**Seeking Security: Gay Labour Migration and Uneven Landscapes of Work**

**Abstract**

Previous research has understood the migrations of gay men and other queer people through a lens of identity development, whereby relocation is driven by processes of coming out and consuming particular urban amenities. Meanwhile, labour geographers have largely overlooked sexuality, seeking to understand work-related migration in relations to gender, race, citizenship, and the collective organization of workers. Drawing on the migration narratives of gay-identified men living in Ottawa, Canada, and Washington, D.C., U.S.A., we argue that the norms governing gender and sexuality within various workplaces, economic sectors, and locales continuously influence migration related to both work and inextricably linked processes of social reproduction. We demonstrate how the affective needs of queer workers both deflect them from and attract them to particular locales and workplaces. In their migration destinations, queer workers tend to also transform the norms of social reproduction within workplaces and sectors. While queer workers may use migration to successfully negotiate the uneven landscapes of queer inclusion and visibility in North America, their agency is also constrained by the ongoing of regulation of sexuality in both workplaces and social and community environments.

**Key words:** gay, queer, labour mobility, social reproduction, workplace

**Introduction**

During the past two decades, geographers have explored the gendered and racialized nature of labour migration (Silvey, 2004; Bauder, 2005; McDowell et al., 2009). This research, however, has often presumed heterosexuality and neglected the role of queer1 subjectivities in movements between jobs, sectors, and locales. Meanwhile, research examining the migrations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and other queerindividuals have often focused on coming out (Gorman-Murray, 2009; Lewis, 2012a), identity development (Knopp, 2004; Gorman-Murray, 2007), and the consumption of urban amenities (Black et al., 2002; Cooke and Rapino, 2007) rather than work and employment. In this paper we address these dual lacunae by examining the work-related migrations of gay-identified men. Given the imbrication of economic production and uneven landscapes of social stigma in queer workers’ lives, we find that migration aids but does not guarantee the attainment of secure, meaningful livelihoods.

Research in labour studies, and labour geography specifically, has often centred on workers who are geographically stable, employed in standard trades and services, and collectively organized (Coe and Lier, 2010; Kelly, 2012; Tufts and Savage, 2009). The ongoing focus on collective organization in labour studies, however, elides the experiences of queer workers whose concerns about inclusion and discrimination are not always addressed through mainstream unions (but see Colgan, 1999; Hunt and Eaton, 2007). Research on the mobility of gay, lesbian, and other queer workers therefore tends to inhabit the periphery of labour geography and often finds greater affinity with other domains of human geography (Lier, 2009). Feminist geographers, for example, have attended to the use of gendered and racialized job hierarchies to meet low-cost production imperatives (Silvey, 2004), as well as the influence of women’s culturally defined reproductive roles on their day-to-day mobilities (Hanson and Pratt, 1995) and longer-term migration decisions (Pratt, 1999; Blunt 2007). While these interventions reframe labour migration as a political and social process that cannot be separated from economic motivators and interests, they often presume that migrants are heterosexual and conform to traditional gender norms. Since queer workers navigate complicated patchworks of restrictive and protective policies as well as everyday homophobia in workplaces and communities (Badgett 2007; Ward and Winstanley, 2005), understanding their migration decisions is important to the development of labour geography as a political project.

Sexuality and space researchers have tended to explain queer migration through a lens of identity formation whereby relocation allows queer individuals to come out (Knopp, 2004; Lewis, 2012a), establish support networks (Gorman-Murray, 2009), and potentially improve health and well-being outcomes (Lewis, 2014). Few, however, have explored how sexual identity intersects with the economic factors influencing migration. While research on early gay neighbourhoods suggests that they offered business and property development opportunities for gay men (Knopp, 1992), they are now often framed as places of consumption rather than work (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Bassi, 2006; Mattson, 2014). Similarly, quantitative work on locational choice among male same-sex couples has suggested that consumption preferences (e.g., for higher-cost housing and nightlife) rather than work are the mains driver of gay migration (Black et al., 2002; Florida, 2002; Cooke and Rapino, 2007). Other accounts frame gravitation to different cities, neighbourhoods, and scenes as part of gay identity development (Valentine and Skelton 2003; Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014), but professional livelihoods rarely figure into these accounts. While labour geography thus tends to neglect the role of sexuality in shaping labour conditions, sexuality and space research often overlooks the role of work in migration decision-making.

In the following study of gay men’s migrations to Ottawa, Canada, and Washington, D.C., U.S.A., we argue that gay men’s work-related migrations stem from uneven landscapes of heterosexism and homophobia and their effects on both economic opportunities and linked potentials for social reproduction. While many gay men successfully employ mobility to overcome these uneven geographies and reshape the norms of work in certain cities and sectors, they often remain subjected to less obvious forms of workplace regulation. We begin with a review of two concepts relevant to gay labour migration: worker agency and social reproduction. Following a brief discussion of methodology, we elaborate on three elements of gay labour migration: (1) departures from locales with heteronormative sectors and workplaces, (2) gravitation toward local economies perceived to facilitate economic security and meet the affective needs of gay workers, and (3) the ongoing regulation of gay men within these chosen destination environments.

**Agency and control among mobile workers**

Labour geography has been animated by debates about the potential of migration as a form of agency amidst policies and practices that disadvantage workers of particular gender, ethnic, and class subjectivities. While some marginalised workers are able to protest working conditions ‘in place’ (Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu 2010), others relocate to mitigate exploitation, shift labour supply away from adverse conditions, and reshape the geography of production (Rogaly, 2009). Migration may also reshape social norms in the origin and destination locations. In the context of international migration, women often leave countries with restrictive gender norms to gain social space, economic independence and potentially increased respect after they return (Rudnick 2011; Silvey 2004). Similarly, in terms of internal migration, millions of African Americans moved from south to north during the Great Migration of the early to mid-20th century in order to find better jobs and escape racial segregation (Tolnay 2003).

Marginalised workers that have migrated, however, are still subject to controls and regulations that perpetuate disadvantage. Female international migrants that escape restrictive gender norms in one country often face racism in work and public settings after moving (Gilbert 1999). For racialized migrants, their agency is constrained by immigration policies and worker programmes that filter them into precarious situations, exploitative workplaces, and lower-paying jobs such as nannying and food processing (Pratt 1999; Ball & Piper 2002; Bauder, 2003; McDowell et al. 2009). The labour market segmentation of immigrants is often further legitimized by gendered and racist discourses that faun nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment amongst white workers in destination countries (Bauder 2005). Similar constraints may apply to internal migrants. While some workers move relatively freely, others cannot afford to adapt to different regional regimes of professional licensing, educational fees, and social welfare programming (Ellis, 2012). Many African American families who moved during the Great Migration have become embedded in cycles of inter-generational poverty and segregation in northern inner cities (Clark, 2007) while those with greater financial and human capital have moved back to an economically reinvigorated and more racially equitable South (Tolnay, 2003). For undocumented farm workers, internal migration is necessary to avoid immigration raids but they remain vulnerable to employers seeking to exploit a floating reserve of agricultural labour (Mitchell, 2011; Scott, 2013). Migration and social norms, then, are mutually constitutive. The norms entrenched in places may both prompt a marginalized group to migrate and affect its economic fortunes thereafter, while exoduses and influxes of migrants can occasionally reshape social norms in origin and destination places.

Interestingly, employment and career concerns tend to not figure in many of the existing accounts of internal migration among gay men. In fact, much of this work tends to reify the notion of gay men as upwardly mobile, middle-class consumers by prioritizing measurable variables such as housing prices, climate, and urban amenities within econometric analyses (Black et al. 2002; Cooke and Rapino 2007). In addition, the focus on couples rather than individuals (an unfortunate limitation of available quantitative data) creates a bias toward men who are more likely to be in midlife, out, and economically established. We argue that work-related migrations of gay men are distinct from but also similar to those of women and racialized minorities. Gay internal migrants might have greater agency and mobility than racialized international migrants due to their citizenship status and the relative invisibility of their sexual identity. In addition, the movement of gay men into particular sectors and locales may reshape norms governing gender and sexuality and facilitate their economic security and status (Humphrey 1999; Ward and Winstanley 2005). At the same time, gay men may grapple with discriminatory hiring and promotion practices (Badgett 2007), informal homophobia in workplaces (Giuffre 2008; Willis 2012), and segmentation into to lower-paying sectors (e.g., food service, care, and entertainment-related professions) that can reproduce marginal status (Murphy 1996; Giuffre et al. 2008). Since homophobia is the product of place-based norms, its effects cross the boundary between work and other areas of life. The concept of social reproduction, particularly how family and community relationships enable economic production and facilitate life’s work (Katz, 2001), is therefore useful to understand gay labour migration.

**Gay Migration, Work, and Social Reproduction**

The concept of social reproduction, or the assemblage of processes required to reproduce workers and societies, holds a central place in feminist writings on labour migration (Armstrong and Armstrong 1990; Bakker and Silvey 2008; Locke et al., 2013). First harnessed by socialist feminists to highlight the domestic work of women, social reproduction has been invoked at times to variously highlight biological reproduction, care work, and the reproduction of capitalist economies (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990; Baker and Gill 2003; Frederici 2012; Strauss 2013). At the international scale, migration enables often advanced economic production and security in destination countries while creating a brain drain and care drain in places left behind (Kofman, 2014; Silvey, 2004). Most studies of gender and migration, however, overlook the experiences of migrants who defy gender and sexual norms. Manalansan (2006), for example, has suggested that the abundance of research on Filipina migrant nannies in North America perpetuates a stereotype of Filipino workers as female, feminine, heterosexual, and docile while homogenizing the fluidity of gender and sexuality that exists within Filipino society.

Work on internal migration, in contrast, does not often attend to social reproduction directly (Locke et al., 2013). Recent work, however, has shown that models attributing internal migration to employment potentials based on unemployment rates and wage gaps no longer hold up and that only a minority of internal migrants now attribute their moves to solely economic motivations (Molloy et al., 2011; Morrison and Clark, 2011). Ellis and Wright (1999) have argued that internal migrations, similar to international migrations, also contribute to the ethnic segmentation of labour markets because internal migrants gravitate to sectors where their co-ethnics work. While this gravitation is partially accounted for by ethnic networks that share job information, it might also reflect the degree to which individuals feel more comfortable or supported in workplaces with employees that share their ethnicity or language. Similarly, Cooke (2008) argues that most individual internal migrations should actually be categorised as family migrations because they involve considerations of employment, educational, and social potentials for partners, children, and relatives. There is therefore increasing acknowledgement that the relationships and shared identities that facilitate social reproduction contribute to internal migration, but sexually non-normative individuals are again often from these debates.

Gay men may be particularly absent from discussions of social reproduction as they fall outside heteronormative conceptions of gender, are often presumed childless, and are sometimes thought to be complicit in exploitative structures (see Puar, 2002; Nast, 2002). Since gay men often lack heteronormative family attachments and can leverage both male and class privilege in the negotiations of patriarchal organizations (Nast, 2002; Bowring and Brewis, 2009), they are often thought of as a highly mobile group that can pursue geographically diverse opportunities with ease. At the same time, few geographers have explored gay men’s experiences as marginalized workers or as reproducers of local gay communities amidst ongoing homophobia (but see Gorman-Murray, 2008). Arguments that productive and reproductive work are interwoven within life’s work (Katz, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2004) allow us to think about how networks and organisations (e.g., gay and lesbian professional groups) that facilitate social reproduction for queer workers also enable economic production through the provision of support and knowledge. Similarly, reframing social reproduction as a way to describe how humans create the conditions of their own existence (Bakker and Gill 2003; Strauss 2013) moves beyond biological reproduction and care work to consider socialising, community-building, mentorship, and other processes that might help build gay men’s ‘families of choice’ (Weston 1991). These reproductive processes, however, are not just individual but articulated through norms, policies, and other “cultures and structures of belonging” that are resisted and reproduced (Kofman and Raghuram, 2015; Gedalof, 2009, 82). Hennessy (2006), for example, theorizes sexuality as an affective need that is alternately outlawed and valorised in different sectors and workplaces, while Mai and King (2009, 300) draw attention to the uneven levels of support and acceptance for queer identities across what they call the “geopolitics of love/desire.”

We suggest here that these uneven landscapes of gay inclusion and the social norms that govern them precipitate particular patterns of mobility among gay workers, such as gravitation to queer-friendly sectors and places (Murphy, 1996; Hunt and Eaton, 2007; Giuffre et al., 2008). Even when work is not the main driver of migration, the ways in which place-based norms govern other aspects of life (e.g., relationships, social support) are likely to affect the extent to which work is bearable and productive. The narratives here underline the links between gay men’s affective and financial needs while challenging the preoccupation with identity formation and consumption in research on gay men’s locational choices.

**Methodology**

Our analysis draws on the migration narratives of 48-gay identified men living in Ottawa, Canada, and Washington, D.C., USA. Washington and Ottawa were chosen for the project because they are rarely categorized as gay ‘homelands’ (see, for example, Weston 1995) despite their numerically large gay communities. In fact, both cities have been characterized as a places of regulation for queer people, marked by civil service expulsions and the policing of public homosexuality (Lewis, 1997; Kinsman, 2000; Johnson, 2004; Lewis, 2012b). While these cities therefore represent a distinct type of ‘government town’ that is less economically diverse than homelands such as New York and San Francisco, they are also ideal sites for examining the imbrication of agency, control, and social reproduction in gay workers’ lives.

In-depth interviews (24 each in Ottawa and D.C.) with self-identified gay men were conducted in neutral locations (e.g., coffee shops), lasted about 1–2 hours and gathered each participant’s migration history, its relationship to other life events, and its implications for their health and well-being. The final transcripts were coded iteratively to identify themes such as coming out, career/work, and human rights, and then recoded for more specific sub-themes such as ‘homophobic workplaces’ (Charmaz 2006). While work was not originally planned as an area of investigation, the centrality of work and career in the majority of the narratives (55% cited work as the most important reason for moving to Ottawa or D.C.) prompted us to think through the linkages between sexuality, work, and migration, especially in cities with distinctive types of local economies. While gay men’s narratives cannot speak for the work-related migration experiences of lesbians, queers of colour, or trans individuals who may face even greater constraints, they offer an opportunity to explore the role of work and career rather than consumption in gay men’s lives. More specifically, the narratives complicate the picture presented by indicator-driven studies of same-sex couples’ internal migrations by exploring *how* and *why* certain labour migration decisions are undertaken by individual gay men at different points in the life course.

**Leaving Heteronormative and Homophobic Work Environments**

Previous research has identified the workplace as a site where gender and sexual identities are enabled, constrained and reproduced (Humphrey, 1999; McDowell, 2004; Embrick et al., 2007). Studies have documented both the modes through which this regulation occurs (e.g., overt harassment, homophobic hiring practices, informal behavioural codes) and workers’ methods of coping, such as concealing their sexual identity, altering their dress and behaviour, and building supportive relationships with managers (Humphrey, 1999; Griffith and Hebl 2002; Ward and Winstanley 2005; Giuffre et al., 2008; Willis 2009, 2012). In this sense, workplaces reflect and reproduce the social norms of locales and regions, leading to a blurring of the work/non-work boundary in life’s work (Mitchell et al., 2004). Consequently, the perceived livability of certain locales for gay men is dependent not just on work life, home life, or public life, but the degree to which these can be aligned and reconciled.The narratives here suggest that gay workers choose to move based on their specific workplace experience, the perceived local concentration of workplaces and sectors with restrictive gender and sexual norms, and the insinuation of those norms into other aspects of life.

***Precarious Positions: Making Ends Meet in Homophobic Environments***

Participants frequently emphasized the vulnerability they felt in places where anti-gay stigma cross-cut both work and other aspects their life-worlds. Some decided to leave regions where they perceived limited economic potentials in male-dominated, homophobic environments (McDowell, 2004; Embrick et al., 2007). Two men discussed how early work experiences in southwestern Ontario affected their decisions to move to Ottawa:

There were of course times when I was an undergrad where I went back home to work in the summer … on one occasion I worked in a factory … it was very sexist … homophobic … all of those things.” (Terry, 40, white)

I did try to work in a stock room … all the other guys that were working there just made fun of me non-stop. Finally I got a job in a restaurant [and I was] the only guy working there (Luke, 24, white).

Luke’s story was telling because he shifted from one job where he was marginalized because of his sexuality to a ‘safer’ (albeit lower-paying) one where he still felt out of place because of his gender. In the longer term, he moved because he felt that the gender and sexual norms of the town where he lived would leave him with few viable employment options:

It’s a mill town … all the men are like, “Grr” and all the women are taking care of the house. I didn’t fit into that … it was just really kind of odd to be surrounded by that kind of environment, where those are really your only two options.

While Luke got a job as a youth support worker in Ottawa, Terry ultimately decided to become a federal public service lawyer despite clerking in southwestern Ontario during law school and hatching a plan to move back there. Their narratives demonstrate that workplaces are not only places of production, but also sites where gay men assess their life potentials.

Racialized gay men perceived an even greater economic risk in staying in homophobic environments. Randall (45, Black/Aboriginal) felt that staying closeted was a necessity for getting a job in 1980s Halifax, Nova Scotia because he perceived the majority of employers were both racist and homophobic (see also Chriclow, 2004). Although he was seeking work in an ostensibly ‘gay-friendly’ profession (graphic design), he felt that being openly gay would be perceived as an additional, undesirable marker of difference.

The double whammy of being both Aboriginal and Black meant that no matter how clever I was, no matter how good my portfolio was, how well I presented myself … I was never going to get a break. And that’s just simply the fact of life in Nova Scotia ... if I had been out, I mean the triple whammy would have been devastating.

Randall ultimately left Halifax to complete a Master’s degree in Ottawa before joining a government agency. While some men therefore leave because a region is dominated by heteronormative sectors such as manufacturing and resource extraction (and the more ‘gay-friendly’ jobs are also more precarious), others leave because the social norms of the place would deter them from coming out even in gay-friendly sectors (Giuffre et al., 2008). In this way, gay labour migrations can stem from the perceived potentials of local economics to both affirm sexual identities and facilitate long-term economic security.

***The Self-Segmentation of Queer Workers: Job Type and Belonging***

Participants’ decisions about where to relocate and where to work were constrained by narratives about where they ‘fit’ in the labour market. In this sense, migrations were not unfettered expressions of agency, but reconciliations of personal ambition and social discourses about appropriate jobs for gay men. In research on creative cities and knowledge economies, gay men’s locational decisions appear to align neatly with discourses that see sexual diversity, creativity, and social tolerance as co-producers of growth in particular sectors and cities (Florida 2002; Collins 2004). A few participants employed these discourses when explaining their moves:

I just think that gay men tend to be attracted more toward jobs in politics, in law … academic institutions, which we have a lot of [in D.C.], I guess government, too. There’s no like industrial feel to the city at all, there’s no manufacturing … I think gay men tend to be attracted more toward like the … creative kinds of jobs … not creative in the sense of like art … but like the culture. (Adam, 34, white)

Gay men, however, may also face a type of double exclusion in which they may feel uncomfortable in masculinist and homophobic sectors but are sometimes deemed unfit for feminized jobs such as nursing or teaching (Murray, 1996, 158–160, 209–214; Humphrey, 1999). Consequently, men who wish to be out at work but lack skills and capital or live in less economically diverse regions may filter into stereotypical, low-paid positions such as those in food service.

Pete (41, white) described how his employment choices were limited in the rural eastern Ontario. “I guess like the makeup artists or hairdressers … [food service] has always been quite open to the gay community, so … if I was like a construction worker or maybe like a police officer as well, it might be a little different.” Yet Pete felt that the nature of food service work limited his security and upward mobility. “As a waiter you have no choice … you have to deal with everything … even like people I don’t usually like tolerate … and you’re usually going to bed between 2 and 3 in the morning.” In contrast to those working in unionized sectors, he was also left vulnerable to the prejudices of individual managers: “I went through a depression like three years ago … I was working for a manager in [eastern Ontario town] and I guess the manager had some issue because I was French and gay, so … I was kind of more like their target.” Pete ultimately left for Ottawa to work for a provincial beverage distributor. While Adam’s narrative of ‘creative jobs’ reinforces narratives of hyper-mobility, wealth and choice among gay men (Florida 2002; Puar 2002), Pete’s story reveals that in some regions queer people may still feel like the only safe employment is, ironically, in financially insecure jobs.

***Interlocking Needs: Production and Reproduction***

Participants explained work-related migrations involved social and emotional as well as financial concerns. For some, moving to a place with greater acceptance of gay identities allowed them to fulfill affective needs not being met elsewhere. Mark (49, white), for example, felt that attempting to date other men could threaten his job as a Catholic school teacher in Newfoundland, especially in the wake of a child abuse scandal at a Catholic orphanage in the province (see Kinsman 1995):

I felt a little bit exposed. I met people from time to time and I would have people visit my apartment … I was feeling, that … this could blow up in my face at some point. And I just felt a little bit vulnerable ... I couldn’t have been out at work … socially there was a real stigma … in Newfoundland, of course, the whole scandal with the Mount Cashel orphanage and the Catholic Church … People, you know, made … the unfortunate connections.

Meanwhile, Jake (27, white) turned down jobs in places where he expected that there would be few opportunities to build relationships with other gay men.

I had applications out with different [U.S. National Weather Service] forecast offices and … I mean the idea that if I got that Williston [North Dakota] job, my god … there’s no gay people up there. Like I went on gay.com just to see if there was any gay people and there was one other gay person and he worked for the weather office.

Both Mark and Jake’s narratives show that the norms governing sexuality, and thus the potentials for gay men to reproduce their communities at work and elsewhere, are distributed unevenly. Relocation, then, may be necessary for some men to merge careers with non-work lives.

**Capital City as Safe Haven for Gay Workers**

The title of gay ‘homeland’ as a title typically conferred upon New York, San Francisco, Toronto, and other major cities that were sites of early gay activism and gay neighbourhoods (Weston 1995; Fortier 2001; Nash 2005). In contrast, Ottawa and Washington are often described as places whose gay communities have developed primarily through work-related factors. Capital cities have long served as alternative labour markets for those from surrounding industrial and resource-dominated regions, as well as beacons for marginalized groups seeking to engage with national politics and influence their own advancement (Dascher, 2000; Aaron and Ragusa, 2011). By the 1980s and 1990s, gay men moving to Ottawa and Washington were gravitating to political-media complex that increasingly valued gay issues, and were swayed by the promise of long-term security and inclusion in the public sector despite higher potential payouts in business, financial, and industrial sectors (Taylor-Vaisey, 2009; Peters, 2013). The following narratives expand on these ideas, suggesting that formal rights protections in public service agencies, influxes of queer workers, the creation of LGBT professional organisations, and the resulting cultural acceptance for non-normative sexualities in these cities.

***Government Towns as Professional Homelands?***

The prevalence of public and non-profit sector work in Washington and Ottawa provided participants with a clear sense of potential for career advancement, meaningful livelihoods involving like-minded colleagues, opportunities for community and civic engagement, and ease of movement between multiple government and policy-related sectors. Many also indicated that the public service had contributed to a broader culture of acceptance and social consciousness that influenced their sense of belonging in other types of workplaces. Shane (27, African American) rationalised the growth of a large gay workforce in D.C. as the product of opportunities for power among gay men, first as closeted individuals but eventually as a visible minority group (see also Knopp, 1992; Johnson, 2004):

There are a lot of gay organizations here … apparently Capitol Hill has always been run by gay men, and so … there’s probably always been a sizeable gay community here … if you don’t have your full rights you’re aware of the government and how it can have an impact on you, and so I think that being in a place like D.C. is going to draw gay people … it’s a very important part of our experience.

Others felt that Ottawa and D.C. offered the best potential for sustained career mobility, both across organizations and upward through levels of management. For two men involved professionally with LGBT advocacy, their work was tied directly to the reproduction of queer community and the availability of a dense institutional infrastructure.

There was definitely a strategic move … the job I had before [in London, Ontario], sort of the largest focus was on the municipality … [Ottawa] is a good city to sort of see how change happens, how shifts in thinking kind of work their way through the different levels of government. (Rick, 27, white)

I was sort of non-profit, advocacy-minded and wanted to be in a place that would be supportive of that … I worked for the Human Rights Campaign for a couple years, and then I worked for Equality Maryland for five years, starting as the sole employee and then working my way into like a six-person organization (Jake, 35, white)

A few also noted that the long-term influence of gay professionals in D.C. had normalized sexual diversity within the local work culture, even in sectors (e.g., scientific research and development) that have been described as masculinist and homophobic (see Bilimoria and Stewart, 2009).

The kinds of [scientific] organizations—of which in D.C. there are many—that [my partner] could conceivably work for … if they were all located in Topeka, Kansas … the gay issue would have been much larger … but it was, certainly reassuring knowing that we could move here, and that just really was unlikely to be an issue. (Martin, 46, white)

Capital cities such as D.C. and Ottawa, then, offer a combination of organizational density and queer inclusivity that not only benefits the career mobility individual workers, but helps to maintain the social reproduction of gay family units where partners are engaged in different types of work.

***Rights Politics and Civil Service Evolutions***

State and local institutions also play a critical role in governing the degree to which workplaces support the reproduction of different types of gender and sexual identities and family forms (Bakker and Silvey, 2008; Wicks 2002). Formal rights and protections for queer workers have advanced considerably in Canada and the United States during the past two decades. While both countries have decriminalized homosexuality (Canada in 1969, United States in 2003) and legalized same-sex marriage (Canada in 1995, United States in 2015), day-to-day experiences of the government workplace are still highly variable, especially in the United States. In 1995, Canada added sexual orientation as a protected identity category in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that governs *all* Canadian workplaces. The U.S. civil service, in contrast, has generally referred to a less formal U.S. Office of Personnel Management memorandum (1980) advising against using sexual orientation in hiring and firing decision (Lewis, 1997). Despite the advent of more progressive policies in some U.S. civil service branches (e.g., elimination of homosexuality as grounds for security clearance denial in 1995, the repeal of the U.S. military’s ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’ policy in 2010), protections for gay US civil servants remain a jurisdictional and organizational patchwork.

Participants’ perceptions and experiences of civil service work varied considerably between the two cities. In Ottawa, most men had an expectation that the government sector was where Canadian non-discrimination policies were most likely to be upheld in day-to-day workplace practice.

Within our own constitution sexual identity, orientation is protected. You certainly might and will encounter specific areas—be it geographic or certain managers or whatever—who might react negatively, but it’s up to you as a gay person to stand up and … and take it out into the open. It will be dealt with very quickly. (Adrian, 56, African Canadian)

At least in the federal workplace, we have a series of rules that dictate [non-discrimination] … people understand what the rules are, and people know what their rights are. (Chad, 35, white)

Their narratives suggest that while Canadian legal frameworks protecting gay government workers are not always adhered to in organizational practice, working at the geographic ‘centre’ of government provided a sense of confidence that any transgressions would be addressed (Martinez and Hebl, 2010; Aaron and Ragusa, 2011).

In contrast, men in D.C. felt that the acceptance of gay civil servants was the product of a historically accrued work culture that was unique to the capital city.

I think federal service is much more tied to where you’re living and where you’re working than people think ... it’s not standardized across the country, necessarily, but in D.C. there’s a flavor of that it’s very comfortable to have gays working without any issues in just about every federal agency, but I didn’t get a sense of that in Ohio, especially in [military-related sectors]. (Mark, 34, white)

Meanwhile, the actual *policies* guaranteeing gay workers’ rights in D.C. have long been inconsistent, though they could become standardized through proposed amendments to the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Browning, 2015). Max (31, white), for example, was unsure whether his partner could receive health care benefits or rights to his federal pension due to inconsistent policies within different jurisdictions of the D.C. region.

One of the sort of things that I’m personally coming to grips with … is the sort of the patchwork nature of a lot of the gay marriage legislation … [partner’s name] and I live in D.C., where we are legally married, I work for the federal government, which may or may not recognize it—the jury’s still out—and [partner’s name] works in Virginia, which explicitly doesn’t recognize it.

Policies within the U.S. civil service have also been geared more toward facilitating specific work scenarios (e.g., helping same-sex couples live abroad) than providing a baseline of rights.

For the first time, [same-sex] partners have diplomatic passports and can get diplomatic visas and status … They can now travel with us on official orders and have their airfare paid for and be medically evacuated if there’s a problem, and they’re considered actually dependents … so the Department [of State] does have a policy of non-discrimination but it’s not rooted in law. (Arthur, 30, white)

While moves to Ottawa were therefore influenced by an expectation that *formal* protections would be upheld, moves to D.C. were more related to narratives about an *informal* work culture that might offer some security amidst an uneven patchwork of protections.

***Making Work ‘Work’: LGBT Auxiliary Organizations and Facilitating Worker Inclusion***

Gay workers in Ottawa and D.C. have also helped to shape the institutional landscape governing social reproduction in both cities by creating auxiliary organizations that facilitate social networking, exchange of professional know-how, and workplace activism. Labour research has typically focused on the union as the foundation of worker organization, both generally (Tufts, 1998; Wills, 2001) and with respect to gay men and lesbians (Colgan, 1999; Hunt and Eaton, 2007). Civil servant unions in Ottawa and D.C., such as the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the American Federation of Government Employees, have frequently supported legal struggles for same-sex benefits and have Pride programs. Participants, however, tended to name LGBT professional organizations as their main sources of workplaces support. Such groups can be important for queer workers who are coming out in the workplace (Griffith and Hebl, 2002; Ward and Winstanley 2005), seeking queer role models (Rumens, 2008; Bowring and Brewis, 2009), or seeking to build workplace and community identities beyond the heteronormative atmospheres of golf weekends, sports events, and parent-child activities (Giuffre et al., 2008; McDowell et al. 2004).

LGBT professional organizations also promote inclusion and belonging by publicizing and counteracting homophobia in the workplace (Martinez and Hebl 2010; Colgan and McKearney, 2012). Max (31, white) described the gay and lesbian group at his agency:

It is social, but … whenever like the [government department] does something nasty … there was an [anti-gay marriage opinion issued], so we wrote a sort of letter of concern to the Attorney General about that … I think the group … is still deciding what it is, because there was a lot of its functions were banned under the Bush administration; they were not allowed to meet on government property.

In more conservative branches of government, however, LGBT auxiliary organizations may help gay and lesbian workers to function within their workplaces without necessarily seeking to reform the work environment. John (33, white) explained the role played by the gay and lesbian professional organization within the U.S. Foreign Service:

They identify jobs … that have gay-friendly bosses or even try to help people get positions in the nicer locales like Europe or certain areas of Asia or South America. As long as you aren’t a jerk, the other [gay Foreign Service] officers will watch out for you ... if you take a position in a hardship post like Baghdad or Kabul, the members form a small community. I mean, how could you not? It’s not a friendly place for openly gay males ... lots of repression from the soldiers who get annoyed even if you look at them funny.

Auxiliary organizations can therefore provide onsite support in potentially hostile environments and facilitate both a certain type of labour segmentation (i.e., to more ‘tolerant’ posts) for gays and lesbians. Yet in helping gay and lesbian civil servants to simply adapt to workplace discrimination without necessarily enacting structural changes to facilitate more sustained inclusion, auxiliary organizations may reproduce exclusionary social relations.

LGBT professional organizations may also act as informal anchors for broader ‘alternative economies’ of gay and lesbian businesses, organizations, and fundraisers that sustain social reproduction of queer workers beyond the ephemeral interactions of bars and clubs. By circulating through these diverse alternative economies (Brown, 2009), gay workers can access forms of networking, mentorship, and knowledge-sharing that also facilitate upward mobility within the government workforce. Anthony (29, white) explained that being part of Ottawa’s Public Service Pride (PSP) organization offered networking opportunities that might not be as accessible at more mainstream work functions.

I didn’t have that advantage in a smaller center … I didn’t have other gay colleagues. And I wouldn’t say … [now I am] favoured to any great extent, but at the same time you have a natural connection to those people and therefore they pay more attention to your work style, your work ethic, your reputation … it’s all about who you know, right, in addition to what you know.

According to Anthony, larger cities and capital cities in particular offer a type of social infrastructure that allow for career development beyond the confines of the office. This infrastructure not only signifies a gay community beyond the realm of ephemeral nightlife interactions, but the presence of an alternative to conventional networking activities such as corporate retreats and golf weekends, which can be profoundly masculine and heteronormative (see McDowell, 2004). Gay professional networks, however, can also become loci of power that consolidate wealth and power for some while leaving others on the margins (see also Knopp, 1992; Nast, 2002). Two participants explained how LGBT professional organizations had divided and depoliticized local gay communities.

Like the largest gay event in Ottawa is when the gay public servants have their monthly thing … always it’s like 200 or 250 people out … so in terms of who has got the power to gather and where … it is in the public service … The social development is happening probably at those parties of gay men. (Rick, 27, white).

… There is no big overall kind of thing except for the [Human Rights Campaign], which I find them to be kind of annoying … Like they just seem to be going to parties all the time and they’re raising money for AIDS research. Great, but what about like sex education, sexual health, what about the gay elderly, what about gay teens who are getting harassed in high schools …? (Tim, 27, white)

Gay and lesbian auxiliary organizations are clearly a key component of the social reproduction infrastructure of capital cities. Yet while they help to build support structures and careers for some skilled professionals, they may also foreclose grassroots forms of community activism that incorporate multiple class subjectivities.

**Regulating sexuality at work?: The Pink Ceiling and Golden Handcuffs**

Work-related mobilities among gay men can be imagined both as acts of agency leading to emancipation from risky and potentially oppressive workplaces elsewhere and as new opportunities to fulfill affective needs imperative to workers’ social reproduction. At the same time, they remain exposed to indirect forms of labour control that restrict the expression of non-normative gender and sexual identities. Upon moving to Ottawa and D.C., participants encountered differing opinions about the acceptance of openly gay identities in government workplaces (see Humphrey, 1999; Aaron and Ragusa, 2011).

[The speaker said] “you might not feel like you want to come out for professional reasons and that’s fine” … I’m just sitting here thinking to myself that I’m at a job event sponsored by the school gay organization … and my head was just exploding and I’m thinking, why am I here? (George, 39, white)

… If you were straight and talking about your wife and kids … you’d feel much more comfortable talking about that in the office than you would if you were going off to a Black and Blue [circuit party] weekend, right? (Raymond, 31, black)

Two more men, invoking the metaphor of the pink ceiling, felt that crossing an imagined threshold of outness might prevent advancement to the highest levels of management.

I can remember having a conversation with somebody about why there aren’t more out senior civil servants in the federal government, and the man who I was talking to said, ‘you really don’t want to be terribly out otherwise you’ll hit the pink ceiling.’ (Mark, 46, white)

I think there’s still kind of a pink or violet ceiling … I can count on one finger the deputy ministers I know who are out … We have legislated equality, I don’t think we have lived equality (Jamie, 70s, white)

These comments indicate that the ‘new’ norms produced through growing visibilities of queer workers in capital cities exist alongside more conservative norms that are reproduced through indirect channels. While some men do not come out at all, others conform to unwritten rules of decorum that outlaw certain expressions of sexuality (Giuffre et al., 2008; Willis, 2009).

Just as the norms of appropriate social reproduction extend into the workplace, regulation at work can also extend into the social sphere. Ian (31, Hispanic) recounted his experience of joining a gay running group after moving to D.C. Although he had had been part of a similar group in Seattle, the dynamics of the D.C. group were different: “[Usually during introductions] everybody says their name, but they don’t do that in D.C. … they don’t wanna … be publicly at a gay event … this is the way it was explained to me.” In this way, the social reproduction concerns (e.g., developing meaningful relationships) that may have precipitated migration in the first place can again become limited after migrating.

While certain aspects of gay identities are disciplined in government workplaces, others are recast as forms insider knowledge essential to the management of particular projects and branches. Openly gay men therefore become what Humphrey (1999) calls being “out and pursued.” They become candidates for sexuality-specific positions or assignments even if they do not have a professional interest in those areas. Sebastian (42, Métis) offered an example:

I’m working in public health … if anything, I think that my life experience as a gay person is *seen* as an advantage where I work because … when you’re devising strategies about infectious disease prevention … if you’ve seen a bath house, you know, more than once in your life, it’s like you know anything about the lifestyle of single gay men.

The government sector therefore accepts and even valorizes certain professional gay identities (e.g., community educator) while rendering ‘off-the-clock’ identities unspeakable. Even as gay men become co-opted into the governance of the gay population, they are expected to eschew open expressions of sexuality. Moving to Ottawa or Washington, D.C., then, might improve gay workers’ career mobilities within and across organizations, yet constrain social mobilities.

At the same time, many participants chose to commit to careers in Ottawa and D.C. because of the financial security afforded by the local labour market, as well as the sustained social reproduction made possible through that security. Mark (49, white) explained,

I have the golden handcuffs on, so I guess probably [I will stay]. I mean after seven [more years] I can retire … I have really no desire to leave this city at this point; I see myself living here probably the rest of my life … [the idea of retirement] changes … your perspective and having done one fundamental uprooting in my life, I really have no great desire to experience that again—it was very difficult.

For Mark, who had moved from Newfoundland, his grievances with Ottawa (e.g., an emotional ‘coldness’ to the city and lack of sociability with [mostly heterosexual] work colleagues) were insufficient to precipitate another move. His narrative suggests that the labour migrations of gay men are not expressions of unfettered agency, but often debilitating social upheavals that involve sacrificing certain supports (e.g., the proximity of family) to pursue more secure livelihoods.

**Conclusions and Implications**

First, the results here suggest that sexual subjectivities cannot be disentangled from economic motivations for migration. Building on the work of feminist geographers who emphasize the problematic distinctions between reproduction and production, we found that gay migrations were shaped by, and helped to shape, landscapes of economic production and social reproduction (Mitchell et al., 2004). Geographical variation in social norms governing sexuality may prompt them to leave certain sectors or locales, pursue others, and constantly weigh career security against the potential for a fulfilling non-work life. Landscapes of work are therefore implicated in gay migration specifically because the workplace *is* a site of social reproduction where affective needs are potentially met: relationships are built, role models are sought, and professional identities are created. At the same time, the supportiveness of workplaces for queer workers varies significantly according to sector and locale. Migration thus becomes a nexus for the achievement of both economic production and social reproduction within queer livelihoods.

Our results also show that the social and sexual norms of places are also potentially influenced by the industries and workplaces that dominate them. Ottawa and Washington were attractive to gay men because public sector workplaces were believed to be gay-positive, but also because respondents felt that the corresponding capital city culture would increase their ability to participate fully in community life outside of the workplace. They perceived that socially and politically engaged cities would support their own reproduction in the form of gay friendships, community infrastructure, and same-sex romantic partnerships. Gay migrants also left or chose not to move to regions where the dominant economic sectors were perceived to be homophobic. The workplace, in this respect, is not only seen as a site where gender and sexual identities formed in the household or community are expressed and reproduced, but also one where the gender and sexual norms that permeate community life are constructed.

Given the ongoing marginalization of queer people and the imbrication of economic production and social reproduction in their lives, the geography of the North American labour market may look somewhat different to queer people than the general population. In certain regions, positions considered stable (e.g., unionized manufacturing jobs) might be located in workplaces that are uncomfortable or even dangerous for queer individuals, leading them to take on precarious work (e.g., food service) where they may still be vulnerable to discrimination. By the same token, ‘dream jobs’ in areas with little perceived potential for social reproduction in the form of queer friendships, partnerships, or community might be eschewed in favour of jobs in locales that can offer more opportunities in this respect. In other words, the choice to simply ‘do time’ in an undesired locale to advance one’s career may be less of a commonsense decision for queer people due to the uneven geographies of social reproduction they face. Regional and local landscapes of work, however, are not concrete and pre-existing, but actively shaped by the mobilities of queer people into certain sectors and locales. Over time, the segmentation of gay workers into the government sector has reshaped the norms of gender and sexuality in capital cities. Both cities have shifted from atmosphere of heavy regulation to active, albeit inconsistent, modes of inclusion ranging from auxiliary LGBT workplace organizations to non-workplace political and fundraising functions. As discussed by Rogaly (2009) and others, migrants influence broader labour markets and workplace politics by bringing their skills, talents, and identities from one place to another, and presenting new possibilities for worker resistance.

Within this broader landscape of opportunities and constraints, D.C. and Ottawa represent particular kinds of queer labor markets and alternative gay economies. Distinct regimes of social reproduction in these cities help gay men navigate potentially homophobic workplaces, network with other queer professionals, and make lateral moves in jobs related to queer politics, health, education, and advocacy. While the social reproduction opportunities offered in certain types of work settings (e.g., advocacy organizations) may attract queer workers and facilitate their career development, the regulatory nature of other workplaces (e.g., military agencies) extends into the social sphere by privileging particular professional dispositions and casting outness as a career risk. Moreover, the benefits afforded by these local queer economies, including functions and fundraisers that promote upward career mobility, are only available to those individuals whose education, skills, and capital allow them to participate. This exclusivity may be the fallout of transitions to more institutionalized forms of LGBT community that are especially prominent in government towns like Ottawa and D.C. (Lewis, 2012b).

Gay men’s work-related migrations are thus mediated the by ongoing tensions between economic production and social reproduction, as well as between agency and control. The ongoing influx of queer workers into capital cities for both career reasons (e.g., availability of less gender-normative work) and social reasons (e.g., finding larger gay communities) has allowed for the ongoing restructuring of organizations to partially meet the affective needs of sexuality. Migration, however, do not necessarily resolve the tension between worker agency and control. Gay workers continue to segment themselves into sectors and workplaces where they perceive their sexuality to be more accepted, and to locales where they expect to be better protected. They also become tokenized through the commodification of the gay identity for production purposes and face only partial acceptability even in gay-friendly workplaces (Giuffre et al., 2008). As Hennessy (2006, 392) states “…in the end, capital cares more about the accumulation of profit than about the particularities of human individuals, about gay or straight, man or woman. And yet, the accumulation process takes place within certain limits which include the cultural dimension of social life that the worker brings with her, including the organization of affective needs into sexuality.” Future research should therefore give greater attention to how queer people reconcile affective needs and career security in landscapes of heterosexism and homophobia that remain uneven. Work should be understood as a fundamental component of queer livelihoods, and a more critical examination of how it intersects with sexual identity is as important as the focus on identity itself in queer geographical research.

**Notes**

1 Here, queer refers to the broader range of non-normative sexual and gender identities including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender.

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