of queer theory relegated to the specific post-structuralist school of thought that emerged in the 1990s, with key thinkers being Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Michael Warner, Lauren Berlant and Jack Halberstam, among others.

[55] For an analysis of the connection between neoliberalism and the AIDS crisis, see Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016).

[56] For more on LGSM and LGBTQ-trade union links in Britain, see Diarmaid Kelliher, *Making Cultures of Solidarity: London and the 1984–5 Miners' Strike* (London/New York: Routledge, 2021); Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Peter Purton, *Champions of Equality : Trade Unions and LGBT Rights in Britain* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2019).

scholar Adrienne Rich's germinal essay "Notes Towards a Politics of Location." Its in her spirit of fruitful provocation that I write this chapter.[57]

In short, the aspiration of this chapter is to begin to clear a path for a queer study of deindustrialization, and perhaps most importantly, to entice scholars to travel along it.[58] Indeed, this chapter is intended to serve as a counterpoint to the next, with this serving as the theoretical and historiographical scaffolding for the case study that is the second chapter. My argument is this: deindustrialization, as a significant social, economic, and cultural shift, did not leave out queers. To better understand the queer and labour histories of the late 20th century, historians must examine the effects of deindustrialization on queer communities.

First, I will examine the historiography of deindustrialization, illustrating the broad shift from immediate polemic response to attempts to make sense of the wider cultural impact of the process. I will pay close mind to who is made the focus of these studies, and crucially—whose lives are mourned. Secondly, I will examine queer theory and history, and attempt to make a case for a renewed examination of deindustrialization and labour more broadly, when historians and theorists discuss queer and trans lives. Lastly, I will provide some avenues for further research and show how future scholars might bring renewed focus to queer lives during deindustrialization and its 'half-life.' Crucially, I want to provide an argument for a queer study of deindustrialization beyond the reasoning that queer people are marginalized within industrial labour and thus deserve to be represented in scholarship. I hope to go beyond that in arguing that a queer perspective in

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[57] Adrienne Rich, "Notes Towards A Politics Of Location," in *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (New York: Norton, 1986).

[58] I choose my words carefully here. I am not proposing a "queering" of deindustrialization or arguing that deindustrialization itself is a queer process of some sort. My focus here is on how deindustrialization impacts and has impacted queer communities, rather than potential queer particularities of the process.

and of itself can shed new light on how deindustrialization's unfinished business continues to shape societies.

Deindustrialization—who is she?

Deindustrialization's aftermath and presence stretches beyond shuttered factories. Across North America and Western Europe, working-class communities, cultures, bodies, and politics have been irrevocably shaped by the deindustrialization that characterized much of the waning decades of the 20th century. Plant closures and capital flight ripped apart single-industry towns while the deleterious aftereffects of the industry lingered in workers' bodies and the land. In many cases, the factory was the locus of the community, and with its removal, working-class communities and subjectivities are left adrift. Anglo-American academics initially positioned their work as a political response resisting deindustrialization, but from the 1990s on, the scholarly agenda shifted to simply try and make sense of the social and cultural fallout deindustrialization has wrought.[59] However, deindustrialization is not something confined to this period, or this so-called 'Western' geography.[60]

[59] For a good historiographical overview of these changes, see Christopher Lawson, "Making sense of the ruins: The historiography of deindustrialisation and its continued relevance in neoliberal times," *History Compass* 18, no. 8 (2020), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12619.

[60] I am focusing in on the wave of deindustrialization starting in the 1970's with the onset of the neoliberal transition in North America and Western Europe—the imperial core, if you will. Following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and USSR, there has been significant deindustrialization in these regions. And of course, deindustrialization somewhere often means industrialization elsewhere—often the Global South. I situate this paper's geographical focus within North America and Western Europe, with an even stronger focus on the Anglophone world. For empire and deindustrialization, see Prabirjit Sarkar, "De-industrialisation Through Colonial Trade," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 22, no. 3 (1992); Tirthankar Roy "De-Industrialisation: Alternative View" *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 17 (2000), http://www.jstor.org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/stable/4409201.

Sherry Lee Linkon introduced the concept of deindustrialization's "half-life," comparing the lingering aftereffects of deindustrialization to the decay of radioactive material. Thus, the past is not simply confined to the past, and the violence of deindustrialization goes beyond the figures of the jobless steelworkers.[61] Deindustrialization lingers in later generations, and it continues to shape communities. Scholars of deindustrialization, often in a Thompsonian vein, seek to understand how this process affected workers' lives and identities from a place of respect and solidarity. As eminent scholars Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott write: "The point of departure for any discussion of deindustrialization must be respect for the despair and betrayal felt by workers as their mines, factories, and mills were padlocked, abandoned, turned into artsy shopping spaces, or even dynamited."[62] While I agree with Cowie and Heathcott here, we must push ourselves further to better understand which workers are mourned, which workers are made visible in scholarship, and thus whose lives and labour are deemed valuable.

Deindustrialization studies, broadly speaking, has often focused on a mythologized white male and heterosexual proletarian—the no-nonsense steelworker or the hardworking miner. We see this view in the field's earliest works, especially those that home in on the recent aftermath of a particular wave of plant closure in a certain region or community.[63] The Rust Belt of the US looms large in particular. Further, many of the influential works in the field that interrogate gender

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[61] Sherry Lee Linkon, *The Half-Life of Deindustrialization: Working-Class Writing about Economic Restructuring* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 2-3.
[62] Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1.
[63] For examples of earlier works in the field that have a strong focus on the way certain workers were affected by plant closure, see Kathryn Marie. Dudley, *The End of The Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America*, Morality and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0608/93006041-t.html. Gregory Pappas, *The Magic City: Unemployment in a Working-Class Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

focus in on industrial masculinities, rather than the lived experiences of women or other genders.[64] In a similar vein, concerning race, there is a danger of what Gurminder Bhambra calls "methodological whiteness." Bhambra argues that in discussions of deindustrialization, class is often conflated with race, making 'working-class' a signifier that takes whiteness as implicit.[65] Similarly, we must resist a methodological straightness that takes heterosexuality and accompanying structures like the nuclear family as given.

While these works are foundational to the field, and certainly the significance of deindustrialization to the future of this sort of hegemonic masculinity is important, it is unwise to confine the social fallout of deindustrialization just to certain workers, when the reality is much broader. Recently, interventions from scholars focusing on experiences of women, racialized and immigrant workers have begun to complicate this picture, showing how the impact of deindustrialization stretches beyond the social world of certain white male workers.[66] As Alice Kessler-Harris argues of the future of US labour history, the male paradigm must be decentred, for

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[64] For interrogations of gender and industrial masculinity, see chapters 3 and 7 of Arthur McIvor, *Working Lives: Work in Britain since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Valerie Walkerdine and Luis Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community After De-Industrialisation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[65] Gurminder K. Bhambra, "Brexit, Trump, and 'methodological whiteness': on the misrecognition of race and class," *The British Journal of Sociology* 68, no. S1 (2017): S217, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12317.

[66] For new analyses that push the field of deindustrialization studies into new directions regarding race and gender, see Chiara Bonfiglioli, *Women and Industry in the Balkans: The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav Textile Sector* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2019); Jason Hackworth, *Manufacturing Decline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019). Jackie Clarke, "Closing Time: Deindustrialization and Nostalgia in Contemporary France," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 79 (2015), http://www.jstor.org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/stable/43917311. Virinda Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks: Experiences of Migration, Labour and Social Change* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

otherwise the male workplace is framed as the ultimate progenitor of working-classness.[67] She writes:

> It is time for a new strategy—for a radical reconceptualization that takes on "the central organizing conception of labor history-class." It is time to see what happens when we pull class apart- to ask if it is possible to construct a discussion of the relation of production and the allocation of its product in a way that more fully encompasses the consciousness and identity of the people who participate in economic society. To do that we need to investigate the role of gender in shaping the ideas and actions of men and women and therefore in structuring the economic universe.[68]

I propose a similar investigation along the lines of queerness and examine how sexuality shaped the social fallout of deindustrialization. As Cowie and Heathcott ask us, we must approach the study of deindustrialization from a place of respect and solidarity. That does not negate the fact that our work as scholars serves in part to produce and reproduce public memory, and we must not forget our role as some type of arbiter, determining whose story is worth being told—who is the voice of the community. We must not only ask who lived through deindustrialization—but also who does not get the dubious distinction of getting to be mourned in its half-life? To begin, we must look at the nuclear family and the economic structures that reproduced it.

Following the Second World War, much of the capitalist West underwent an economic boom. A driving force behind this boom was the implementation of industrial policy which prioritised mass production and mass consumption powered by industry. This industrial policy has been come to be known by scholars as Fordism.[69] A key part of Fordism was the 'family wage.' A male breadwinner earned a so-called 'family wage'—which, along with precarious gendered

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[67] Alice Kessler-Harris, "Treating the male as "other": Redefining the parameters of labor history," *Labor History* 34, no. 2-3 (1993): 195, https://doi.org/10.1080/00236569300890121.
[68] Kessler-Harris, "Treating the male as "other": Redefining the parameters of labor history," 193.
[69] For the initial coinage of the phrase, see Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: ElecBook, 1999).

and racialized labour, was enough to keep reproducing a heterosexual nuclear family.[70] In essence, some white families were able to subsist solely on a family wage because they were able to rely on un-or-poorly paid labour from racialized people and women to make up the difference. As Melinda Cooper writes: "As an instrument of redistribution, the standard Fordist wage actively policed the boundaries between women and men's work and white and black men's labor, and in its social-insurance dimensions, it was inseparable from the imperative of sexual normativity."[71] With this, industrial production was not only embedded in a social order that reproduced heterosexuality as imperative, but it was an integral part of it. To access the full benefits of the post-war compromise, proximity to the heterosexual nuclear family was crucial. This process created a certain kind of industrial masculinity, that while hegemonic, was also quite precarious.

In *Exit Zero,* Christine Walley straddles the lines between history, autoethnography and memoir as she chronicles her family's story of living through industrial and post-industrial Chicago. Her father, after the steel mill closes and he is left jobless, still clings to his steelworker identity, even after he picks up precarious work as a security guard.[72] Walley notes that middle-class commentators are quick to pin an industrial masculinity as central to working-class communities. To Walley, this masculinity is instead contingent on a specific class position that was as exploited as it was hegemonic. She writes: "Deindustrialization had exposed the often-unsuspected fragility beneath the bravado of men like my father."[73] The emasculated father, as Sherry Lee Linkon writes, is a common trope in literary representations of deindustrialized

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[70] Leah Vosko, *Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of a Precarious Employment Relationship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 21-23.
[71] Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2019), 23.
[72] Christine Walley, *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 74.
[73] Walley, *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago*, 76.

communities.[74] Fathers, now disconnected from their job, and thus the font of masculinity that they draw upon, are now left directionless. As Linkon continues, in many literary representations this emasculation has the effect of "displacing" the futures of their sons, now that the family tradition of working in the mine or factory is impossible to continue. But what of those whose futures were already displaced, and were perhaps already disconnected from that type of masculinity?

I bring up the story of Walley's father not to create a strict oppositional dichotomy between the queer people I seek to bring to the forefront and workers like Walley's father. Rather, I wish to show a relationship. Deindustrialization is a process that interlocks with gender. The gendered nature of this process shapes whose lives are often publicly mourned after deindustrialization. In any case, deindustrialization represented a shift away from Fordist capitalism and the family wage. If this model regulated people, including queer people, into the nuclear family through work, what were the implications of its demise? Paradoxically, as I discuss in the next section, industrial production also provided the preconditions for queer identity and community. This contradiction, with the family wage both reproducing heterosexuality, yet providing the economic and social preconditions for other forms of sexual identity, crystallized a certain kind of industrial masculinity in tension with the nuclear family.

The (de)industrial queer

Beyond the argument about queer representation, and the dangers of letting 'working-class' be coded as always already straight, there is a historical and empirical argument to be made as to the importance of industry and its decline to queer histories. Germinal texts in queer studies from John D'Emilio's "Capitalism and Gay Identity" to George Chauncey's *Gay New York* and Leslie

[74] Sherry Lee Linkon, "Men without Work: White Working-Class Masculinity in Deindustrialization Fiction," *Contemporary Literature* 55, no. 1 (2014): 152-55, http://www.jstor.org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/stable/43297950.

Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* all—in their own ways—underscore the importance of industrial capitalism to the emergence of gay community and identity as we know them in North America and Western Europe.[75] As D'Emilio argues, the increased dominance of wage-labour and the wave of urbanization in the nineteenth century allowed individuals to construct identities based on a personal life that existed outside the heterosexual family.[76] If one is earning a wage rather than being part of an interdependent family unit, one may have the freedom not only to engage in more sex outside the bounds of the family unit, but also to form an identity around queer sex. This provides a valuable counterpoint to a more standard Foucauldian interpretation that places regulation from above front and centre in the formation of modern sexuality, with a particular eye to the medical and juridical.[77]

In D'Emilio's interpretation, there is both agency and regulation happening at the same time, specifically in the realm of social reproduction. As Alan Sears argues, sexuality was formed not only by a governing from above, but also in "mobilization from below," as in activism for reproductive justice and rights for LGBTQ people.[78] Sears goes on to make the point that any sort of queer or trans liberation must not only focus on the 'equality rights' activism that has characterized the past few decades, but also on a broader project of changing the shape of social

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[75] To be clear, I am referring to a gay community in the way that 'homosexual', 'gay', 'lesbian' and other words exist as identity signifiers in a broadly Western and contemporary context. Neither I nor D'Emilio are suggesting that same-gender attraction or sex did not happen before industrial capitalism. John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (London/New York: Routledge, 1993); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: gender, urban culture, and the makings of the gay male world, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
[76] D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," 470.
[77] See Part Four of Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1990).
[78] Alan Sears, "Body Politics: The Social Reproduction of Sexualities," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 173.

reproduction to one that does not regulate queers into heterosexuality. There are still some caveats to these arguments, however. For instance, queers often found and still find employment in the service sector and arts as opposed to industrial labour in many circumstances.[79] However, it is still *industrial* capitalism we have to credit in part with the formation of queer community and identity in a Western context.

Why then, has deindustrialization not been treated with a similar level of significance by queer historians? Whether or not industrial labour in and of itself was a queer place, the economic and social transformation that deindustrialization brought about must be significant for queer people. One explanation for this a tendency to shift focus away from of class analysis in queer theory, due to its emergence during the broader post-structuralist turn in humanities scholarship post-Cold War. Indeed, class analysis alone will not get us to a full understanding of queer lives. Of course, the inverse is also true: without examining how labour and production shape social structure, how can we fully understand how sexuality and gender do? Another obvious, and perhaps superficial explanation is that there was a lot else happening to and with queers in the last forty-or-so years of the 20th century. From flashpoint events like Stonewall, the rise and fall of gay liberation, increased visibility, the AIDS crisis, and some important political victories—and losses—there was a lot else going on. In particular, the AIDS crisis shifted the focus of many queer

[79] Further, D'Emilio's analysis is very much confined to a US-centric milieu in which the climax of queer history is Stonewall, from which all other homosexuality springs, which is generally considered to be a parochial interpretation of queer history. For a critical discussion of the global resonances (and lack thereof) of Stonewall, see Anjali Arondekar, "The Sex of History, or Object/Matters," *History Workshop Journal* 89 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1093/HWJ/DBZ053. For an examination of 'queer work' focusing on service labour and cruise ships in the postwar era, see Allan Bérubé, ""Queer Work" and Labor History," in *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History*, ed. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

activists from broad-based liberation to mere survival.[80] We might also hypothesise that because of the AIDS crisis, acts of solidarity between queers and those threatened by deindustrialization like Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, became more of an exception than the rule.

I contend, that if we begin to place these events I just listed in conversation with the onset of deindustrialization, we can get a fuller picture of these events. Particularly, we can get a better picture how these events have shaped queer people's labour. While an in-depth analysis relating these events to broader histories of deindustrialization is a worthy endeavour, it is certainly outside the scope of this chapter. I will now follow these two lines of inquiry: the supposed incommensurability of Marxism and queer theory, and the spectre of deindustrialization in queer history.

Incommensurability

Debate in the field of queer studies has put into question the compatibility of queer theory and Marxism.[81] Compared to Marxism, queer theory might be seen as idealistic and un-materialistic. Queer theory and Marxism are far from the only two approaches to shape queer history and deindustrialization studies, respectively. Early works of queer history, like those of D'Emilio, and Gary Kinsman in the Canadian context, are strongly influenced by Marxist critique, like the early gay liberation movement as a whole.[82] In the waning decades of the 20th century, like

[80] For an overview of how the AIDS crisis and neoliberal governance impacted LGBTQ activism and institutions in the US, ultimately resulting in a large degree of non-profitization, see Myrl Beam, *Gay, Inc: The Nonprofitization of Queer Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 34-40. http://www.jstor.org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/stable/10.5749/j.ctv3dnp0n.

[81] For an introduction to debate of incommensurability of queer theory and Marxism, see David L. Eng and Jasbir K. Puar, "Introduction: Left of Queer," *Social Text* 38, no. 4 (145) (2020), https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-8680414, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-8680414. For further discussion, see Holly Lewis, *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Marxism at the Intersection*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2022).

[82] Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada*, 1st ed. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987).

many fields, queer studies turned to post-structuralism for theoretical backing, birthing what is now called queer theory. Though class has always been central to deindustrialization studies, many of the field's eminent scholars, like Cowie, Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison are far from being ardent Marxists.[83] Despite that, the humanist Marxism of the British New Left, like the work of E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, has had an outsized influence on the field.[84] I counterpose these two frameworks because they are respectively concerned with class and sexuality, the two ideas that scholars must reckon with in any queer study of deindustrialization. In teasing out how Marxism and queer theory do and do not agree, I hope to point to new directions for how class and sexuality may be approached in deindustrialization studies.

In stark contrast to Marxism, queer theory's aims are nebulous. As feminist theorist bell hooks speaks of queer, she means "queer not as being about who you're having sex with – that can be a dimension of it – but queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and it has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live."[85] Thus, the queer faces the material environment as an outside unto their self, and the task of the queer is to find a space within the hostile material to exist and to thrive. This seems at odds with a standard Marxist interpretation of material conditions, and indeed resistance to oppression. Rather than the focus on

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[83] Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

[84] Christopher Lawson, "Making Sense of the Ruins: The Historiography of Deindustrialisation and its Continued Relevance in Neoliberal Times," *History Compass* 18, no. 8 (2020): 3-4, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12619.

[85] This is far from the only or definitive definition of queerness, but simply a popular one: bell hooks, "Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body" (Eugene Lang College, May 6 2014). For the challenges of defining queerness and queer theory, see Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?," *PMLA* 110, no. 3 (1995), http://www.jstor.org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/stable/462930.

a system, queer theory's focus is on a subject. Queer theory often purports to bring about a 'new world,' but not in a capital-C Communist way. The task of queer theory, very broadly and perhaps uncharitably defined, is to reject and resist all it surrounds, with an eye to radical emancipation of queer subjects through subversive queer acts. This is the main cleavage often perceived between these two bodies of work: Marxism is about broad-based class liberation, queer theory is about individual, subjective resistance.

As Petrus Liu argues, queer theory and Marxism are not truly incommensurable in the sense of complete incompatibility, but rather they are dialectical. When we conceptualize the two frameworks as different ways of understanding society and its structure, rather than as ways to get at two different identities/positions (i.e., sexuality and class) we can have a "torturous conversation" between the two, rather than complete incommensurability.[86] Both bodies of work emphasise the material, albeit in different ways. Scholars can and should keep the two in dialogue, even if they are truly incommensurable. As both theories emerge out of the lived experiences of workers, queers and working queers, and as scholars who should approach these lived experiences with respect, we have a duty to engage in Liu's 'torturous conversation.' Indeed, queer performance theorist Joshua Chambers-Letson writes of a "communism of incommensurability":

> In order to foster a world of boundless exchangeability, capitalism flattens difference into equivalence, making singularity into commensurability. In the place of capital's commons of equivalence, communism calls for a commons of incommensurability: a sphere of relation structured less by the flat social fictions of possession, equality, and equivalence, than by a mode of sharing out, just redistribution, and being together in racial and sexual particularity.[87]

This communism of incommensurability allows us to examine the deindustrial half-life with a queer lens. Rather than flattening out everything into a broad notion of 'community' or something

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[86] Petrus Liu, "Queer Theory and the Specter of Materialism," *Social Text* 38, no. 4 (145) (2020): 27, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-8680426.
[87] Joshua Chambers-Letson, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (New York: NYU Press, 2018), xx.

like it, the effects of deindustrialisation can be seen in their queer particularity, without losing sight of the basic social relations that shape these effects.

Spectres of queers past

Where then, might historians of queer labour take the field? The literature on queer labour history is small but mighty, with few works actively examining the significance of deindustrialization. The work of historians Allan Bérubé and Miriam Frank, examining queer people in the labour movement in the postwar United States offers crucial context. However, this scholarship—the work of Frank in particular—focuses on bargaining gains made by queer people and their unions—deindustrialization is mentioned only briefly.[88] To be clear, this is incredibly important history that must be told, but this narrative of queer labour justice must be contrasted with the simultaneous erosion in union power. One moment in queer labour history that is also very much about deindustrialization and has been comparatively well studied is the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) solidarity group during the 1984-5 Miners' Strike in the United Kingdom. LGSM was formed of like-minded gays and lesbians who raised money for striking miners from the gay community. This represented an until then unseen closeness and solidarity between a mainstream union and LGBT activists in Britain during the fight against the union-busting, austerity, and homophobia of the Thatcher government.[89] Anne Balay's work on queer workers in the steel industry also provides us with direction. Balay contrasts the simultaneous erosion of worker's conditions in the steel industry with the seeming upswing of LGBTQ rights in

[88] Miriam Frank, *Out in the union: a labor history of queer America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2014).
[89] For more on the LGSM see Robinson, *Gay men and the Left in Post-War Britain*; Kelliher, *Making Cultures of Solidarity: London and the 1984–5 Miners' Strike*.

the 1990s and 2000s.[90] When a homophobic hypermasculinity emerges in some steel communities, what implications does that have for queer workers and communities? We might think of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues,* where butch Jess takes a job at a cannery, gets involved in a union, but their machine is sabotaged by a coworker, leaving them injured and unemployed.[91]

Within less-labour focused queer studies, in a 2014 special issue of leading journal *GLQ* on the American Midwest, deindustrialization is rarely even mentioned, reduced to passing mentions of "working-class cultures" and "heartland."[92] Rather, the Midwest is examined as heteronormative middle America—and while the authors in this issue work to destabilize that inaccurate notion, the economic history that produced that heteronormative family structure is absented. With that said, more scholarship in queer history, theory and studies must examine queer lives outside the metropole, and most certainly outside cities, and these scholars are a part of that necessary work. To speak more generally, deindustrialization needs to be in the picture.

This can be done by reading queer scholarship with an eye for deindustrialization. One window into this connection is through gentrification. As many scholars have shown—and we see in our daily lives, deindustrialization and gentrification are linked inextricably. For every factory that closes in a city, chances are it will be turned to luxury lofts, demolished to make way for blocky five-over-ones, or God-forbid—turned into a 'maker space.' Sarah Schulman's *Gentrification of the Mind,* her memoir of the AIDS epidemic, shows how the "literal gentrification

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[90] Anne Balay, *Steel closets: voices of gay, lesbian, and transgender steelworkers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 67-69.
[91] Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Leslie Feinberg, 2014).
[92] Martin F. Manalansan, IV et al., "Queering the Middle: Race, Region, and a Queer Midwest," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20, no. 1-2 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2370270, https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2370270.

of cities" and the shrinking of the queer political imagination relate.[93] To Schulman, the vibrant queer political culture that birthed ACT UP, an activist group fighting for justice during the AIDS crisis, is no more because the material conditions that made such resistance happen have shifted so greatly. High rents bar working queers who wish to migrate to the metropole for community, safety, and crucially, safer work. As Schulman laments, cities are often left with a preponderance of corporate queers with Ivy League degrees, leaving working-class queers and a radical queer politics sidelined in favour of a narrow liberal outlook. As Jin Haritaworn writes, as gentrification takes hold and certain environments are regenerated for certain queers, we must ask:

> [what] else is going on, and who else is on the scene as certain queer bodies become a lovely sight in the shadow of racialized Others; as transgender bodies, whose dehumanization rarely gains the status of injustice, gain visibility as colourful subjects in revitalized areas that have let go of people of colour; and as assimilated rights-bearing subjects re/turn towards murderous times and places with queer nostalgia. It further involves asking who or what becomes legible as gay, queer or trans, and who gets run over on the intersections.[94]

To take Haritaworn's insights over to deindustrialization, we must not let a queer study of deindustrialization be an ironic manufactory of white queer nostalgia for an industrial past previously thought to be straight. If we are to examine queer lives, it must not be to cast them as a valorized figure in contrast to the spectre of the racialized Other that haunts many deindustrialized areas, as seen clearly in both Brexit and the Trump campaign. We cannot 'salvage' the white gay steel worker of Youngstown in order to further cast shadow upon racialized others. In short, this queer study of deindustrialization I propose must not succumb to reactionary fears. This queer study of deindustrialization must be one that is not only intersectional in method, but also one

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[93] Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 14-15.
[94] Jin Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 3-4.

oriented to a justice for deindustrialized areas that goes beyond good and bad memories, but to a fair future.

Deindustrialization's role in the shifting queer political imaginary affects scholars who study at the nexus I describe in this chapter in two ways. First, this is the world we live and work in, and the political imaginary of younger scholars in particular, who have never lived under the conditions of Fordism. Second, because queer histories generally focus on metropolitan urban environments which have weathered deindustrialization better, deindustrialization's role is generally subsumed into neoliberalism or gentrification. To look at this from a cultural perspective, if it were not for deindustrialization, the Detroit Black queer ball culture that Marlon M. Bailey examines so generously in *Butch Queens Up in Pumps,* would not have existed in such ways, for example.[95] Nor would Detroit techno. Examining queer and trans working-class lives with an eye to deindustrialization can help disturb the idea that queers must flee the always already hostile periphery to the welcoming metropole—clearly demarcating where queer life (especially queer political life) is and is not.

Traces of queer lives in deindustrialization

Throughout this chapter, I have been critical of existing scholarship in deindustrialization studies. At the same time, my critique is rooted in the field's foundational commitment to the people and communities affected by deindustrialization. To fulfill this commitment, we must make sure that the tapestry of deindustrialization's story that we weave not only includes queer lives but shows how significant deindustrialization was for queer history. How is this done? There in lies the directions for further research. Queer and deindustrialization histories, share similar

[95] Marlon M. Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (University of Michigan Press, 2013).

resonances, along both methodological and thematic lines, including a heavy use of oral history, and an impulse to honour and cultivate the stories of those on the margins. Another resonance that future scholars can explore is that of trauma, and the ephemeral traces that it can leave, whether we speak of the trauma of deindustrialization or violence against queer and trans people.[96] How might these violences be remembered, and what traces might they leave? How might scholars examine this in a way that is regenerative, rather than voyeuristic?

As Steven High has noted, so much of deindustrialization scholarship has focused on loss, and in particular, the loss of a working-class identity and indeed way of life.[97] Likewise, queer history and theory has examined trauma through crisis, especially with regards to the AIDS crisis. Neither of these respective emphases are either surprising or unwarranted. Much has been lost, whether the livelihoods in a mill town or the far, far too many lost to AIDS. What can this emphasis on trauma do for a queer study of deindustrialization? Conversely, what may it obscure? Both fields rely on both the ephemeral and material to construct feelings of loss. For example, the 'structure of feeling' of deindustrialization is constituted by both the material conditions of the past and present (e.g., plant closure) and the ephemeral traces of what once was. With this, historians must contend with the inherent methodological difficulty in balancing both the material effects of deindustrialization on a base level, and the ephemeral traces it leaves on places, bodies, and cultures that may not be necessarily accessible in the traditional archive. The challenge only becomes more complex when we try to get at the *queer* history.

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[96] It should also be noted that trauma, particularly in oral history scholarship can be perhaps overused as an analytic framework, see Steven High, "Introduction," in *Beyond Testimony and Trauma : Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence*, ed. Steven High (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015).

[97] Steven High, "'The Wounds of Class": A Historiographical Reflection on the Study of Deindustrialization, 1973–2013," *History Compass* 11, no. 11 (2013).

As queer contrasts to Williams' 'structures of feeling,' Jose Esteban Munoz's "Ephemera as Evidence" and Ann Cvetkovich's "archive of feelings" may help us get at queer histories of deindustrialization. Munoz, a scholar of performance, argues that ephemeral traces of queer acts serve as valuable evidence for scholars, despite outdated notions of academic 'rigor' that exclude queer lives from what is deemed good scholarship.[98] He suggests that scholars move beyond a traditional archive, as it is unable to fully capture queer life, instead asking scholars to examine performance, art, and other non-traditional sources. Munoz links Williams' structure of feelings to the queer ephemeral he describes. To him, queerness is itself a structure of feeling—a public culture built upon traces of queer acts. With this, looking at the constellation of sources he terms the ephemeral is not completely disconnected from the material, but is something that rather refashions it.[99] Essentially, Munoz is making the case for a queer history and queer studies that goes beyond the traditional archive, rejecting methodological straightness in favour of methods that favour the ephemeral, the experimental, and the minoritarian. For the study I propose in this paper, such an approach is fundamental for scholars of deindustrialization seeking to look at queer life, while still honing in. A focus on the queer ephemeral is not in any way something that is incompatible with the study of deindustrialization—something that is so grounded in material conditions and social relations shifting so rapidly, but rather something that colours in that existing evidence. An expansive focus of what could be considered evidence allows scholars to get at histories of sexuality, feelings, and indeed labour.

But where are we to find these traces? Munoz, by his own admission, is making more of an argument as to what using queer performance as evidence *could* do methodologically, rather

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[98] José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women & Performance* 8, no. 2 (1996): 6-7, https://doi.org/10.1080/07407709608571228.
[99] Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence," 10.

than where they ought to be found and what they could say.[100] To think practically, scholars could incorporate more discussion of queer cultural production, material cultures, and autobiography. Those working with oral history can incorporate collaborative mapping, photo elicitation, on-site interviews, and other methods that can take something otherwise hard to incorporate, like the façade of a warehouse, into something contextualized within a life story. Further, we can take an approach to 'life story' in our interview guides that does not unconsciously 'straighten' queer life by forcing it into a linear childhood-marriage-work-family-to-present narrative that privileges heteronormative life.

Ann Cvetkovich's notion of the 'archive of feelings' is valuable in helping us contextualize and interpret queer sources. Cvetkovich's work focuses on trauma in lesbian cultures, and how it is and is not recorded. Trauma, like queer life, rarely leaves concrete records, thus, a new archive is needed. To Cvetkovich, the archive of feelings is more of a method than an actual brick-and-mortar repository of documents—it is reading cultural texts with an eye to memory, feeling and emotion. As Cvetkovich writes: "the archive of feelings is both material and immaterial, at once incorporating objects that might not ordinarily be considered archival, and at the same time resisting documentation because sex and feelings are too personal or ephemeral to leave records."[101] Here we might find resonance with Linkon's 'half-life.' The archive of feelings can provide a generative understanding of past damage and trauma that is a refusal to, in Linkon's words, "get over it", mixing a hope for change and regeneration with the very real trauma and mourning. The task of future scholars should not only be to record damage, or to rescue those

[100] Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence," 6.
[101] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, sexuality and lesbian public cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 244.

voices from the "enormous condescension of posterity," but to go beyond damage and locate desire and regeneration.[102]

Conclusion: Regeneration

The 2000 film *Billy Elliot* and its subsequent musical adaptation of the same name tell the story of Billy, a queer-coded boy learning to dance ballet in the North of England amidst the 1984-5 Miners' Strike.[103] His father and brother are striking miners themselves and are initially hostile to Billy's dancing—relating it to femininity and of course—homosexuality. However, this queer child quickly becomes the community's last hope as the strike drags on and the miners' fortunes grow dimmer. The community bands together to send Billy to audition for a prestigious ballet school in London, which Billy gets into. But of course, the miners lose the strike. *Billy Elliot* is the perfect neoliberal tale of the deindustrial queer. There is nothing left for Billy in Durham, the best he can do for his community is not only leave but perform a sort of gendered labour at odds with the masculine industrial labour of his family. But what of stories of deindustrialization that do not conform to an understanding of deindustrialization as loss without limit, or an understanding of resource communities as always already homophobic and the metropole as always already welcoming?

This question is in part, what this chapter has broached. Throughout this chapter, I have made two main, interrelated arguments for a queer study of deindustrialization. First, that queer people have not been adequately represented in histories of deindustrialization, as the field has generally been bound by a methodological straightness, contributing to a coding of the working

[102] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 13.
[103] Stephen Daldry, "Billy Elliot," (United Kingdom: Universal, 2000).

class as always already straight. Second, I have argued that there is something particularly valuable for scholars in adopting a queer perspective to deindustrialization. With the critical use of queer theory, the relationship between sexuality, gender, class, and work and be explored more fulsomely, as can questions of memory and trauma. To back up these arguments and provide new directions for further study, I have discussed methodological resonances between the two fields, paying specific attention to ideas of public feelings, memory, oral history and trauma.

I will conclude with a short discussion of regenerating both queer histories in deindustrialized places. Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck, in her essay "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," urges scholars to take a pause on research that only centres damage to vulnerable communities, and to instead centre desire. Tuck acknowledges that the focus on damage on the part of researchers has been in part to catalogue damage so redress can be sought. While this is a good intention, she argues that damage-centred research has reproduced a notion that the subjects of the research are always already ruined, traumatized and irreparably damaged.[104] While Tuck is mostly speaking to her expertise in Indigenous studies, we can take her insights and apply them to the study I propose in this paper. Whether we speak of the crises of AIDS or deindustrialization, much has been written—and indeed felt—about mourning. One of the questions I have posed in this paper is 'who gets to be mourned?' However, scholars must also ask: What can be regenerated? How can communities affected by these crises like AIDS or deindustrialization, or the interlocking systems of oppression like capitalism and heteropatriarchy regenerate themselves? We must be careful not to easily accept a queer regeneration along the lines that Jin Haritaworn diagnoses, in which certain respectable (white and bourgeois) queers arise from places once

[104] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 412-13.

deemed degenerate—like a silk flower somehow blooming from the grounds of an abandoned textile factory.[105] Such a regeneration is inequitable on the face of it. We must not only examine the past of the deindustrial queer and continue to weave the complex and multivocal tapestry that we might have, but also to look to the future, and to ways of living in kinder relation.

[105] Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places*, 4-7.

Chapter 2 – "In this part of the country": Oral histories of queer Cape Breton

The Body Politic, a Toronto-based gay liberation magazine, put in an ad in 1983 in the *Cape Breton Post,* advertising subscriptions. I found the responses to the ad archived at The ArQuives, Canada's national queer archive, in Toronto. Most responses are simple notes to be enclosed with payment, but a few offer more detail. One subscriber from Sydney wrote:

> Dear Mr. or Mrs. Mysterious:
> I am writing in regards to your ad in the *Cape Breton Post* in hopes that I will receive something worthwhile for my efforts of writing and sending a money order which you will find enclosed.
> Yes, I am gay. I am also 30 years old still living at home and I am a taxi driver and I lead a very dull life as the gay pop [sic]. Down here is very poor and if not they are too scared to speak up.
> Well I won't go on with too much about to bore you and will close for now. Yours truly, Edward.[106]

This ad might have been a bright light to the people who responded to it—an affirmation that queer community did exist somewhere—and could exist in Cape Breton. One New Waterford subscriber wrote: "Your efforts to help gay men, and women, *in this part of the country,* are greatly appreciated."[107]

In this chapter, I hope to put into historical perspective queer life in 'this part of the country'—Industrial Cape Breton. Using archival traces like these as well as oral histories as starting points, I hope to recontextualize the social and economic crisis of Cape Breton's deindustrialization from the vantage point of 2SLGBTQ+ people. I ask: What can the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ Cape Bretoners tell us about deindustrialization? Further, how do Cape Bretoners make sense of their individual and public memory, patterns of migration, and their sense of Cape Breton as a place? In answering these questions, I ultimately argue that 2SLGBTQ+ Cape

[106] The Body Politic Cape Breton Post Advertisement Responses, 1983, The ArQuives, Toronto.
[107] Emphasis mine. The Body Politic Cape Breton Post Advertisement Responses.

Bretoners felt the impacts of deindustrialization acutely, through their communities, their work lives and their story of migration. In fact, all of my narrators' forward-looking desires for queer community and life in Cape Breton are all reflected through the prism of deindustrialization's half-life.

First, I will provide more context into the specific history of Cape Breton's deindustrialization as well as queer communities in rural areas, elaborating on the introduction. From there, I will examine shared resonances between the stories shared with me, focusing on how the relationships between sexuality, gender, community, class and migration play out throughout my narrators' life stories. From there, I will show interlocking crises of deindustrialization, AIDS, and out-migration pushed Cape Breton queers closer into community. In particular, I argue that for many of my narrators, queerness and working-classness exist in an uneasy parallel, where the queer and working-class pasts of Cape Breton exist separately, only interacting in moments of immense crisis, where queer and working-class pasts and futurities exist in an uneasy and contradictory simultaneity. Despite this, deindustrialization's half-life remains the prism through which this thesis' narrators' desires for the future are reflected.

The narrators

This thesis is based upon six oral history interviews, five of which were conducted by me—the other of unknown provenance archived in Toronto's ArQuives—from 1993. These six narrators form a sort of collective portrait of queer life in Cape Breton. This is a portrait that is rich, textured, and meaningful—but not exhaustive, all-encompassing, or definitive. With this, I hope to not only begin to get at the structure of feeling of queer Cape Breton, but also open a path up for future study. My six narrators are: Geraldine Dawe, Madonna Doucette, Jean MacQueen,

Peter Steele, Charles MacKenzie, and Tuma Young. I refer to them in the text of this thesis using their first names only. Referring to them by last name feels stilted and impersonal, and not reflective of the level of vulnerability that each narrator displayed in their interview, or the rapport I enjoyed with each narrator.

Geraldine is the one from the ArQuives—interviewed by a man who never identifies himself but seems to imply he's not from Cape Breton. Geraldine talks about starting a lesbian and gay support group and a publication, the *Island News.* Peter, born in 1955, is a photographer and marketing specialist from New Waterford, who after a brief time in Toronto and Halifax, made his career working in Cape Breton. Peter is a longtime activist, being a founding member of the AIDS Coalition and Pride Cape Breton. Jean, born in 1963, is a retired healthcare worker and an early and longtime employee of the AIDS Coalition in Sydney. Tuma, born in 1966, is a Mi'kmaq two-spirit Elder and distinguished lawyer, born in Eskasoni in the center of Cape Breton Island. Tuma lived in Halifax and the United States during his education, returning to Cape Breton to build his career as a lawyer. Being the only person of colour and indeed, the only narrator who is not a white settler in this project, Tuma's life story is deeply different than that of the others. Queer activist and non-profit leader Madonna, born in 1974, grew up in New Waterford. Madonna came out as gay later in life, after marriage and having children with a man. Everyone in Cape Breton who I mentioned this project to, told me to talk to Madonna. For many Cape Breton queers, Madonna is the central resource person, with her role as the Executive Director of the Cape Breton office of the Youth Project, a non-profit organization that supports queer and trans youth. Charles is the youngest of my narrators, born in 1985, growing up in Dominion. Charles attended the then University College of Cape Breton (now Cape Breton University), worked in call centres—one of

the few postindustrial work opportunities in early 2000s Cape Breton, before moving to Ontario for education.

Industrial decline in Cape Breton

Whereas deindustrialization in other contexts, like Britain, might be punctuated by a specific flashpoint event, like the 1984-5 Miners' Strike, creating a before and after that is at least culturally perceived if not necessarily true, deindustrialization in Cape Breton is long and stretched out. The nationalization of the collieries and the steel plant in 1967 following the Parade of Concern remains as a cultural touchstone in Cape Breton—a time that Cape Bretoners, like others before them in the Labour Wars of the 1920s, fought back against injustice and for the continueance of working-class community and life in Cape Breton.[108] From there, things stretch out, the Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO), the federal Crown Corporation which operated the mines, and the Sydney Steel Corporation (SYSCO), owned by the province, provided stable—if dwindling employment. As Will Langford notes, from 1967 to the early 1980s, the bureaucrat's plans of a managed decline were being executed, with mixed results. Visions of a new, hyper-Celtified Cape Breton shone through in tourism endeavours, like the restoration of the fortress of Louisbourg—where much of the work was done by DEVCO miners, and the importation of sheep from Scotland.[109] DEVCO- assisted businesses generally failed to succeed, with Langford arguing that DEVCO's main exercise was getting the Cape Breton public to hold

[108] For an excellent history of the Labour Wars, see David Frank's biography of J.B. MacLachlan, a legendary labour leader. David Frank, *J.B. MacLachlan: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Lorimer, 2023).
[109] Will Langford, *The Global Politics of Poverty in Canada: Development Programs and Democracy, 1964-1979* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020), 174-76, 210-11. https://canadacommons.ca/artifacts/1880142/the-global-politics-of-poverty-in-canada/.

on to hope, and keep on deferring positive results to the future.[110] During the oil crisis of the 1970s, it looked like Cape Breton coal could become economically viable—some DEVCO bigwigs looked at their profit margins and figured—if for only a brief moment—that managed decline could possibly become managed growth.[111] Unfortunately for DEVCO, oil recovered in the early 1980s, making Cape Breton coal economically precarious once again. Managed decline was on the agenda once again, with slow closure throughout the 1990s, with final closure of the steel plant by 2001.

It is in this moment of the 1980s and 1990s that most of my narrators come of age, leave Cape Breton, and come back to it. It is amidst this backdrop of the social and economic crises of deindustrialization that they live their lives—and other crises interlock. The working-class structure of feeling is strong—yet utterly precarious, as work that underpins it erodes. The coal strike of 1981, powered by the radicalism of young miners, many of whom were brought on during the oil crisis with promises of a lifelong career in coal, tried to halt the acceleration of closure, but ultimately failed. At the same time, DEVCO technocrats and community leaders search for new ways to overcome the eventual end of coal, with some, like Father Greg Macleod, a disciple of the Antigonish Movement, advocating for community economic development and cooperatives, and DEVCO working to establish what would become Cape Breton University—jokingly referred to as "Devco University" by many.[112] Despite these potential pathways for regeneration and a future

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[110] Langford, *The Global Politics of Poverty in Canada*, 211.
[111] William Gillies, "Choosing Nationalization: The Creation of Cape Breton Development Corporation" (History in the Making, Concordia University, May 6 2023).
[112] For DEVCO technocracy, see chapters 5 and 6 of Langford, *The Global Politics of Poverty in Canada*. For the early history of CBU, see MacKinnon, *Closing Sysco*, 160-67. For the history of the Antigonish Movement, see Santo Dodaro and Leonard Pluta, *The Big Picture: The Antigonish Movement of Eastern Nova Scotia* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012).

for a postindustrial Cape Breton, outmigration characterized Cape Breton society from the 1980s to the present. As Kate Beaton writes in her graphic memoir *Ducks:* "Cape Breton used to export fish, coal and steel; but in 2005, its main export is people."[113] As I will discuss later in the chapter, out-migration should not be taken to mean a complete disconnection between Cape Bretoners on the island and those in diaspora. In fact, the movement between Home and Away is a regular one, and one that has characterized the lives of many of my narrators.

Tensions between Home and Away, industrial and anti-modern, and ultimately labour and capital are at the heart of the contested public memory of deindustrializing Cape Breton. As such, they are part and parcel of the stories of this thesis' narrators. The crises that these tensions embody do not stop when we examine the queer community. In fact, as I argue in Chapter 1, looking at the queer community can help us better understand how deindustrialization interlocked with other social phenomena and crises. In particular, this thesis hopes to better understand how queer community emerged outside of metropolitan cities, in areas where the social fabric is eroding.

Queer childhood

Childhood, as queer theorist Kathryn Bond Stockton argues, is a particularly queer thing.[114] To Stockton, queer childhood is a matter of "growing sideways"—of finding alternate queer lifepaths because the heteronormative understanding of 'growing up'—with kids and a spouse—becomes impossible. As Mary Louise Adams argues in her study of sexual regulation among young Ontarians in the post war period, discourses of sexual regulation demand the right kind of appropriately chaste and heterosexual (e.g.: 'leave room for Jesus') expression, while queer sexual

[113] Kate Beaton, *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands* (Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2022), 2.
[114] Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The queer child, or growing sideways in the twentieth century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

and gender expression is either unspoken or dissuaded.[115] In oral history, as Neil Sutherland writes, talking about childhood can prove especially generative.[116] Childhood is bound in layers of emotional and affective density, and exploring childhood memories can help us not only learn about that person's childhood, but the way they speak and relay their story can show us how some of their most formative moments fit into the wider historical picture. My oral history interviews, as with many, begin with discussion of the narrator's childhood, grounding us in time, place, and their own subjectivity. Further, as historian of childhood Kristine Alexander points out, recovering the voices of children in the archive is a task fraught with difficulty.[117] Oral history might be one of the few ways to get at these stories. In this chapter, I take childhood as the entry point that lets us get into the themes that run throughout these narrators' life stories and the history of Cape Breton as a whole.

Charles described to me growing up in Dominion, a former coal town a 20-minute drive northeast of Sydney. A millennial, Charles grew up in the 90s and 00s, when plant and mine closure utterly defined the social environment of Cape Breton. Dominion had not been a coal town for a long while and had shifted into a commuter village serving Sydney and Glace Bay. He told me this:

> Charles: We barely had bus service because people kept throwing bricks at buses.
> Liam: Oh, really? Why?
> Charles: Well, there was nothing else to do, I guess.[118]

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[115] Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).
[116] Neil Sutherland, "When You Listen to the Winds of Childhood, How Much Can You Believe?," *Curriculum Inquiry* 22, no. 3 (1992), https://doi.org/10.2307/1179839.
[117] Kristine Alexander, "Can the Girl Guide Speak? The Perils and Pleasures of Looking for Children's Voices in Archival Tesearch," *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 4 (Summer 2012).
[118] Charles MacKenzie. Interview with the author. December 9 2022.

This feeling of childhood loneliness echoed in other interviews—the feeling that there was not only nothing to do but that there was little else out there—especially as a queer kid. On top of this, narrators recalled experiences deeply familiar to many queer people—of secretly trying on mum's high heels, of being taught a certain way of expressing gender that felt wrong, and of having unexpected moments of desire that felt strong. Yet, these experiences happen in isolation, and queer identity is a product of living in community. The vignette that Charles' anecdote conjures evokes the frustration of an unmet desire. I asked each narrator if they knew or at least knew of any other queer people growing up, and I got similar answers:

> Liam: And so, as a young person like growing up, like, did you know any queer folks or?
> Madonna: My family has connections to the fortress of Louisbourg, and there was a man that worked out there that was gay, who was from New Waterford. I know this is very… So I knew that we knew that he sort of existed. And there was a [occupation omitted to protect anonymity] [from] New Waterford that I heard my parents talk about sympathetically because his queerness was a really poorly kept secret, but he really suffered in trying to keep it secret. He seemed to only date on his travels, so he made trips, maybe two or three times a year. But that's that's--
> Liam: Oh yeah.
> Madonna: A really limited life.
> Liam Devitt: Yes, really. Yeah.
> Madonna: No lesbians, always invisible.[119]

And as Charles told me:

> And my mother actually had had gay relatives. So at the time, they didn't say that just—the way she described it was, "Well, my cousin moved to Halifax and opened up flower shop with his roommate." But you know, yeah… Dorothy—a friend of Dorothy.[120]

Like *The Body Politic* ad, whispers of queerness are all we have—or, as Madonna put it, "poorly kept secrets." For many of my narrators, it seemed like a queer future in Cape Breton was closed off, or at the very least something to hide. Tuma recalled to me the traumatic chain of events that lead to him first learning that there might be queer community somewhere:

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[119] Madonna Doucette. Interview with the author. June 28 2023.
[120] Charles MacKenzie. Interview with the author. December 9 2022.

> I knew I was different in 1975. The Brothers [name] came to Eskasoni and another few brothers came to Eskasoni and were substitute teachers at the Indian Day School, and they were from Mount Cashel [Orphanage in St. John's NL]. Or they had done some things in Mount Cashel and they were to go back and wait till things settle down. Right now, they're looking to escape and then shortly afterwards, Sister [name] caught me with Brother [name] in a compromising situation. And so, she called me "godless sodomite." Not godless, but sodomite. "Dirty Indian red sodomite" … when I was 9, so that's that. I didn't even know what sodomite meant. So, I had to go to the dictionary and find out when it was, so I went and it said that all sodomites live in San Francisco. So, I said, "I'm going to have to go to San Francisco," and I did end up going to San Francisco in the mid-late 80s and lived there in the Mission District. And I did HIV/AIDS outreach.[121]

Instances of sexual abuse like this were not uncommon at Indian Day and Residential Schools. In particular, churches shuffling known abusers from school to school and parish to parish was common practice. Though deeply acute in Indigenous communities, sexual abuse in religious institutions was not exclusive to them. In 2002, David Martin, in his suicide note, accused a Sydney priest of sexual abuse. After that became public in 2003, many others came forward with similar stories, corroborating evidence of systemic and institutionally supported sexual abuse of children in the Diocese of Antigonish, which includes Cape Breton.[122] Nowadays, the once devout region has little love for church-going. Tuma continued after I expressed shock at this story:

> Yeah. So, you know, I tell people that. That's my first [time] thinking when somebody told me that I was gay that I was a sodomite. But everybody else in the community would say "you're just like your older brother Herman," you know, and my older brother Herman had left Eskasoni back in 69 or 70. My father had driven him up to Maine and got him a job at the Playhouse in Maine, and then when they were ready to come back, he just kept going to Boston. And yeah, my brother was about, I think it was 15 or 16 and when he got to Boston, he lived with my aunt for a while. And then he found Wayne at The Pink Elephant or some place. And Wayne and him started a relationship for and until he died for almost 45 years. So, but we all know he was gay, and he lived in Boston. And

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[121] Tuma requested that some names be anonymized. Tuma Young, Interview with the author, November 27, 2022.

[122] "Sex abuse settlement by Antigonish diocese wraps up," *CBC News*, October 31 2012, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/sex-abuse-settlement-by-antigonish-diocese-wraps-up-1.1198284; Jennifer Ludlow, "Diocese of Antigonish selling more properties to pay off sex-abuse deal," *CBC News*, August 16 2016, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/catholic-sex-abuse-settlement-antigonish-1.3727150; "Nova Scotia priest charged with sexual abuse," *CBC News*, March 26 2003, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia-priest-charged-with-sexual-abuse-1.363695.

> but he never uttered the words either. So, when I was in Eskasoni, as I was at the time, it seemed I was the only one. And I couldn't fathom why I was the only one. It's not until later I figured out why. My brother was outed in '69 by my now ex brother-in-law. He yelled and he was threatened and worse, literally chased out the door. You know, he could have been killed? So, my father took him to me and told him he couldn't really come back and everything. So it took another, you know, like 6-7 more years before I was older than I came out, right. And it's still very dangerous at the time. But the danger was from the teachers and the administrators at the Indian Day School, not from my community because everybody kind of knew. But they all hid me and protected me, you know.[123]

Tuma's story serves as a valuable counterpoint to the stories of the other narrators, and also as a reminder that it is often through the violence that is done to us that queers begin to understand where we fit into society. The security of the post war compromise that was afforded to settler coal mining families was not—or rarely afforded to Indigenous peoples. While this thesis is not and cannot be an examination of queer Mi'kmaq experience in Cape Breton, Tuma's story serves to remind us of how colonial and heterosexist oppressions are intertwined, and that discussion of queer childhood in Cape Breton without a recognition of how much childhood differed among settler and Indigenous young people is crucial.

Like Tuma, for Jean and Peter, the influence of religious doctrine in their lives, through both their education and their families, was a massive influence on their perception of their own gender and sexuality as young people. As Jean told me:

> "And I when I was 16, I went to Australia for a year as an exchange student, and the family I lived with, it didn't go to any organized religion or belong to any organized religion. And [they] were lovely people, just like my parents. And I thought, "wait a minute, now." That's my first kind of questioning. "How can you be good and you know and not have anything to do with the church?" That was the time when I really started questioning the whole organized religion aspect in my life. But I think when I look back on when I was a kid growing up as far as I always knew, I did have crushes on boys. I remember in in junior high. But as I got older, I always like liked women more. Like, I thought I "ohh I'm it's because I'm a feminist" [laughs] and you know, I was like the typical tomboy. I didn't clue into that because I just thought women were more and more interesting. And so I definitely

[123] Tuma Young, Interview with the author, November 27, 2022.

> confused the questioning period for a long time and I and my grandmother, died when I was, I think my early 20s. And I think and I didn't come out until I was 33 and I think and it's like partly if my grandmother lived longer, she was 68 when she died, I probably would have delayed coming out because thinking that just because of-- You know you're loved. But I think that would be an embarrassment."[124]

These stories remind us that our perceptions of our gendered and sexual selves are always prefigured by the hopes and anxieties of others. For Jean, it was through travel and seeing a similar, less religiously attached family that began her process of questioning her sexuality. Until then, it seemed like certain futures were blocked off.

On a similar theme, Charles told me about his graduating class:

> Liam: Yeah, and what was it like—I think you said you only came out after high school. But what was it like being gay in high school?
> Charles: Well, that's the sort of period where you start to like… become more of a… sexual being, I think. In your personality, and your growth starts to sort of crystallize it more. And I definitely—I knew I was different. I can't tell you when I started putting that together. But I definitely knew. I mean, I knew years before I came out that I was [gay]. I knew what gay was. But I think it definitely made it harder cause you know, I never. You could never have taken a guy to prom back then. It just wasn't—it wasn't a thing that happened. And I never, you know, I never dated because all of the people [in my graduating class] that I mentioned—five of the 28 people in school came out. We didn't know, it [coming out] was all after school, so we never knew that we were all in the same room at some points.[125]

From there, only a certain kind of futurity is available. We can conceptualize this narrow futurity through what Lauren Berlant might call a relation of "cruel optimism," where aspiration (perhaps to leave Cape Breton; or to live a heteronormative life) becomes a barrier to personal flourishing—which might include a deeper connection to home, or queer community of romantic, sexual, platonic and political kinds.[126] But as these queer kids "grow sideways"—heteronormative

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[124] Jean MacQueen, Interview with the author, June 27 2023.
[125] Charles MacKenzie Interview with the author. December 9 2022.
[126] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

lifepaths are not available to them. Indeed, these lifepaths—that of the steelworker and miner—become less available as the local economy begins to falter.

> Charles: Every year [on Halloween] there were piles of kids, they would all have their dad's DEVCO overalls on and a mask that they bought at Bargain Harold's or Woolco or something like that. And it was like there was a switch flipped at some point. And I stopped getting candy from my grandmother up until she passed away in 2008 and that just stopped. Because at that point, like the mines had been closed for so long, like you didn't have, your father didn't have DEVCO overalls at that point and it went from like when I was a kid, a lot of people still worked in the mines. I had friends whose fathers responded to the Westray mining disaster [of 1992]. I think the term is dredgerman? I can't remember off the top of my head since its obviously been 30 years. And then almost overnight, everybody was working in call centers and there were so many of them because we had ICT, there was Ron Webber, there was—I forget what the one in Glace Bay was called—it's Concentrix now because--
> Liam: Concentrix now.
> Charles: But it used to be something else? It was Stream [sic] for a while, but it was something else before that, so there were six call centers, I think at one point. And it seemed like everybody that that's where everybody went at one point because. It was a steady job. It's not glamorous work, and it was a job you could do when you didn't—you didn't have to retrain for that.[127]

During my visits to Cape Breton for this project, several people mentioned the DEVCO overalls costume tradition to me—almost always to make the same point, that one day there was a connection between fathers and their children through industrial work—and then that all vanished. Charles mentions how sudden the transition from mining and steel to postindustrial call centre work felt. A masculine job that formed both personal and community identities was displaced by precarious service work.

Before coming out, Madonna had a relationship with a man, having two kids. She became a single parent when her partner left her. Madonna is a proud working-class woman—the daughter of a coal miner. Even though she says her family was "poor" growing up, she felt stable. Her own experience as a mother felt very different:

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[127] Charles MacKenzie, Interview with the author. December 9 2022.

> The next generation is supposed to be better, but no one factors into that [if the] next generation is supposed to be better when you have a family like—honestly, when a husband and a father walks out and leaves children behind. There's almost no way for that family to do well. Under my circumstances at least. Plus, my dad died young. So, my dad retired from the coal mines. And then, like, he died at 59.[128]

The continued social reproduction promised by industrial work—a pension, a decent wage to support a whole family—all fell apart, leaving those at the margins disproportionately impacted by this shakeup of the social relations of the time.

Classing queer/queering class

Cape Breton is famous for its working-class pride. Davis Day, celebrated each June 11 marks the anniversary of the murder of miner and trade unionist Bill Davis by company thugs in 1925. Union slogan "stand the gaff", coming from miners' turning around a company executive's derision into a declaration of perserverance, became a household phrase in Cape Breton, and is plastered on picket signs on the island and across Canada to this day.[129] For many of my narrators, who almost all came from working-class backgrounds, relayed to me that working-class consciousness was an integral and ordinary part of being a Cape Bretoner—to the point for some that it seemed everyone was working class. As Charles told me: "This sort of striations and economic class and things like that, I didn't. I didn't know one from the other." While Sydney, being the regional centre, had more wealth and professionals, all the towns in Industrial Cape Breton revolved around industrial labour, and it was that labour that characterised the everyday culture. Here, Madonna told me about her father:

> Madonna: Like my dad being a coal miner was a really big part of my life. He would save a treat out of his lunch can for me to have. So, if he had, like, a pastry for a part of his

[128] Madonna Doucette. Interview with the author. June 28 2023.
[129] Don MacGillivray, "Davis, William," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto-Quebec: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2005). http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/davis_william_15F.html.

> lunch, he would save, like, part of his pastry for me to have and all like, it was just so normal that there was always, like, a black corner of the sandwich in his lunch can because coal miners were very careful to only touch one corner of their sandwich because their hands were so dirty, you know? I'd open up the can and I'd see like the sandwich corner, and he would save me something out of his lunch can. And it was like a it was a classic metal lunch can. You know, poverty was a very different thing than it is right now, because we all sort of looked poor. There wasn't this sort of like huge chasm between the haves and the haves nots like the kids that came from money in our town were like teachers' kids or business owners' kids. But like a lot of times, we kind of looked and acted all the same. Like there wasn't this hierarchy and fashion and technology that divides people like today. So, like a teacher's kid kind of looked and sounded like a coal miners kid. And as I've gotten older, I've also noticed like we were poor, but we had a summer home in Margaree. Like that was very common in coal miners to have, like, a summer home in Mira or in Margaree Island. And so, I remember there's this family story of my brother coming home from school. He was wearing jeans that my mother had patched, and he told my mom that a kid was jealous that his mom loved him enough to patch his jeans. Right? So, like, lucky poverty versus unlucky poverty? I don't know. It's weird. Sort of… Very much working class. My father had his own stigmas that, you know, he had a lot of pride, so… Being employed in New Waterford during the 70s and 80s was really like. When the coal mines went on strike in the 1980s, my father refused to take social assistance.
> Liam: Oh really?
> Madonna: There was something that was deep in his marrow that he would not [take the social assistance]. But I mean it was there for families that needed it, and it wasn't a sign of his ability to, you know, support the family. But my parents didn't argue a whole lot. And I remember one argument with my father saying that he would rob a bank—which of course my father was a very law-abiding person and wouldn't ever—but he would rob a bank before he would ever go on assistance. So, there was a sense of pride that he was working class.[130]

This idea of working-classness met several challenges as industrial decline became inevitable. Ian McKay, in his germinal work *Quest of the Folk,* argues that an anti-modern Celtic sensibility developed in Nova Scotia to paper over its industrial past, in part because fiddle music draws more tourists than coal mines, but also because the radicalism integral to Nova Scotian working-class tradition was anathema to the personal values of the folklorists that lead this anti-modern folklore revival, like Helen Creighton.[131] To McKay, Creighton and other folklorists constructed a conservative logic of innocence and applied it to Nova Scotia, from which we can see how

[130] Madonna Doucette. Interview with the author. June 28 2023.
[131] McKay, *Quest of the Folk : Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, 99-100.

"Creighton's thought naturalized conservative assumptions about class, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, irrationalism, and local identity."[132] My invocation of McKay's critique of Creighton is not to setup a strawman between a always reactionary folkism and a righteously workerist industrial culture. Rather, I wish to illustrate a key cleavage within the culture of the island, and thus the milieu in which queer community is formed.

Despite the difference in character that the industrial and folk versions of the island have, they have something in common: they are largely settler creations. In Mi'kmaw, Cape Breton is called Unama'ki, meaning "land of fog."[133] In fact, the folk view of the island often serves to create an imagined past where Indigenous peoples are erased, and their land becomes more and more associated with the settler culture (i.e. Scotland), rather than their own. Industrial development also serves to perpetuate settler colonialism. Steven High coined the term "mill colonialism" in his study of the forestry industry in Sturgeon Falls, showing how the development and eventual closure of the pulp mill served to exploit Indigenous peoples and perpetuate settler title.[134]

To Tuma, a Mi'kmaq two-spirit elder from Eskasoni, the working-class culture of Cape Breton was a white settler one—and one he was not welcome to. In an economistic sense, Tuma and his family were certainly working class. His father drove a three-ton truck, scavenging for scrap metal and hauling odd jobs. Tuma's first job, as a small child, was picking blueberries with his family, as a migrant worker in Maine. The benefits of the post-war compromise afforded to

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[132] McKay, *Quest of the Folk : Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, 100.
[133] "Commonly Used Indigenous Terms & Phrases You May Not Be Familiar With," 2020, accessed February 12 2024, https://www.cbu.ca/future-students/blog/commonly-used-indigenous-terms-phrases-you-may-not-be-familiar-with/.
[134] High, "Deindustrialization on the Industrial Frontier: The Rise and Fall of Mill Colonialism in Northern Ontario."

steelworker or coal families were blocked off to Indigenous peoples—or at least made incredibly hard to access. Where Madonna's father mined coal, Tuma's family salvaged scrap coal off of North Sydney's harbour, being paid four cents an hour. As Tuma told me: "nobody worked in the mines. Nobody went underground. None of us, anyways, because those were good jobs."[135] Tuma's story is incredibly important to the argument I make in this chapter. To understand the formation of queer community and identity in Cape Breton, understanding how class and race interact is critical. Where for some of my narrators, the geographic and symbolic significance of the coal mines and steel mills is great, for Tuma, they mean much different things. Rather than a pillar of *the* community, they might be the pillar of an exclusionary group. Further, as Scott Lauria Morgensen argues, LGBTQ+ activisms and communities in the United States (and I would add Canada), are almost entirely projects designed to be compatible with a white settler state, to the exclusion and erasure of Indigenous peoples and their diverse genders and sexualities.[136] With this, not only is the industrial culture of Cape Breton a problematic, but also what nascent queer communities exist.

How then, when working-class culture in Cape Breton is complicated by antimodernist folk revivalism and the experience of Indigenous people, does queerness fit into this? In Chapter 1, I argued that a queer study of deindustrialization must get at how class and queerness intersect and impact each other. What makes a queer worker relate to their class position, class culture, and actual labour differently than a straight one? For my narrators, queerness and working-classness often exist in two distinct siloes. A narrator will recount only details about class in a question about class, or only details about queerness in a question about queerness. One of the strengths of oral

[135] Tuma Young, Interview with the author, November 27, 2022.
[136] Scott Lauria Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 11-13.

history is that it allows themes and memories to mingle together as they are remembered to the interviewer. They become tangled, messy, complicated.

Yet I found that my narrators rarely let "queer" and "working-class" be put together, as if they are mutually exclusive. Naturally, the existence of the working-class queers that many of my narrators were and are, proves such a premise to be false. If asked directly, I am certain that my narrators would quickly affirm the notion that working-classness and queerness do exist simultaneously. Though, as Alessandro Portelli tells us, the way that a memory is remembered back to us is almost as significant as the memory of itself.[137] I asked Peter what he thought the reason behind the macho and hyper-masculine attitude of New Waterford's working-class men was. He insisted that it was not because of the nature of the work that was done, but because of the influence of sporting culture and religion, and certainly not because it was an industrial community.[138] Of course, while drawing a clean line between industrial work and homophobia is contrary to the aim of this entire thesis, it is significant that Peter would deny any connection so strongly. The lack of interdiscursivity between these memories reflects to us the tense position Cape Breton queers were in from the 80s to the 2000s. They were a community waiting to be sown together. Others like them were visible enough to know that other queers existed, but the social milieu of the time precluded contact. How then, does the community form?

Queer space, place and community

As Charles joked to me after I mentioned *The Body Politic* ad to him: "Well, in the 80s in Cape Breton, there was nothing else to do but recreational homosexuality."[139] *The Body Politic*

[137] Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 51-52.
[138] Peter Steele, Interview with the author. November 30th 2022.
[139] Charles MacKenzie. Interview with the author. December 9 2022.

hopefuls mentioned this too, one referring to a "dull life." In *that part of the country,* queer life was especially difficult and isolating. In embarking on this project I hoped to speak with queer steel and coal workers. I expected to hear stories of illicit love affairs amongst co-workers, of being forced to perform gender in a certain way in order to maintain employment, anxiety about being one of the only queers in the community, and a wrestling with a conflict between their identity as a worker and as a queer person. In this dream, I was the one unearthing all of that. To use the Thompsonian language, I was the one rescuing the gay steel mill from the "enormous condescension of posterity."[140] Alas, that dream remains a dream, and I could not find anyone queer who directly worked in these industries. Nevertheless, with the stories my narrators, many of whom came of age in the 'half-life' of deindustrialization shared with me fragmentary stories of the community that I hoped to access—especially the spaces and places that this small, insular and disparate community gathered.

I asked all who I interviewed about what spaces they went to meet other queers. Geraldine told her interviewer that it was at house parties that she first saw women with other women, further inspiring her to explore. Peter told me about men cruising on Sydney's Esplanade, and in Cossett Heights—then a forest, now a residential subdivision. Sydney, despite being the de facto metropolis of Cape Breton, was too small to support an official gay bar. Instead, Cape Breton queers met in other establishments—and frequently enough to allow the venues to garner a reputation. Peter mentioned Cutters, a bar he described as "high-class" and thus naturally attracting a homosexual clientele, as well as the bar of the now-demolished Ile Royale Hotel as being particularly cruisy. In 1985, Peter and his friends decided to organize a dance:

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[140] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 13.

> And we all decided at one point, we're going to put something on and see how many gay people we can muster together to come and enjoy this night of music, dancing and whatever. So, on Lingan Road there is a senior citizens hall. When you drive on Lingan Road, you cannot see the senior citizens' hall because of where it is in the woods. In fact, it has a winding driveway to get to us. You literally are up to the parking lot before you see it. And we thought that was the safe haven to have this get together.

It is significant that Peter mentions the seclusion of the venue as paramount. Even explicit efforts to get the widest turnout possible come into conflict with practical, and very real concerns about safety.

In September of 1991, Geraldine was asked for help. The child of some friends of her's was gay—and had a drinking problem. He landed in the hospital after a failed suicide attempt. Geraldine, as an out lesbian, was called on to try and do something for him. Following this, Geraldine took it upon herself to put some sort of initiative together. This first started with a LGB help-line.[141] She used her own home phone for it—even going on the radio to promote it. She was greeted with a deluge of calls, finding it difficult to handle it all by herself. She told the interviewer that it was nearly impossible to get others in the community to volunteer. She spoke about the difficulties of being the single local resource for queer people: "Because I'm here, they make you feel like you're gonna make everything all better for them, but you can't. They need more than just one person to talk to, they need other friends."

Eventually, the phone line turned into the Island Gay and Lesbian Association, with Island standing for "is something good and needs doing." In the interview, Geraldine describes designing the *Island News* newsletter on a friend's Macintosh, and distributing it, without trouble, to local businesses across the island, citing large demand. They held initial meetings at Scrouples, a hair salon in Sydney Mines, before moving to the then-University College of Cape Breton when

[141] Here I use LGB as it was the term used by Geraldine in the interview. While I doubt that Geraldine's organization was openly transphobic or exclusionary, this fits with in a wider lack of visibility of trans people in gay/lesbian/bisexual activism and community spaces at the time.

members of the AIDS Coalition of Cape Breton joined the organization. She described the newsletter to the interviewer as: "A way for gay people to make friends with other gay people. We have a friendship spot there. And if someone is looking for more than a friendship, I tell 'em be honest, put down that it's a relationship you're after." Geraldine described a plan to have three socials a month, two at homes and one in a community hall. All of the events would be dry: "too hard to get drunk here in a small town and get gay things going. I'll tell you; we'd have a feud on our hands! […] This is something new and I don't want to see it destroyed." One young man who she didn't know, showed up at her house at 4:30 AM and demanded that the events have alcohol. Geraldine noted that there was a problem in the community, often at gay dances organized by others, of older people taking advantage of young people and teens. As Peter mentioned to me, talking about the dances he organized, and what happened when he had to find a replacement DJ:

> But unfortunately, after a number of years, we ended up getting another guy that was very adamant about doing the music and he did a wonderful job with the music and even brought in a light show and the whole kit and caboodle. But unfortunately, he would bring underage guys to the dance to help work and get them drunk and… I had few other things so I left. I gave up everything [with the dances] altogether.[142]

I asked Charles about the dances as well:

> Liam: Yeah, sorry. Just remembered one thing that I wrote down. Again, the gay dances you went to--
> Charles: Oh, I'd no I didn't, I didn't go.
> Liam: Oh, you didn't?
> Charles: No, because it was… Like, I don't drive for a few reasons. So, to get into town on the bus and then late at night, you have to cab home. And I didn't [want to do that]. I think I would have gone if I had something to go with me. But nobody I knew wanted to go. And they didn't at the time have the best reputation. Now, that might just be rumor mongering, and you know, people sort of throwing shade on like a queer space and a queer experience. But I never had any real interest in going beyond sort of morbid curiosity.
> Liam: Yeah, no, like then, like, tell me more. Like what reputation did they have?
> Charles: Well, we, I mean there was there was we all knew there was alcohol and there was there was drugs which I know from people that went there. Some of the—the rumor was

[142] Peter Steele, Interview with the author. November 30th 2022.

> that some of the older members of the community who should have known better were a little bit more predatory towards some of the younger guys.[143]

Problems like Charles and Peter describe were, and indeed are hardly exclusive to regional or rural settings. Sexualized abuses of power are a constant. With Cape Breton, and other settings where the community is small, and rather than only one gay dance party rumored to be unsafe, *the* gay dance party is unsafe, only further reproducing isolation. We might find Geraldine's concern around alcohol reflected in this—that this was not only a matter of keeping the party fun for everyone, but a very real concern that if the event gained a negative reputation, the critical mass to bring about another would not nessicarily come about.

Despite what seems like a successful organization, Geraldine found it difficult, describing what she felt as a lack of real interest on the part of the community in being part of a community organization—rather than just a committee that puts on dances. Beyond Geraldine's interview and two issues of the *Island News* held at the ArQuives, I could not find other mention of the Island Association—and despite my best efforts, I could not track down Geraldine herself for an interview, that is, if she is still alive.

The Island association and the dances were both in their own ways fighting for visibility. That is to say, enough visibility so that other queer people know you exist, but not so much that it opens the nascent community up to even more violence. Tuma mentioned to me that experiences of visibility and community differed across settler/Indigenous lines:

> Tuma: The only other person that I knew was talked about for being gay, was Roy Gould. Roy was—guess he would say bisexual, but more gay man than anything else. But

[143] Charles MacKenzie. Interview with the author. December 9 2022.

> he was the first chief [of Membertou] who was the first openly gay man to become chief member, too. And I was since 1970-71[144.]
>
> Liam: Ohh wow! So, like pretty early, he was out in the 70s?
>
> Tuma: Oh yeah, he was out, man. He's always been out, but not in the white community.[145]

This anecdote reminds us that visibility and community are socially contingent on a number of factors, especially racial and settler/indigenous relationships. Unfortunately, this thesis cannot fulsomely explore this tension, nor do I believe I am the best person to explore the history of 2SLGBTQ+ Mi'kmaq histories. Nonetheless, this reminds us that claims to community building are often necessarily exclusive ones; who is in the community and who is not?

Migration

The history of Cape Breton—like the history of many queer communities—is inseparable from migration. All the narrators had, at some point, left Cape Breton—for greener pastures, education, love, or all of the above. Only Geraldine, the archived interview, had never left Cape Breton. As Gary Burrill writes, the back-and-forth between Home and Away is a central tension for many Maritimers.[146] The Maritime home is valorized as an idyll of hard work and simple folk, whereas the cosmopolitan Away (or perhaps the resource-frontier variant we might find in the Alberta tar sands), is either a distraction, a temporary necessity, or at worst, a betrayal of one's core values and ancestors. As I mentioned in the introduction, the tension of migration shaped many of my interactions with prospective narrators. Why would I, someone from the place that

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[144] Tuma is slightly off here, Gould was elected in 1969, re-elected again in 1970, then resigning in 1971. "Roy Gould," accessed February 12 2024, https://www.membertouheritagepark.com/node/44.
[145] Tuma Young, Interview with the author, November 27, 2022.
[146] Burrill, *Away: Maritimers in Massachusetts, Ontario, and Alberta: An Oral History of Leaving Home*, xi-xii.

people go to for opportunity, come to the place that people leave? I always responded with an earnest answer—Cape Breton is interesting. On that point, we could agree.

Why then, did almost all of my narrators leave—and come back? The metronormative queer story of migration shows the young queer leaving the past behind—of never coming back, of leaving the toxicity of the periphery for the community and anonymity of the metropole. Geraldine, when she operated the Island Gay and Lesbian Association phone line in the early 1990s, would often hand out copies of Halifax gay newspaper the *Gaezette* to queers in need of direction*:* "A lot of gay people here in Cape Breton don't even know that down in Halifax, four and a half hours drive down there's four or five gaybars, you can get a *Gaezette.* So now I give them a *Gaezette* and bring them to the club to show them. … I definitely think there should be something [a gaybar] there [in Cape Breton] for them." Here, Halifax is a way out, a place for potential community, but there's nevertheless a recognition that queer community in Cape Breton ought to exist, for and by the people living there. Geraldine mentioned how many of her friends moved away, and they asked her why she wouldn't follow. She replied: "I don't feel I should have to leave here. I think that's sad." For Geraldine, there was a refusal of a metronormative lifepath, but also a recognition that the metropole had resources. Jean moved to Halifax to attend Dalhousie University, and Peter moved there for the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Tuma also lived in Halifax for a time for work. Madonna bemoaned the brain drain of talented queers who couldn't make a career in Cape Breton:

> Liam Devitt: Yeah, did other queer and trans folks that you knew in Cape Breton, did they leave as well?
> Madonna: Yeah. So, you know, the brain drain is something that happens in the queer community especially and--
> Liam: Oh, totally. Oh yeah.
> Madonna: The amount of impressive people who have left Cape Breton, pre-being-impressive and gone off to a city to be their authentic self. To be able to date and fall in

> love and to dress the way they want to dress and then also to develop incredible careers and be, you know, huge economic engines in Toronto or Montreal or Vancouver wherever they decided to go. All to the detriment of us because they could have if they felt like they could have done what they did and stayed in Cape Breton, maybe they would have. But they were chasing their freedoms first.[147]

Whether because of economic imperatives or by homophobic discrimination—or rather the imbrication of the two, queer Cape Bretoners were caught up into broader patterns of out-migration. Examining their experiences can show us the complexity of maritime migration histories. For Madonna herself, she left for Vancouver with her then-husband with hopes of greener economic pastures. Soon after arriving, she got pregnant with her first child, naming him Breton in tribute to her island home. As a pregnant woman and later as a mother, she found difficulty getting work, and after not too long, Madonna returned to Cape Breton.

While many of my narrators relayed to me stories of trauma, discrimination and injustice, many were adamant that Cape Breton not only is—but was an accepting and safe place for queer people. As Charles, the youngest of my narrators, noted, "Atlantic Canada has the opinion it has the image in general of being quite socially conservative, and I can honestly say the exact opposite was my experience growing up. No one called me a faggot until I moved to Ontario [at 25]."[148] As Charles came of age in the early 00s, looking for post-secondary opportunities, he chose to attend the University College of Cape Breton (UCCB; now Cape Breton University), rather than leave. He told me what the sense of comings and goings was like then:

> For like you know, what is it 13 years? In school or something like that? Until you're at university. So, there was very little change. I mean it was at that point [where] like Alberta's economy hadn't really started pulling in workers in the East Coast, so we didn't have all these people moving away, if somebody moved, it was like a big deal.[149]

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[147] Madonna Doucette. Interview with the author. June 28 2023.
[148] Charles MacKenzie. Interview with the author. December 9 2022.
[149] Charles MacKenzie. Interview with the author. December 9 2022.

I find myself returning to the insistence of many of the narrators that Cape Breton was and is a good place to be queer. The refrain being that the island is certainly more accepting today than in the past, but still accepting in the 70s, 80s and 90s. However, others, like Peter told me:

> The whole change in the industrialized world here has affected this island in every possible way you could think of, you know? I'm just glad that with the years of an open gay community that people are more comfortable to stay here, regardless of what the economics is. Because certainly being gay before… Although for me that wasn't the factor… For a lot of people, it was a factor that living elsewhere was a better choice for them.[150]

Peter did leave Cape Breton as a young adult, to attend the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and then work in Toronto. He told me that his queerness was never a factor in his decision to leave or not—yet the community he found in Toronto and Halifax was very impactful for him. When he came back, he knew that he couldn't go back into the closet too:

> So I moved back in 1984 to New Waterford. It was as homophobic as it was when I left in 1973. And when you live a very open gay life and you come back to this and that—it [homophobia] was something I just wasn't comfortable with and I wasn't changing who I was. I was very comfortable with who I was.[151]

For myself, I can't help but question the interpretation of 'always-accepting', or at the very least look at it a bit closer. While I do not doubt my narrators' feelings or their life experience, I detected a strong need to preemptively defend Cape Breton from accusations of being a homophobic backwater. Cape Breton gets maligned enough, either by mainland Nova Scotians or by the rest of the country—see Stephen Harper's comments on the "culture of defeatism" of Atlantic Canadians, something many on the island took as a personal insult.[152] I am reminded of geographer Richard Florida's theorization of the "creative class"—a popular idea in the early

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[150] Peter Steele, Interview with the author. November 30th 2022.
[151] Peter Steele, Interview with the author. November 30th 2022.
[152] "Harper plans to battle 'culture of defeatism' in Atlantic Canada," *CBC News*, May 30 2002, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/harper-plans-to-battle-culture-of-defeatism-in-atlantic-canada-1.306785.

2000s. Florida contends that economically lagging places were so because they did little to attract the so-called "creative class"—graphic designers, cultural workers, artists, tech workers—because they were socially backwards, calling out homophobia in particular.[153] Florida's deeply flawed theorization only blames non-metropolitan communities for being poor because they are poor, and ignores how "creative class" led gentrification affected working class communities in metropoles. Unfortunately, as Steven High and many other critics have argued, Florida's thinking serves as a neoliberal cudgel wielded against working-class and (post)industrial communities, shaming them for being allegedly backward.[154] My narrators' defence of Cape Breton is likely a response to attitudes informed by thinking like Florida's, associating industrial decline with an imagined refusal of cosmopolitan liberalism.

Whether contemporary Cape Breton is, as Madonna said to me, "one of the best places in Canada to be a queer youth" or not—it is deeply significant that through their own life stories, these narrators are taking ownership of their home, and envisioning a new queer past and future for Cape Breton.[155] This is an island where the gay steel mill, whether constructed out of bricks and mortar or rather aspirations and fabulations—exists in the collective memory of a nascent queer community. Indeed, the gay steel mill ought to be constructed by materials both real and fictive! As Cape Bretoners come and go from the island, caught up in the machinations of the energy transition from coal to oil, they build on their relationship to the place. Now, I will examine the most emotionally charged instance of queer migration in Cape Breton—the AIDS crisis.

AIDS

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[153] Richard L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 2 ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2012).
[154] Steven High, "The Forestry Crisis: Public Policy and Richard Florida's Clock of History," *Our Times*, Jan/Dec, 2009/2010.
[155] Madonna Doucette. Interview with the author. June 28 2023.

The onset of the AIDS epidemic profoundly changed the lives of Cape Breton queers. The phenomenon of AIDS and deindustrialization colliding is not one exclusive to Cape Breton. Ruth Reichard, in *Blood and Steel,* examines the story of Ryan White, a boy who contracted HIV from an impure medication in Kokomo, Indiana, a steel town facing plant closure.[156] Reichard shows how White's fight to attend public school discursively overlapped with the town's struggle for national relevancy and economic livelihood as the town's main employer closes.

Jean was one of the first employees of the AIDS Coalition. As a health promotion worker, she performed outreach on HIV/AIDS, safer sex, harm reduction, and anti-homophobia workshops. During her degree at Dalhousie, Jean met public health nurse Janet Bickerton, who brought Jean aboard on her project to apply for Health Canada funding for what would become the Metro Area AIDS Council in Halifax. Simultaneously, Ron Reynolds, a Licensed Practical Nurse from Glace Bay was gathering support from his fellow healthcare workers for a Cape Breton-based organization. Reynolds' partner, Michael Anderson, was HIV-positive, and had to regularly go to Halifax for treatment. From there, the idea of an AIDS organization in Cape Breton was floated, either as a satellite of a provincial-level or Halifax-based organization or as a stand-alone organization—which is what eventually happened due to restrictions on grant funding. For much of the 1990s, Jean was either the Coalition's sole employee, or part of a very small staff. Jean related to me her early days working at the AIDS Coalition:

> I was at the AIDS Coalition a couple years before I came out and there were many men who came home to die because they couldn't afford… They were so sick. And so, they didn't come home for the great HIV care they're going to get. They came home because it was family, and a lot of times they were rejected by their family and now they're coming home because they are HIV positive or diagnosed with AIDS. And so, in my experience

[156] Ruth Reichard, *Blood and Steel: Ryan White, the AIDS Crisis and Deindustrialization in Kokomo, Indiana* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2021). Ebook.

> with many, many men in particular, that was a thing. They were disowned from families. It just not wasn't talked about.[157]

This phenomenon of AIDS patients "coming home to die" held great resonance for many of the narrators. As Peter told me:

> [Through my work with the AIDS Coalition], I came to know a lot of guys that lived elsewhere, who left here after high school and contracted HIV wherever they lived and when it developed into AIDS. They moved back here, right? Some moved back to be with their families, some moved back to be taken care of by their family and a lot of them moved back here because it was cheaper to live here than where they lived and it was at a time when you were paying for medication yourself, it wasn't being covered, so it was more financially feasible for them to be living here. Even if they weren't with their family it was still more affordable for them to live here. We had members on the board that had AIDS and have since passed away.[158]

This migration pattern, influenced by the colliding crises of AIDS and deindustrialization, forced Cape Breton queers into action. In fact, when she started working at the AIDS Coalition, Jean wasn't out. Nevertheless, part of the job was doing anti-homophobia work as Jean told me:

> So, then we at the beginning too there because we were the AIDS Coalition, it was automatically assumed we were gay friendly. And so, we became more of that. This is a safe place for people who are [gay]. So, it became kind of both, and we got some funding projects and through the AIDS Coalition was a natural progression. Partly, prevention of HIV is "don't be poor", you know? And, initially it was many men that, yeah, moved away and had to come home because financially that they […] They should be there. The second couldn't work and to the place where you go is family. They take you in and a lot of times [the] family was so…We were dealing with the family support and they're dealing with finding out sometimes if their son is gay. And ill! Then there's the whole AIDS phobia. You know, what do you do? You don't have to disinfect everything! Those conversations and then also support around what it, you know, anti homophobia. So, yeah it was a double whammy for the longest time, so we naturally got into well, "if we can make it a safer space for people who are who are having sex with men." And then the conversations of using condoms for protection is, you know, so it's that just the work of the AIDS Coalition was meant that we did, you know, more work within [gay communities].[159]

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[157] Jean MacQueen, Interview with the author, June 27 2023.
[158] Peter Steele, Interview with the author. November 30th 2022.
[159] Jean MacQueen, Interview with the author, June 27 2023.

It was through this work in queer communities, often working with queer colleagues, that Jean says she was able to finally come to terms with her own internalized homophobia, and live openly gay.

Certainly, unprotected sex is not the only risk factor for AIDS. Like in many deindustrialized regions, as the mines and steel plant closed, many turned to addiction. The AIDS Coalition was caught in between these interrelated crises of public health, of queers coming home to die, and an opioid epidemic—both of which were exacerbated by the destructive force of deindustrialization. As Peter Thompson argues in his analysis of the film *Cottonland,* documenting the opioid crisis in Glace Bay in the early 2000s, addiction is framed like contagion—a disease destroying the otherwise idyllic community.[160] Not unlike AIDS. Madonna told me about her time working at the AIDS Coalition in the 00s-2010s:

> [I was] just the most naive kind of version of a person that you could experience. I was. And so, it was a real learning opportunity for me to like hear their stories and to have people with substance abuse disorder humanized, right? Because they were always just people with addictions, were just vilified in my family. So you know. Being shocked to hear that the woman that was sitting beside me, who was haggard and unshowered and generally speaking unhealthy looking. To hear that she was a beautiful young bride not that many years ago, and had a home and like a life—a middle class life that she lost to drugs. It kind of took me back a little bit because I had never been exposed to the humanity of people with addictions. Just the bad stories. You know, so it taught me empathy and compassion. It taught me that people are much more complicated than the one-dimensional stories that you hear gossiped at the kitchen table.[161]

In Cape Breton, AIDS patients moving back for care further exposes the fragility of the island's society, economy, and indeed one of the key cultural narratives of Cape Breton. As Peter Thompson argues in *Nights Below Foord Street,* Nova Scotian postindustrial culture often casts

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[160] Peter Thompson, *Nights Below Foord Street: Literature and Popular Culture in Post-Industrial Nova Scotia* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020), 120-21. https://canadacommons.ca/artifacts/1878855/nights-below-foord-street/.
[161] Madonna Doucette. Interview with the author. June 28 2023.

itself in strong contrast to the metropolitan cultures of the rest of English Canada.[162] Living at home in Nova Scotia is strong, masculine, and part of a long lineage of hardworking men, whereas leaving and building a life elsewhere is a betrayal of those values, a betrayal of the toil of the miners or the fishers or the steelworkers who came before, and who dutifully reproduced the family. With this return migration brought on by AIDS, this relationship between the downhome-conservative-nativism of Home, and the cosmopolitan betrayal of Away is made queer. Where a return home might be triumphant, or at least cause for learning the valuable moral of the importance of home or family, it is a bittersweet moment, and an indictment of how Canadian society—rural or metropolitan—has failed queers. As Madonna told me, when HIV patients didn't die, they were left with the consequences:

> As far as I knew, I hadn't ever met anyone [with HIV/AIDS]. And so and hearing their stories and getting to hear about how they came home—a lot of men came home to die and then some of them *didn't* die and then they had to figure out what their life was going to look like. And it was just enriching to me that working at the Ally Center/AIDS Coalition, it enriched me deeper than any sort of formal education.[163]

Jean told me the mentality of some patients was like, "'I'm not going to be around in six months' time or a years' time, why then worry about that Visa bill?"[164]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, I was not able to speak to anyone who moved back to Cape Breton to convalesce. Whether we're talking about New York, Montreal, Port-au-Prince or New Waterford, the AIDS crisis was and is immeasurably destructive, especially in how it disrupted the cultural memory of queer communities. Like many of the topics discussed in this chapter, what we know about the lives of people who came back to Cape Breton to live with AIDS is fragmentary.

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[162] Thompson, *Nights Below Foord Street: Literature and Popular Culture in Post-Industrial Nova Scotia*, 90-91.
[163] Madonna Doucette. Interview with the author. June 28 2023.
[164] Jean MacQueen, Interview with the author, June 27 2023.

I do not mean to present my discussion here as all-encompassing or definitive. Unfortunately, I do not think such a discussion will truly be possible because of the paucity of sources. Rather, I hope to complicate understandings of out-migration and metronormativity.

Queer work

Allan Berube introduced us to the concept of "queer work"; jobs that queers take on because they are less exploitative or discriminatory, that they are available to queers where other jobs are not or are types of (often also feminized) labour that queer people are allowed into.[165] Berube's discussion turned to the history of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union, where white gay men were deemed acceptable surrogates for workers of colour on segregated ocean lines, as well as other instances of service work that queers often find themselves in. Taking Berube's discussion and applying it to Cape Breton can help us better understand the island's transition to a postindustrial economy, and better understand this thesis' narrators' life stories. While the narrators span different ages and generations, coming into working life while Cape Breton's economy was at different points of transition, we see similar patterns. How we work forms a significant portion of the fabric of our society, embodying the relationships between production and consumption, labour and capital, and individual and collective identity. In the context of deindustrializing Cape Breton, where masculinized industrial labour erodes and is replaced by precarious work in the service sector, the public sector, call centres, and community organizations, we can see how the shift in the types of work being undertaken affects the form of queer communities.

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[165] Allan Bérubé, ""Queer Work" and Labor History," in *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History*, ed. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

As I mentioned earlier, leaving Cape Breton for work or study was common for them, even for those who came of age at a time when leaving was uncommon, and for men, industrial employment was expected. As Peter, who graduated high school in 1973 told me: “If I were to go through my yearbook, just about all of the guys in that yearbook ended up working in the coal mines. I'm the only one in my family that graduated from college, right? I have two brothers that went to college, but they never finished college. I'm the only one that graduated.” Peter told me that it was his artistic ability that allowed him to leave and to have the chance at upward mobility, something he says that the community was deeply excited for. I am reminded of *Billy Elliot,* where a young gay-coded boy in the coalfields of County Durham during the 1984 Miners’ Strike excels at ballet, providing the last hope for his community on the precipice of utter defeat.[166]

As previously mentioned, Jean worked as a health promotion worker for the AIDS Coalition of Cape Breton for most of her professional career. Before that, while studying at Dalhousie University in Halifax, she worked at a Christian bookstore—not because she agreed with the business, but because she had to, as she jokingly recalled to me: “finance her drinking and cannabis use all through university.”[167] Here we see a similar story to that of Peter. Though Jean was born into a more middle-class family (father was a salesman, as opposed to Peter’s coal miner) there is a similar pattern of upward mobility. Indeed, Tuma as well, was able to attend university, become a lawyer, and become deeply involved in Mi’kmaq, two-spirit, and legal advocacy. For the younger people I spoke to, like Madonna and Charles, this promise of social mobility was complicated by the downturn in coal and steel which became incredibly pronounced by the 1990s.

[166] Stephen Daldry, "Billy Elliot," (United Kingdom: Universal, 2000).
[167] Jean MacQueen, Interview with the author, June 27 2023.

Both Madonna and Charles worked in call centers. After working as a stage manager for a community theatre for a decade, Madonna worked in a call centre selling balance transfer credit cards to the US market. Charles also worked in one when he was a student in the early 2000s:

> Liam: All right, so you got a job at a call center, yes?
>
> Charles: Yes, this was when everybody in town worked at a call center. Like there was a lot of older adults who had really left the island and, you know, had really, like, my mother had never really had a "career." But they knew that I had ambitions beyond staying in a call center my entire life. And they were really supportive of that. I have to say like—I remember I was working at the call center when I got into grad school and a bunch of people made a big fuss because I got my letter with my scholarships and everything in it because I opened it at work.[168]

Call centres, along with warehouses, are common industries that move into deindustrialized areas.[169] As Jenny Ceridwen Cockburn notes in her study of unemployment in post-industrial Cape Breton, where work in Devco coal mines created a culture of mutual respect and solidarity fostered by trade unionism, call centres were generally non-union, and workers faced abusive calls from clients, and managers were more empowered to seek retaliation against employees due to the precarity of the work and the simple fact that they could have their pick of employees due to the high unemployment rate.[170] In Cockburn's thesis, written in 2005, she interviews a former Devco miner who detests his current call centre employment, telling her that the labour conditions are poor and many of his colleagues would rather collect Unemployment Insurance than work that kind of job.[171]

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[168] Charles MacKenzie. Interview with the author. December 9 2022.
[169] For a discussion of how post-industrial blue-collar employment affects communities, see James Pattison, "'The whole of Shirebrook got put on an ASBO': The co-production of territorial stigma in a former colliery town," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 54, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518x211048198.
[170] Jenny Ceridwen Cockburn, "'Getting Enough Stamps for the Pogey' and Other Strategies for Surviving Cape Breton's Deindustrialization" (MA Concordia University, 2005), 80-85, https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/8658/1/MR10196.pdf.
[171] Cockburn, "'Getting Enough Stamps for the Pogey'," 86-87.

For Charles, though working in a call centre was not his favourite, he enjoyed the wide variety of co-workers. He told me that many of his colleagues were rarely employable otherwise, including many queer people. He shared with me stories about a former coworker who he called "not exactly a positive example of homosexuality", who went cruising on his lunch break and came back to tell everyone about it. Similarly for Madonna, she enjoyed call centre work, and the people she met during it. It was a daytime job with decent health benefits, and for single mother Madonna, that was deeply important. Madonna still had some important grievances with call centre work, however:

> I just want to say something though about the call center work, because you're talking about deindustrialization. So one of the things that always really pisses me off is that the traditional industrial jobs that were in Cape Breton were designed for men's bodies and hired men as the breadwinners for the family. But when those industrial jobs went and more and more single parents like myself emerged, without fathers and husbands making money—the jobs that replaced those industrial jobs were low paying call center jobs, and so it almost guaranteed an entire generation of poverty for those—mostly women—that worked in call centers. And I have a real problem with the political divide of good paying jobs for men versus good paying jobs for women, and that is a whole rant. You could do a whole 'nother thesis about that.[172]

With the call centre, in particular with Charles' experience, we have a very curious example of post-industrial employment being more welcoming to queers and allowing them to make bonds within the workplace together, yet still deeply exploitative and precarious. Whereas with Madonna's experience, call centre work was a symptom of a deeply inequitable transition that shifted not only breadwinning duties to women, but also, as she says, "guaranteed a generation of poverty." From that work, Madonna found employment with the AIDS Coalition in 2010.

[172] Madonna Doucette. Interview with the author. June 28 2023.

As Myrl Beam writes in *Gay Inc.,* gay community and advocacy organizations became increasingly integrated into a non-profit industrial complex following the AIDS crisis.[173] Beam argues that the AIDS crisis forced organizations that were dedicated to managing the crisis to incorporate as non-profits in order to access grant money to carry out their vital work. This, along with a wider turn to non-profitization encouraged by the rights-seeking movements of the 1990s and 2000s like those for relationship recognition and marriage, lead to a marked decrease in organizations centred around militant activism and 2SLGBTQ+ liberation.[174] Beam criticizes the current state of non-profits, who they argue are far too dependent on the state, limiting their potential for activist militancy and ability to challenge the state—to bite the hand that feeds them. In Cape Breton, the community-based gay liberation organizations that Beam focuses in on in their argument never really existed in the same way that they did in Toronto, Montreal, San Francisco, London, New York, or even Halifax! Geraldine's Island LGB Association, the closest thing to what Beam describes, from the materials I have available to me for this project, seems like a flash in the pan moment that did not crystallize into a long-standing organization. When we take Beam's thesis and compare it to Cape Breton, with its absence of activist organizations yet still a birth of community non-profits, we can begin to complicate the picture of gay non-profits and postindustrial transition. In Cape Breton, access to non-profit funding laid the groundwork for queer institutions in the form of the AIDS Coalition, providing resources for people like Jean to do outreach to queer people and do anti-homophobia education. If it was not for a degree of institutionalization, organizations that helped bring the community together would not have crystallized in Cape Breton. My argument here is not to completely contradict Beam—I share their

[173] Myrl Beam, *Gay, Inc.: The Nonprofitization of Queer Politics* (Minneapolis: Univiversity of Minnesota Press, 2018), 7-12.
[174] Beam, *Gay, Inc.: The Nonprofitization of Queer Politics*, 34-40.

concerns with how institutionalized 2SLGBTQ+ organizations have become. Rather, I wish to transpose Beam's metropolitan analysis of non-profitization to a more regional setting, showing how Cape Breton queers never really had the chance to have those liberation focused organizations, and the entire community has always been oriented to non-profit service work, whether the historic AIDS Coalition, or the current Youth Project, the 2SLGBTQ+ youth service organization of which Madonna is Executive Director of their Cape Breton office.

Regenerations

As Peter Steele told me, while we were discussing the lack of a gay bar in Cape Breton, and its changing demographics:

> It's something [opening a gay bar] that's not going to ever probably happen here. You go online on any of the sites, you're going to find an incredible number of Indian students that are here—on the gay sites.[175] But they're all in the closet because they come from a culture where they could be killed for being gay if they came out in their hometowns. So even coming here where they know it's very open and accepted. You know there's still very much in the closet. So that's, you know, even if we see another 5000 Indian students come here, you're still not going to get enough. That's going to support a gay bar because they're not going to be comfortable going out. Halifax would certainly get the clientele. It's just unfortunate now they don't. That clientele doesn't have a specific place to go to. You know you need the population and online has changed everything. The Internet has changed everything here on the island. I'm amazed even 70-year-olds that are online, you know. Is

[175] In recent years, Cape Breton University has taken on an enormous number of international students, many from South Asia. Nova Scotia has the highest tuition rates in Canada, and international rates are even higher. CBU was founded by the Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO) as a way of stimulating economic growth in the city. It has succeeded in that, now having become one of the largest employers in the CBRM. However, CBU can't make ends meet on local students alone—to make up cash shortfall, they have to recruit internationally. This is not a problem unique to CBU, but it is certainly acute there. Media attention has been drawn to the poor living conditions of international students in Sydney, many living in dilapidated company houses, paying exorbitant rents. However, the potential in-migration of young people in the form of international students staying after their degrees might be a lifeline for the economically challenged and aging region. See, *W5*, "Cash Cows: Foreign student recruitment crisis at Canadian universities," aired April 1 2023, on CTV. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzxOAqH-pkc&ab_channel=OfficialW5., Statistics Canada, Canadian and international tuition fees by level of study (current dollars), (2023).

> that a phase? I don't know. Is that the future? I don't know. All I know is that online dating or hookups have become more the thing you don't have to leave home, you know?[176]

This project's narrators have spoken of a queer past characterized by isolation, fragmentation, and lack of community. Thinking back to Portelli's reminder about truth and oral history, how something is remembered, whether close to what we might deem the "historical truth" or not, can tell us many important things about that person's life experience, and the experiences of their community.[177] In these stories, Cape Breton is remembered as having industrial, straight past, and a queer post-industrial present, with an uneasy distinction between the two. When they speak of the present—and the future—there is hope for regeneration—a hope for a queer Cape Breton characterized by solidarity, community, and perhaps most importantly—a shared understanding of a past and a future. While I was in Cape Breton, I was fortunate to attend one of the inaugural meetings of Elderwize, a queer elder group that includes both Jean and Peter. Through regular meetings, they hope to build community, support local queer institutions, and most of all, stay in touch and have fun together.

Let us think back to the advertisement that this chapter opens with. The responses to that ad are fragmentary, showing us where one queer lived at one point in time, and at the base level, communicating a simple desire for community—whether imagined, physical, sexual, or political. When I found those advertisements in the archive, I thought about trying to hunt down the submitters:" Hey John, remember when you asked for a promo copy of a gay magazine in 1980-something? Yeah, so I found your little submission, do you want to talk to me about your private life?" Such an endeavour would prove not only difficult but also ethically fraught—those

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[176] Peter Steele, Interview with the author. November 30th 2022.
[177] Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 51-56.

submissions were made in confidence, with many of them stressing that the magazine must arrive in a plain envelope. Thus, these archival traces remain just that—little fragments of lives that we can only imagine—little outcries for community and togetherness.

In speaking with Madonna, and other queer activists on the island, I learned of the challenges facing queer youth in today's Cape Breton. In particular, I learned of the dismal state of gender-affirming healthcare on the island, only compounded by the island's isolation and the broader context of Nova Scotia's ramshackle healthcare system. Few doctors on the island have the training or will to prescribe gender affirming care, with most trans Cape Bretoners making regular trips to Halifax, where things aren't much better. Through organizations like the Youth Project, and the Elderwize group, regenerative and reparative work—however big or small—is taking place in the community. In Chapter 1, I closed with Jin Haritaworn's discussion of queer regenerations. Haritaworn's analysis is grounded in metropolitan areas, in particular, gentrifying areas of Berlin. When we transpose Haritaworn's argument, (that is: white, bourgeois queer people become a "lovely sight" palatable to society in so far as they serve to displace and erase working class and racialized people—queer or not) to Cape Breton, we see how queer regenerations outside metropoles can happen, and what challenges they face.[178]

The narrators' queer childhoods, each with the impetus to "grow sideways", was influenced by the imperatives of a region's political economy in transition, with signifiers of class becoming untethered from the materiality of industrial production. With Geraldine's Island LGB Association and Peter's dances, we see nascent communities negotiating the role of visibility and politicization. Migration, both out-migration and return, is elastic, and the usual tale of Cape Bretoners as migrant

[178] Jin Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places* (London: Pluto Press, 2015).

labour out west is complicated by the AIDS crisis, which galvanizes disparate community elements into one to fight a crisis. The changing nature of work, from industrial to post-industrial, including non-profit service work, deeply changed the nature of how queers in Cape Breton meet and work. Throughout all of this, in these narrators' life stories, Cape Breton's queer and industrial pasts and futures coexist uneasily, coming together for brief moments, yet diverging. In the conclusion, I will expand on this discussion of contested collective memory.

Conclusion

When I first started asking around for narrators, I heard that someone was working on a documentary about Cape Breton's queer history. I was incredibly excited that someone was doing similar work to me! We could compare notes, share resources, perhaps collaborate! The filmmaker was madeline yakimchuk, a queer Cape Bretoner themselves, and a distinguished documentarian, with extensive work in Cuba and Chile.[179] madeline worked at the Youth Project with Madonna as an intergenerational outreach worker, with their responsibilities being both the documentary and working with queer youth and elders, facilitating spaces where intergenerational knowledge sharing and dialogue could occur. I felt relieved that someone else was doing the vital work of preserving the life stories of queer Cape Bretoners. Clearly there was not only something to be just preserved here but something to be shown to others in many different kinds of media.

madeline died on June 9, 2023, from a medically-assisted death following a surprise cancer diagnosis.[180] They were 67. Their documentary was unfinished. This news came as a shock to everyone and hit the community hard. madeline and I were not close, we had only emailed and spoken a handful of times on my first visit to Cape Breton for this trip. I arrived later that month on a research trip, where I had hoped to interview madeline. madeline grew up in Sydney's Whitney Pier neighbourhood, to trade unionist parents, instilling strong values of social justice. They only came out as pansexual and non-binary late in life. madeline's story is one that is so deeply connected to the social fabric of Cape Breton life, and it deserves to be preserved. Their sudden death reminded me of the urgency of queer historical and memory work. Whether we see

[179] madeline preferred not to have their name capitalized.
[180] Nicole Sullivan, "Remembering 'madeline': Cape Breton senior was a warrior against oppression in Canada, Cuba and Chile," *Cape Breton Post*, August 9 2023, https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/remembering-madeline-cape-breton-senior-was-a-warrior-against-oppression-in-canada-cuba-and-chile-100881557/.

it or not, there is a clock running. The ability to speak with queer people, in particular those of the generation who might have been lucky enough to survive the AIDS Crisis, is getting weaker and weaker. This is felt all the more acutely on an island with such a small and tightly-knit community. Indeed, this feeling of urgency was reflected in many of the interviews and conversations I had in my second research trip, after madeline's passing. How to preserve, how to honour, how to remember, how to be closer in community—these questions all sat in the back of my head during that trip.

The Youth Project was lucky enough to get another filmmaker to finish madeline's film, which though unfinished, was close to completion in post-production. The film, titled "Cape Breton's Queer History in Story" is available to view on the Youth Project's YouTube page.[181] The film is an impressive and incredibly vital piece of memory work. Its approach, and the narrative arc it presents is much different to the one presented in the thesis. Certain community members that I couldn't reach spoke with madeline, and some members that madeline didn't speak to, I spoke to. For those that we both spoke to, our questions, themes, and approach was different, prompting different forms of remembering. In addition, they had poured so much of their energy and passion into a film that they were scarcely in—what of their story?

When put in contrast, my thesis and their film offer deeply different views of Cape Breton's queer past, present and future. Where my approach hones in on each narrator's life story, in particular their family and personal life, "Queer History in Story" is much more focused on providing a history of formal queer organizations on the island. The meat of the documentary begins with an in-depth recounting of the history of the Womens' Movement in Cape Breton, then

[181] madeline yakimchuk, "Cape Breton's Queer History in Story," (Canada: The Youth Project, 2023). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkBpFIkZ4i0&ab_channel=TheYouthProject.

following the activist intersections with gay male communities, the AIDS Crisis, marriage equality activism, and then onto contemporary pride parade work with Pride Cape Breton. The film abstains from adding any contextual information, letting the stories stand on their own. While an interesting approach, viewers not intimately familiar with Cape Breton, and especially its queer community, might feel lost. The film seems to have been made for the community, and especially for the "queer elders" (as they are called in film) that are interviewed. This is not a bad thing! Media produced by queer artists need not be "for" the rest of society. The art can stand on its own. That said, when something is made for and by a specific slice of a community, especially with the aim of preservation, questions of exclusion and inclusion are raised.

Let us think of this documentary as an archive. To my knowledge, the interviews in this film, along with Geraldine's interview held at the ArQuives, are the only publicly accessible oral histories of queer life in Cape Breton (with the narrators' permission, the interviews used in this thesis will also be archived). This means that madeline's documentary represents a massive slice of the queer Cape Breton corpus. As Jacques Derrida argues, the archive is both commencement and commandment.[182] Archives create a clear delineation of where history starts and its trajectory (commencement), and through this, exercise authority over the reader, (commandment) determining what is included or excluded, and what secrets may cross the barrier from private to public. The film frames each interviewee as a "queer elder", invoking the concept of intergenerational knowledge transmission—that this generation's history be preserved for both themselves, and for those younger. In doing this, the film focuses almost all of its time on the "organized queer community", a phrase the documentary uses and admits as its focus. Again, such

[182] Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995): 9-10, https://doi.org/10.2307/465144.

a focus is not a problem in and of itself, I would never suggest that activism not be studied. Rather, the frame that focuses on the organized community and on elder-youth intergenerational knowledge sharing shapes the documentary's argument.

For example, Cape Breton's industrial past and post-industrial present is elided, rarely even mentioned. I note this not from a place of demanding all works focus in on the social phenomenon I happen to be most interested in, but rather from a place of demarcating how collective memory in Cape Breton is contested. In fact, the documentary does little to introduce the viewer to Cape Breton at all. Queer life and industrial life are siloed and separated, much as I saw in many of my interviews. Rather than questioning that discursive separation, the documentary reproduces it. When the AIDS Crisis is discussed, there is little mention of the intersections between the social fallout of deindustrialization leading to an opioid crisis, where unsafe and unsupervised intravenous drug use led to increased AIDS spread. My point in raising this critique is not to besmirch the hard and necessary work of madeline, or to tell those that she interviewed that they should have answered the questions differently, but to drive home the need for further study, further memory work, and overall, more community engagement and development.

A shared thread between this project and madeline's film is this: what might queer regeneration look like in Cape Breton? This is a question I have come back to often in this thesis, at the end of both chapters. Madonna's organization, The Youth Project, is performing vital work for queer youth, like a gender-affirming clothing library, drop-in programming for queer youth, and sober dances. Elderwize CB, an organization of queer elders I was so very happy to meet with, is keeping collective memory and community alive. Through all efforts to regenerate, as both madeline's documentary and this thesis have shown, an understanding of community history and

what has come before are paramount. Yes, now there is only a small archive of this history, but it can grow!

In the first chapter of this thesis, I provided a theoretical and historiographical roadmap for such an investigation. Through strategic engagement with literatures of deindustrialization, Marxism and queer theory, future scholars can locate gay steel mills (or pulp mills or fisheries or coal mines…) and examine the complex and multivocal histories that lie within them. Queer investigations of deindustrialization can not only add representational depth to history but can also tell us things that might otherwise be obscured by a methodological straightness. I argue that crucially, queer histories of deindustrialization must not exist to create a sense of white queer nostalgia for the social democratic compromise, but to instead expose that period's many inequities, and suggest a queer regeneration that does not rest on other exploitations. In short, the queer study of deindustrialization must necessarily be one founded in a queer socialist politic.

In the second chapter, I took the roadmap that I provided in the first, and actioned it. Through oral histories, I argue that deindustrialization was a significant factor in how the Cape Breton community formed and negotiated responses to other crises, notably the AIDS epidemic. Further, I identify deindustrialization and its half-life as the prism through with Cape Breton queers view future community regeneration, all the while queer life and working-classness are often counterposed and cast as mutually exclusive. Through the collective portrait of these oral histories, I discuss how class, memory, migration and activism intertwine in the creation of Cape Breton's organized queer community.

I hope that this thesis and madeline's film will not be alone in documenting Cape Breton queer life stories. If anything, I hope that our interventions serve to propel Cape Breton queers, young and old, into building up community and taking charge of their histories, embracing the

messiness of memory and the complexity of the past so that a more just and more kind future can be built.

On the community level, archival projects, museum exhibitions and more oral history work can serve as catalysts for intergenerational discussion, and further queer historical work. In the research of this thesis, I had many wonderful conversations with the archival staff at the Beaton Institute at CBU, the archive that holds much of Cape Breton's local history, with an emphasis on folklore and labour sources. Jane Arnold and the rest of the staff bent over backwards to help me find useful sources in the records, even when they knew there would be little there, if not nothing. I pored over UMWA and USW grievance files, hoping to find a case of workplace discrimination, and yet nothing. I hope the Beaton Institute and other community historical spaces on the island can work to obtain and preserve documents and artifacts from queer communities, so that future projects can grow. In particular, I want to note the importance that I hope that other (post)industrial communities across Canada and the world can also work to preserve the complex and intertwined history of queer workers through deindustrialization.

Even in the current state of primary source availability, there is a great deal of potential for future academic work. In this thesis, newspaper sources, art, and other textual sources are not as present as oral histories. Part of this was due to my choice to focus on oral histories, but the lack of easily accessible digitization of the *Cape Breton Post* also affected this. Future historians might wish to engage with the available textual sources in greater detail, but such an effort would take a great amount of time and effort—more so that I could muster for this thesis. Comparative studies between different industrial communities, like Cape Breton and Sudbury, would also prove interesting. How did different forms of deindustrialization and different approaches to economic rebuilding affect queer people? In terms of future oral history work, a project on Cape Breton

queers in diaspora across Canada would be a deeply intriguing study. For this thesis, I was open to speaking to queer Cape Bretoners living off the island, but it was much harder to find people outside the island, as oral history recruiting requires an on-the-ground presence, and I did not have the resources to poster and recruit in Halifax, Calgary, Fort McMurray, Toronto, and other places queer Cape Bretoners might have ended up. In addition, this thesis has mentioned quite little about activism on the island. This is something that madeline's documentary does much better. That said, deeper examinations of Cape Breton's queer activist histories would be deeply valuable.

In an *Active History* blog post I wrote during the research of this project, I further conceptualized the idea of the "gay steel mill" invoked in the first chapter.[183] The gay steel mill is a place, (not just a *Simpsons* bit) perhaps imaginary, perhaps real, that exists in Cape Breton, and other industrial communities. It represents the lives lived, and the now-ephemeral queer encounters that leave small traces across industrial communities. As I write in that post: "gay steel mills matter as much as gaybourhoods!" Queer history, labour history, and the emerging field of queer labour history must not only focus on the metropolitan or areas coded deeply as queer, but take queer analysis directly to so-called bastions of heterosexual masculinity. With this, such hegemonic ideas can be destabilized, and histories of workers, queers, and especially queer workers can be unearthed, preserved, and contextualized. There is a great deal of history to be forged in the electric arc furnace of the gay steel mill! As one gay steelworker said: "Hot stuff! Hot stuff coming through!"

[183] Liam Devitt, "Is the gay steel mill closed? Reflections on queer histories of deindustrializing Cape Breton," *Active History*, June 12, 2023, https://activehistory.ca/blog/2023/06/12/is-the-gay-steel-mill-closed-reflections-on-queer-histories-of-deindustrializing-cape-breton/.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

This interview guide is an adapted version of the DePOT core interview guide, with more material added with regards to gender and sexuality, and less relevant questions excised.

INTRODUCTION
Please state your name, place and year of birth.
What pronouns do you use?
[If applicable] What was your maiden-name?

CHILDHOOD
What is your earliest memory?
What did your parents/grandparents do for a living?
Where did you grow up? Were there mines, mills and factories nearby?
Did many parents in your neighbourhood work at area mills/mines? Did you visit them as a child? Did children play on industrial lands?
Did you want to work there when you grew up?
How would you describe your family's ethnic background?
Could you smell or hear the industries from where you lived?
Was there poverty?
Were there rivalries or tensions between groups of people growing up?
Was it different for boys and girls growing up?
Did you grow up knowing you were working-class?
Do you have early memories of strikes or other labour conflicts?
Were your parents ever laid-off from their jobs? Did your family experience poverty
Did you want to grow up to follow your [mother/father] into the [mine/mill/factory]? Was this something your parents wanted?

[option of mental mapping – where interviewees draw their neighbourhood on a blank piece of paper]

GENDER AND SEXUALITY
How would you describe your gender identity?
How would you describe your sexuality?
When did you know you were [gay, trans, etc.]?
As a young person, did you know any other 2SLGBTQ+ people?
How did your family treat or think of 2SLGBTQ+ people?
As a young person, how did you think your community [town, neighbourhood, church] treated 2SLGBTQ+ people?

SCHOOL YEARS
What was your primary school like?
How about high school - Was there a greater mix of people?

Were there divisions in terms of what you wore or the music you listened to?
Do you remember divisions of class or race? In the school? In town?
Did you like school? Why/why not?
Did you have any contact with trade unions or political parties when you were a child or teenager?
What was it like being 2SLGBTQ+ in high school?
Did you ever think about pursuing post-secondary education? Did you? How was post-secondary education perceived in the community?

WORKING LIFE

What was your first job? How old were you?
[If applicable] When did you first enter the [main] mine/mill/factory? What was it like entering the plant for the first time?
Could you please describe your position(s) and work/responsibilities at this job? What types of technologies did you use most frequently? Did you make any changes to or adapt these tools in any way?
Did you work alongside other family members?
Were there men and women hired in the plant? Which jobs did men tend to work in and which did women tend to work in?
What was the atmosphere like among male workers/female workers/between men and women in the workplace?
Was it a safe place to work?
Were there any health issues associated with the work you did (eg asbestos; stress)? What were they and can you tell us more about that?
Was there much tension with management?
Was it a high-status job in your community?
Was anyone openly queer at work? If so, what was the reaction? Did this change over time? If you are queer yourself, where did you seek community?
Did you feel safe being 2SLGBTQ+ at work?
How did working there change your outlook on the world?
Did you ever feel stigmatized for being working class?
Heavy industry/mining has been characterised as traditionally masculine work, do you agree?
What work have you done later in life? Has it been still within 'heavy industry'? If no, what kind of work is it? How is it different and how is it the same?

GENDER AND WORK

Do you think the work culture of heavy industry was macho? In what ways?
Would you say that your new employment was as 'masculine' as heavy industry? Were you working with more women? What was this like?
Is there such a thing as 'men's' work and 'woman's' work?
Were men or women effected more by industrial closures in your area?
How did gender shape the experience of job loss?
How did your 2SLGBTQ+ identity interact with your class identity?

FAMILY LIFE
When did you leave home (parents)?
If you have a partner, how did you meet them?
Who took primary responsibility for housework and childcare in your home? Who did which kinds of jobs around the house?
Did you live in the same area (or same kind of area) that you grew up in? Why/why not?
Did you know many people in your neighbourhood? Did other family members live nearby?
Did you have any children? If so, how many? Did you encourage them to follow you/your partner into the mine/mill/factory?
How did their childhoods differ from your own?
(For the younger generation) What was it like growing up in an area where mines/mills/factories were closing/had closed? How did it change things for your family? For your generation?

[*optional exercise – go through family albums and let this prompt remembering*]

QUEER SPACES AND PLACES
Where did you go to meet other 2SLGBTQ+ people? Bars, cafes, parks, houses, cruising spots?
Did they last? Why did they close or otherwise become inaccessible?
What types of people would be at these places?
Were there 2SLGBTQ+ activists that you knew of? What were they advocating for or against?

[*optional exercise – marking queer places and spaces on maps*]

INDUSTRIAL DECLINE
What were the first signs of industrial decline that you saw?
Why did your workplace close down? Who was to blame? Could it have been avoided?
Do you remember your last day on the job?
What do you think was the most significant change from when you started working to when the plant/factory/mine was closed?
How were people told? What was their response?
How did you tell your family?
Did you think there was any chance of saving your jobs?
What did the union do in response?
What kind of support did you get from government and your union?
Was your former workplace demolished? Did you watch it go down? What were your feelings as you watched? What do you think when you go by the old site?
Did you take any souvenirs or mementos from the plant for the demolition?
How has life changed since the plant closed? How did it effect your family? How did it effect your community?
Was your town/city/region hit harder by deindustrialization that elsewhere?
Who is to blame for deindustrialization?
How did it affect your health? How did it affect the health of your family?

MIGRATION
Did you ever feel like you had to leave Cape Breton? Why?
Did other 2SLGBTQ+ people you knew leave? Why did they leave?
Would you say it was more economic factors driving people to leave, or more social factors, like homo/transphobia?
Did anyone in your life (family, friends) try and influence your decision to leave or not? What were their arguments?
Did you leave Cape Breton? Why? Where did you go?
If you stayed, why did you make the decision to stay?
Do you enjoy living in [new place]? Why?
Do you still feel connected to Cape Breton? How?
Do you still visit Cape Breton? What's it like when you go back? What's changed? What's stayed the same?
Do you work a different type of job in your new city? How is working there different compared to working in Cape Breton?

WORKING CLASS EXPRESSION
Have you ever written about your experiences (songs, diaries, poems, memoirs) or documented it other ways, e.g. through photos? Do you know others who have done so?
Did you ever come across artists engaging with your industry or deindustrialization? What was your reaction to this creative work?
Do you ever visit industrial heritage sites or museums? Why/why not?

SHIFTING POLITICS IN DEINDUSTRIALIZED AREAS
How has the politics of your community changed in your life-time?
Did the political Left or Centre lose ground locally during these years?
Do you think there's a rise in support for the political right, like there's been in other deindustrialized areas?
How have your own politics changed in your lifetime?
Do you think Cape Breton is a better place for 2SLGBTQ+ people now than it was in the past?
How has 2SLGBTQ+ activism in Cape Breton changed over time?

FINAL QUESTION
Is there anything you would like to add before we end the interview?

[*option of walking/in-situ follow-up interview*]