Háskólinn á Akureyri
University of Akureyri

One of those stories

Social control, migration, and gossip: young women in small rural communities in Iceland

Doctoral thesis

Gréta Bergrún Jóhannesdóttir

University of Akureyri
Social Sciences
2024

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Doctoral thesis

Sociology

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Ein af þessum sögum

Félagslegt taumhald, fólksflutningar og slúður: ungar konur í litlum byggðarlögum á Íslandi

Gréta Bergrún Jóhannesdóttir

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Fyrir allar "druslur" þessa lands, skömmin er ekki ykkar

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Work like this doesn't happen without the love and support of the people closest to you. My lovely daughter and my cheerful, energetic boys are my greatest supporters as well as my pride in life. I am lucky to have my sisters as my close friends and supporters. Helga Rún, my extra sister, was there for me every single step of the way. This girl is also so lucky to be surrounded with friends, some since early childhood, who have endless belief in my ability to do great things, even finish this adventure of writing a doctoral thesis. The women in my life have always had a great influence on me, and I know my mother and grandmothers will smile down from the sky on the day that I hold my PhD certificate. My dear friend Sóley recently joined them, and I know she will decorate the sky with her joy on my behalf. Last but not least, my father and brother are like steady rocks in my life, always there when I need them.

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away before the article was published. She was a great person and an outstanding professional within the field of rural sociology.

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To all the courageous women I interviewed who told me their stories – sometimes painful memories but fortunately most often love for their village – and gave me insight into their lives: thank you all for making this possible.

Ágrip

Í þessu doktorsverkefni eru rannsökuð samfélagsleg áhrif á ungar konur í litlum byggðarlögum og félagslegir þættir sem hafa áhrif á búsetu þeirra og búsetuánægju. Þar er sérstaklega horft til þess hvernig félagslegt taumhald slúðurs virkar í þessum samfélögum og hvernig því er beitt gegn konum.

Rannsóknin byggir á megindlegum og eigindlegum rannsóknaraðferðum. Megindleg gögn koma úr könnunum sem lagðar voru fyrir á Íslandi árin 2019-2020 á vegum verkefnisins Búferlaflutningar á Íslandi. Niðurstöðurnar sýna að það félagslega taumhald sem felst í slúðri hefur áhrif á búferlaáætlanir bæði karla og kvenna í litlum byggðarlögum. Þau sem upplifa mikið slúður um sitt ástarlíf eru tvöfalt líklegri til að ætla að flytja en aðrir sem ekki upplifa slíkt. Fyrir þau sem fluttu áður fyrr úr litlum byggðarlögum til höfuðborgarsvæðisins má sjá kynjamun. Konur sem nefna slúður sem eina af ástæðum fyrir fyrri flutningum eru marktækt ólíklegri til að snúa aftur út í landsbyggðirnar en aðrir sem fluttu.

Eigindleg gögn koma úr viðtölum við konur, sem voru tekin í nokkrum sjávarbyggðum á Íslandi árin 2019-2021. Megin áhersla viðtalanna var viðhorf og upplifun kvennanna á slúðri og hvernig þær upplifa það í sínu samfélagi. Niðurstöður viðtalanna sýna að konur upplifa félagslega stjórnun og kynbundna drusluskömm í þessum litlu samfélögum, þar sem frelsi kvenna til einkalífs er takmarkað nema eiga á hættu umtal og slúður. Konurnar sýna forðun í félagslegri hegðun, þar sem ótti við slúður og skömm hefur áhrif á hegðun þeirra og gjörðir. Þá eru einhleypar konur einnig að upplifa sterkt félagslegt taumhald þegar kemur að kynlífi og ástarlífi.

Lykilorð: slúður, félagslegt taumhald, fólksflutningar, konur, lítil byggðarlög

Abstract

This PhD thesis focuses on young women in small rural communities in Iceland and different social factors that influence their residence and residential satisfaction in these locations. Special emphasis is placed on the social control of gossip and the effects it has on women.

The research is based on quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data was obtained by surveys conducted in Iceland in 2019-2020 in the project Residential Stability and Migration. The results show that the social control of gossip affects the migration intentions of both men and women. Those who perceive much gossip about their love life are twice as likely to have migration intentions than people who do not experience much gossip about their love- life. Of those who have already migrated to the Capital Region from rural areas, women who mention gossip as a reason for prior migration are statistically less likely to return than other migrants.

Qualitative data comes from interviews conducted with women in small coastal communities in Iceland in 2019-2021. The interviews focused on gossip, and how the women perceive gossip in their community. The results show that there is gendered social control and slut-shaming in these small communities, where women's freedom to enjoy privacy is restricted without being the subject of gossip. The women show avoidance behaviour whereby the fear of gossip and shaming affects their actions and behaviour. Single women especially experience strong social control when it comes to sexual activities and love life.

Keywords: gossip, social control, migration, women, rural communities

Contents

List of figures

Overview of original articles

This doctoral thesis is based on the following original publications which will be referred to in the text by Roman numbers.

I. Jóhannesdóttir, G. B., Bjarnason, T., Stockdale A. and Haartsen, T. (2021). What's love got to do with it? Love life gossip and migration intentions. Journal of Rural Studies, 87, bls. 236 – 242. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.09.019

II. Jóhannesdóttir, G. B., and Skaptadóttir, U. D. (2023). "You don't want to be one of those stories": Gossip and shame as instruments of social control in small communities. NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research. https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2023.2228797

III. Jóhannesdóttir, G.B. "This Fawning, Flirty Type": Singlehood, Gossip and Power Dynamics—Young Women in Rural Communities. Sexuality & Culture (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-024-10227-x

IV. Bjarnason, T., Jóhannesdóttir, G.B. and Garðarsdóttir, Ó. (In review). From city lights to country nights? The long-term effects of gossip in rural communities on rural return migration preferences and intentions.

Additionally, the following reports and book chapters have been published in context of the doctoral study.

Bjarnason, Þ., **Jóhannesdóttir**, G. B., Gunnarsson, G., Garðarsdóttir, Ó., Þórðardóttir, S. E., Skaptadóttir, U. D., and Karlsson, V., (2022). Um Byggðafestu og búferlaflutninga [Residental stability and migration]. In

Bjarnason (ed.) *Byggðafesta og Búferlaflutningar á Íslandi,* p.13-21. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan

Bjarnason, Þ., Jóhannesdóttir, G. B., and Garðarsdóttir, Ó. (2022). Búferlaflutningar og flutningsjöfnuður [Migration and net-migration]. In Bjarnason (ed.) *Byggðafesta og Búferlaflutningar á Íslandi,* p.55-86. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan

Bjarnason, Þ., Jóhannesdóttir, G. B., and Þórðardóttir, S. E. (2022). Búsetuánægja og búferlaflutningar [Residental satisfaction and migration]. In Bjarnason (ed.) *Byggðafesta og Búferlaflutningar á Íslandi,* p.125-138. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan

Bjarnason, Þ., Jóhannesdóttir, G. B., Garðarsdóttir, Ó., and Skaptadóttir, U. D. (2022). Menntun og búferlaflutningar [Education and migration]. In Bjarnason (ed.) *Byggðafesta og Búferlaflutningar á Íslandi,* p.139-158. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan

Bjarnason, Þ., Jóhannesdóttir, G. B., Skaptadóttir, U. D., and Þórðardóttir, S. E (2022). Kynjuð viðhorf og búferlaflutningar [Gender and migration]. In Bjarnason (ed.) *Byggðafesta og Búferlaflutningar á Íslandi,* p.265-284. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan

Bjarnason, Þ., Jóhannesdóttir, G. B., and Skaptadóttir, U. D., (2022). Innflytjendur og búferlaflutningar [Immigrants and migration]. In Bjarnason (ed.) *Byggðafesta og Búferlaflutningar á Íslandi,* p.285-310. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan

Bjarnason, Þ., Jóhannesdóttir, G. B., Gunnarsson, G., Garðarsdóttir, Ó., Þórðardóttir, S. E., Skaptadóttir, U. D., and Karlsson, V., (2019) *Byggðafesta og búferlaflutningar: bær og þorp á Íslandi vorið 2019* [Residental stability and migration: small towns and villages in Iceland in 2019]. Byggðastofnun. https://www.byggdastofnun.is/static/files/Skyrslur/byggdafesta/byggdafesta_34bls_2019_net.pdf

Declaration of Contribution to the thesis

This doctoral research is connected to the project *Byggðafesta og búferlaflutningar*, Residential Stability and Migration (RSM), a collaborative research project between academics at several universities and the Icelandic Regional Centre, led by Prof. Þóroddur Bjarnason. The research was conducted in the years 2019-2021. All quantitative data used in the thesis are from the RSM project, used with the permission of the project's steering group. The doctoral student was a part of the RSM project's steering group and participated in drafting the questionnaires. I added questions relating to my doctoral project to the questionnaires and the answers are used in this thesis. The doctoral student was also a member of the group of authors who published results and material from the RSM project. All qualitative data comes from interviews with women in small coastal communities in Iceland. The doctoral student set the interview guidelines and collected all qualitative data for the thesis with support of supervisor Dr. Þóroddur Bjarnason and doctoral committee member Dr. Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir.

This doctoral project is funded by Icelandic Equality Fund, Icelandic Research Fund (RANNÍS) and University of Akureyri Research Fund. Húsavík Academic Centre also offered support in the form of office space and a working environment in the village of Þórshöfn, where the doctoral student lives.

A detailed description of the doctoral student's contribution and the contribution of the authors of the four articles that comprise the thesis follows.

Article I

The doctoral student developed the structure of the article and analysed the survey data collected in the RSM project in collaboration with the main instructor. The doctoral student was the main author

while the co-authors Þóroddur Bjarnason, Tialda Haartsen and Aileen Stockdale gave feedback and directions based on their field of knowledge.

Article II

The doctoral student developed the research idea for this article as well as the outline and structure. The doctoral student conducted the interviews under the guidance of co-author and doctoral committee member Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir. The doctoral student analysed and coded the qualitative data and constructed the themes. The doctoral student was the main author of the article with supervision and guidance from the co-author who provided feedback and comments.

Article III

The doctoral student developed the research topic of this article as well as the outline and structure. The doctoral student conducted the interviews under the guidance of doctoral committee member Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir. The doctoral student analysed and coded the qualitative data and constructed the themes. The author wrote the article with guidance and feedback from the main supervisor.

Article IV

The doctoral student initiated this article in collaboration with the main instructor and wrote the first draft of the introduction, literature review and discussion. As the first author, the main instructor designed and implemented the statistical analysis and rewrote all sections of the paper. The doctoral student and the third author provided feedback on various versions that resulted in substantive changes to the paper.

1 Background and motivation

In Iceland there is a saying that you can't let the truth ruin a good story. Icelanders are a story telling people, where the same stories are heard from one generation to the next. But there is a fine line between gossip and stories, between the truth and fiction. Sometimes we feel the need to add little spice to a good story to make it better; not necessarily lying but adding facts, thoughts, or other small details to make a story juicier. The story then passes on to the next person and the next, like the whispering game that was once a common party trick where one person whispers a sentence to the next until the original speaker no longer recognises what he or she first said.

I consider myself fortunate to have grown up on a farm alongside my grandparents who lived next door. My favourite person, my grandma, never spoke ill of anyone and gossip, at least the nasty kind, was not her cup of tea. She was a strong, hardworking woman of another era, a time when gender equality was limited in many aspects of the society. Times have changed, and while Iceland leads the world in gender equality, things still are not entirely equal. Women still bear the main responsibility for childcare and housework, as well as for shouldering most of all the family's emotional work (Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Hjálmsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2019; Pétursdóttir, 2009; Gíslason and Símonardóttir, 2018; Thorsdottir, 2012). There still isn't equal pay for the same jobs. The list is endless.

After completing my bachelor's and master's degree I returned home, to my beautiful hometown in Northeast Iceland close to the farm. I suddenly found that being a mother limited my job opportunities in a community that seemed to favour men's work and occupations. Limited daycare for toddlers wasn't considered a gendered issue. However, my constant traveling for work was a matter of town gossip. It was as if I were outside the norm for the local women for not being home enough for my children or taking care of the home. Interestingly, this was in a community of fisheries, where many men "travel" for work and are away from home for lengthy periods.

Spending some of my twenties and all of my thirties living in this small community brought up all kinds of questions that need to be answered, even though only a few are addressed in this dissertation. These are questions of gender equality and the life of women in such communities; about gendered volunteer work, the tendency for moms to be on the parents' committee of the children's school and to oversee the committee of the sports union; about personal life, the process of developing sexuality and the space that people have living in tight-knit social settings. These questions about equality became more demanding and frustrating. Do I want to raise my children in a community that favours men and boys over other genders? My town is dear to me and the community is caring, closely knit and people are there for one another when in need. We still need to have space for everyone to thrive and be themselves.

Small rural communities often face challenges as the population ages and the number of young people and children shrinks. Lack of educational opportunities and diverse job opportunities often operate as push factors, while the bright lights of the big cities are magnets for young people (Johansson, 2016; Leibert, 2016; Rauhut and Little, 2016). It has sometimes been described as living in a fishbowl, and one can imagine that leaving the fishbowl can be liberating.

Gossip is frequently mentioned as a possible push factor in small rural communities and for rural women in particular (Brettell, 2016; Farstad, 2016; Glendinning et al, 2003; Haugen and Villa, 2006; Rye, 2006a; Stockdale, 2002). Exploring and developing sexual identities is also considered a reason for out-migration of young people in small communities, where getting away from prying eyes of family and friends is also essential (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson, 2006; Edlund, 2005; Thorsteinsson et al., 2020; Wimark and Östh, 2014).

Rural ambiance has been cited as a reason to stay as well as a reason to leave (Haugen and Villa, 2016). If the ambiance in rural areas is more male orientated, where traditional male vocations such as forestry, farming and fisheries are the main foundation of the job market, it is no wonder that these areas are deficient of females (Dahlström, 1996; Rasmussen, 2011). The hegemonic masculinity of many rural communities relegates women to the supportive roles of mothers and caregivers, and female out-migration can in a way be seen as a challenge to traditional gender roles (Campbell, 2000; Grimsrud, 2011a; Little & Austin, 1996).

The idea of hegemonic masculinity has been the subject of much debate and discussion in recent decades. Connell (1995) defined it as a practice that legitimizes men's dominant status in societies and the subordination of women. In later work, Connell and Messerschmitdt (2005) discuss the concept in the work of Rethinking the concept; "masculinities are configuration of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to gender relations in a particular social setting" (p.836). This does give room for rural masculinities, built within the social setting of rural areas. It is also important to note, that as Connell and Masserschmidt also claim, that "to sustain a given pattern of hegemony requires the policing of men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women" (2005, p.844). The slut-shaming and gendered social control that is to be found within rural areas in Iceland is certainly discrediting women and their position within these societies.

There has as well been a constant discussion and theorising at to what it is to be a woman, what being feminine means as well as the concept of femininity. Simone de Beauvoir addressed it as a socially constructed, where one is not born but becomes a woman (1949). Judith Butler has as well addressed this in her groundbreaking work on gender issues, where she among other things claims that we need to rethink the category of a woman. She questions the norms that construct and stabilize the binaries of gender, and how those norms not only define but restrict human identity and expression (1990). Women encounter numerous norms and stereotypes regarding their looks, body image and behaviour. They are often expected to prioritize family, care for others, and exhibit communal qualities (Ellemers, 2018; Haines, 2016).

They are also regulated to the supportive roles of mothers and caregivers (Campell and Bell, 2000; Dahlström, 1996; Grimsrud, 2011; Little & Austin, 1996).

Some researchers in the Nordic countries have argued that male dominance and hegemony of gender relations in rural areas are major causes of out-migration among women (Dahlström, 1996; Rauhut and Littke, 2016). These traditional gender roles might also be too much of a challenge for in-migrating women who are not accustomed to it, in turn pushing them out again (Grimsrud, 2011a). This male dominance of space also makes it more difficult for women to feel closely tied to their home region (Argent and Walmsley, 2008), and they may even feel like foreigners in their own community (Stockdale, 2004).

This dissertation will hopefully contribute to the literature on rural out-migration as well as tight social spaces, hegemonic masculine rural spaces and gossip and gendered aspects of rural communities. This research provides insights into the lives of women in small rural communities and how gendered social control affects their life. The results also show in general how well gossip works as an instrument in social control. The shame that flows around with the gossip is powerful.

The fear of shame prevents people from breaking social norms, and in that way regulates and maintains informal rules of society.

Migration is a complicated phenomenon. Economic factors are often presented as the main force, but scholars such as Clark and Maas (2015), Halfacree (2012), Rérat (2014) and Stockdale (2016) have pointed out that migration is much more complex than that. In this thesis, the focus

is on internal migration. The focus is also on verbal gossip, that is, talk and gossip within a society and between people. More focus is on gossip about love-life than other gossip, in order to grasp on the slut-shaming that flows around with gossip about love-life and sexual activities. Social media is getting stronger as a communication tool for people all around the world, and would without a doubt be an interesting research subject regarding gossip although not examined in this thesis.

This sociological research is based on an intersectional and interdisciplinary feminist approach combining rural studies, sociology, gender studies and geography. To understand the lives of women in small communities, it is not enough to look at the place itself. In feminist research, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in 1991 to examine the interconnected social categorizations of individuals or groups, such as race, class, and gender. Her goal was to ensure that women of colour have their voices heard and to highlight that their experiences differ from individuals who do not share their class or racial backgrounds (1991). Patricia Hill Collins also uses this term, but she expands on it by describing the intersecting, mutually constructed systems of power as a "matrix of domination." In this framework, issues of oppression such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation intersect and influence each other (2000).

We must always look at multiple social factors such as power relations, gender and space, if we are to understand the people living in a certain place as feminist geographers have argued (Massey, 1994; Peake, 2017; Rose, 1993; Valentine, 2002). We also must acknowledge

the fact that one can never fully understand and generalise about people, despite these combined factors. It is therefore important to use an intersectional approach, looking at gender, space, marital status, "local" status and other social factors that can influence the lives of women in small communities.

Icelandic law acknowledges that there are more than two genders. As of 2019, people may identify as non-binary. In this thesis I speak of women and men, since all of my data, both quantitative and qualitative, are from individuals who identify as either men or women. This is in no way meant to discredit the fact that not all Icelanders fit these gender categories.

Results of research like this may give an insight into a specific aspect of the lives of women in small rural communities in Iceland. It also shows the functions of gossip in such social settings, and what a powerful instrument it is. However, I can never claim to have a complete picture of these rural communities or the women who live there. Hopefully this will serve as an effort to improve the situation, to understand how gossip works and to examine ways to change this largely negative aspect of small communities. It is also useful in general, since gossip is everywhere and not limited to small communities. As social beings, we all feel the need to gossip at some point; we have a natural sense of curiosity about our surroundings. This can certainly be useful up to a point, though it is not necessary to know everything about other people.

2 Structure and design of the thesis

This thesis is based on four research articles, three already published. They are discussed by their Roman numbers I, II, III and IV, and can be found in the appendix.

The research questions are presented in Chapter 2.1. These questions are presented and answered in the articles but are thoroughly discussed in the conclusion. Chapter 3 gives a structural view of the articles and the main conclusions. A brief literature review and theoretical approach towards rural communities is presented in Chapter 4, as well as on the social control of gossip.

Chapter 5 presents Iceland as a case study and provides a brief overview of rural Iceland. Chapter 6 explains the methodology of the research project, explaining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Research discussions and limitations are outlined in Chapter 7. Overall conclusions and main findings are outlined in Chapter 8, which gives an overview of the findings of each article, as well as discussions of possible future research.

2.1 Research question and research aims

The aim of this research is to examine the life of women in small rural communities, social space, social control and migration intentions relating to gossip. Rural areas and small communities often have the image of being tightly knit spaces where one's personal life is everyone's

business. The unequal gender ratio of many rural communities has frequently been explained by the out-migration of women, but less attention has been given to the extent to which women are reluctant to move into such communities, either as true in-migrants or return migrants.

Research about gossip can present small communities in a negative light. However, if gossip really functions as a push factor in such communities, this research may provide an opportunity for small communities to aim towards changing for the better. Gender equality and diversity can increase life satisfaction and make small communities better. It is important that there is room for everyone, be it on the job market, in education or cultural life. There also must be personal space for people to live their private life, especially when exploring your sexuality, or finding a partner to share your life with.

The main research questions are as follows:

- *How does gossip about love life affect the migration intentions of women and men in small communities in Iceland? Are young women more affected by gossip than young men?*
- *How do young women experience personal space and social control in small communities regarding gossip? Are single women in these communities subject to gendered slut-shaming?*
- *Are people who have migrated to the Reykjavík capital area because of gossip less likely to return? Is there a gender*

difference between the potential return migrants who moved because of gossip?

Each question is addressed in theoretical articles I, II, III and IV, some with slightly different wording. These questions are discussed thoroughly in the conclusion.

3 Overview of publications

3.1 Article I

Jóhannesdóttir, G. B., Bjarnason, T., Stockdale, A. and Haartsen, T. (2021). "What's love got to do with it? Love life gossip and migration intentions". *Journal of Rural Studies, 87*, 236–242. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.09.019

The article contributes to the literature on rural out-migration. Gossip has been identified as one of the reasons for the out-migration of women (Brettell, 2016; Farstad, 2016; Glendinning et al, 2003; Haugen and Villa, 2006; Rye, 2006a; Stockdale, 2002). This evidence is, however, exclusively qualitative, and no prior studies have attempted to demonstrate the existence or strength of such an affect nor the extent to which gossip may affect young women more than young men.

The quantitative data used is from a survey conducted in 56 villages in Iceland. The survey included questions about migration and migration intentions as well as the perception of gossip about the participants´ personal life. The results show that the more gossip people perceive about their love life, the more likely they are to have migration intentions. After controlling for age, gender, family situation, socio-economic status and community ties, we find that love life gossip increases migration intentions. This effect is not as gendered as was expected, as men are almost equally as likely as women to have

migration intentions related to gossip about their love life. Both men and women who perceive significant gossip about their love life are twice as likely to have migration intentions, compared to those who perceive little or no gossip about their love life.

3.2 Article II

Jóhannesdóttir, G. B., and Skaptadóttir, U. D. (2023). "You don't want to be one of those stories: Gossip and shame as instruments of social control in small communities". *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*. https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2023.2228797

This article focuses on the social control of gossip. The main question asks how gossip and shame are implemented as instruments to control young women's lives in small coastal communities in Iceland. Social control is gendered, and we found that women are slut-shamed for their sexual activities, or perceived activities, in these small communities.

The article is based on qualitative interviews with 24 women in small coastal communities in Iceland. The interviews were carried out between 2019 and 2021. The informants were women in the age range of 25-45 in coastal communities with 100-500 inhabitants. Using local Facebook groups, women who both lived in the villages and who moved away from them were encouraged to participate.

The young women interviewed experienced social control through gossip. Some of them also adopted avoidance behaviours when

confronted with gossip and shaming in their communities. Some of them had at some point out-migrated to escape, perhaps returning once some time had passed. The analysis shows how gossip enforces and maintains gendered social control. This is done by gossiping about women's behaviour or perceived behaviour that doesn't conform with the informal social rules of the community. This behaviour incurs shame that often damages women's reputations. Even though nicknames and name-calling are not as common in these small communities as in earlier times, some slut-shaming name-calling is still remembered. These slutty names were almost exclusively reserved for women, and usually the women who endured such slut-shaming no longer lived in these communities.

The participants found that there was no room for a love life or to engage in sexual activities without being gossiped about, and that women were more harshly judged than men for engaging in multiple sexual activities. The results show clearly that this shaming through gossip resulted in gendered social control in those small communities.

3.3 Article III

Jóhannesdóttir, G.B. "This Fawning, Flirty Type": Singlehood, Gossip and Power Dynamics—Young Women in Rural Communities. Sexuality & Culture (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-024-10227-x

This article focuses on the social lives of single women in small communities in Iceland. Being single in a society where being in a relationship is the norm can be a challenge. This can be even more of a challenge in small communities with few single people of one's own age.

These tight settings create the perfect environment for social control where challenging social norms often invites gossip. This has damaging effects on young women in small communities and limits their personal space. This can be especially hard for those who perceive their social lives and sexual activities to be under the microscope of the community.

This article is based on the same qualitative interviews as article II. The interviews with women were carried out in a few coastal communities in 2019-2021. The informants were women in the age range of 25-45 in communities with 100-500 inhabitants. Using local Facebook groups, women both living in the villages and who have moved away were encouraged to participate.

The findings reveal patterns of social exclusion and often stigmatization of single women in these communities. Dinner parties and other activities were sometimes "just a couples thing ". Companionship options were most often gendered; i.e. groups of women or groups of men, and mixed-gender group activities were rare. Single women are frequently slut-shamed because of their love life or sexual activities and are judged more harshly than men for having an affair with someone who is married.

There were quite interesting power dynamics that emerged between local and non-local inhabitants. It seems that local single women were better able to resist slut-shaming and stigmatisation than those who were non-local.

3.4 Article IV

Bjarnason, T., Jóhannesdóttir, G.B. and Garðarsdóttir, Ó.(In review). "From city lights to country nights? The role of gossip in shaping rural return migration patterns."

This article is focused on the possible return migration to rural areas from the Reykjavík capital area. Data comes from the Residential stability and migration (RSM) project, where the focus group is people who have moved to the Reykjavík capital area from rural areas in Iceland. Out-migrants have various reasons for migration, such as seeking education, better jobs or longing for a more urban way of life. Gossip is also mentioned as one of the reasons for prior out-migration by 29% of female respondents and 21% of male respondents.

Former rural out-migrants have various reasons for return to rural areas. Having a family in the area matters, as do strong social networks and friends. Place attachment is also a reason for return migration, as well as nostalgic memories of family life and the quiet countryside, often referred to as the rural idyll.

The findings in this paper show that rural areas indeed face a gender challenge when it comes to attracting return migrants. There is

a clear gender difference whereby women who mention gossip as a reason for prior migration are statistically less likely to return than other former out-migrants. These women both have a lower point of return intentions for the next 2-3 years and lower preference for returning to life in rural areas. After controlling for age, period of departure from the rural area, and several socio-economic characteristics, statistical association between gossip and possible return migration is present for females only. This suggests that gossip has long-term effects on women only, preventing them from returning to rural areas.

4 Sociology of the rural and the social control of gossip: theoretical approach

4.1 The rural idyll

Rural communities often enjoy an image of rural idyll, a place of peace and beautiful landscapes (Munkejord, 2006). There is also a tendency to regard rural communities as a normative image of the past and a repository of national identity (Shucksmith, 2018). The selling points of rural communities seeking new inhabitants include notions of the good life in the countryside, easy access to nature, outdoor activities and a good place to raise kids and enjoy a high quality of life (Grimsrud and Båtevik, 2016). Typical rural idyll characteristics, for example clean air, peace and quiet, low crime rates and little traffic, are also considered as reasons to stay in small communities (Bjarnason et al, 2019).

The assumption of fundamental differences in social life between rural and urban communities is also one of the defining characteristics of the somewhat mythical notion of a 'rural idyll' in many Western societies (Horton, 2008; Little and Austin, 1996; Matthews et al, 2000; Short, 2006, Grimsrud and Båtevik, 2016). Shucksmith (2018) points out that the celebration of rural idyll is normative and power-infused, simultaneously masking repression and supporting local power structures. Others such as Gray (2009), Kazyak (2011) and Woodell et

al.(2015) have pointed out that the rural areas are still stereotyped with negative images of old-fashioned values and consider this is a part of the city cantered metro normativity of recent centuries.

One aspect of rural idyll is the notion that rural areas are characterised by more social interaction, bonding as a form of social capital and community resilience of rural areas (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000) Indeed, Farstad (2016) found that in Norway's rural areas there is more neighbourly care, more social interaction, and more mutual trust than in urban areas. Little and Austin (1996) argue that rural idyll not only involves perceptions of rural communities as being more friendly, supportive and closely knit, but also that such perceptions become imbedded in community behaviour, values and relationships. Similarly, what some people perceive as a 'safe and good' rural environment might be viewed by others as a form of social control where everyone is visible to each other (Parr and Philo, 2003) and 'everybody knows everything about everybody' (Haugen, and Villa, 2006) and

Rural idyll may, however, be contradictory, gendered, and can mean different things to people at different life stages. Shucksmith (2018) argues for the discursive power to be mitigated; rural areas are often seen as passive recipients of modernity, rooted in the past with a dependent role in the global economy. Shucksmith (2018: 165) further notes that "perhaps [it] suits the powerful in rural societies for the status quo to be celebrated rather than scrutinized". It might also be rooted in the past when it comes to traditional gender models, which in

turn can fuel the out-migration of women who challenge it (Grimsrud, 2011a).

Hegemonic masculinities are often connected to rurality and rural lifestyles. This hegemonic masculinity can relegate women to the supportive roles of mothers and caregivers, and female out-migration can in part be seen as a challenge to traditional gender roles (Campell, 2000; Campell and Bell, 2000; Dahlström, 1996; Darcy, 2014; Grimsrud, 2011a; Little & Austin, 1996). This might be changing for the better. Bye (2009) found that even though rural communities still tend to be more traditional in terms of gender relations, there are signs that young men in rural areas are adapting to newer and alternative masculinities. Aure and Munkejord (2015) found similar trends in rural areas of Finnmark in Norway, where they estimated that ongoing gendered changes in the country were changing dominant rural masculinities.

The contrast between the rural and the urban, the close-knit personal communities with informal social control and strong solidarity, and impersonal, bureaucratic, and modern cities was central to the contemporary social theory of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Durkheim 1893; Simmel, 1903; Tönnies, 1887; Weber, 1921). This continues to haunt classical theorists to some extent, and this thesis is not a turning point towards that end, at least not for the rural areas. There is, however, no denying the fact that rural areas change with modern times like any other areas, perhaps just at a slower pace when it comes to gender relations.

4.2 Migration from rural areas

The motivations behind choosing a place to settle are intricate and varied. Urban areas attract residents with enhanced access to services, while the lack of such access is often mentioned as a push factor in rural areas (Sörensen, 2012). There is more diversity of cultural activities in urban areas while limited cultural activities are mentioned as a quality lacking in rural areas (Rauhut and Littke, 2016). Better educational opportunities are also one of the main attractions of urban areas (Leibert, 2016; Johansson, 2016), as well as better job opportunities and jobs suited to one's educational background (Karlsdóttir, 2008). The magnetism of urban areas is often visible in the media, where these areas are depicted as superior and desirable. This magnetism has also been called "bright light syndrome", especially for young people who are supposedly pulled like flies toward the light.

Migration flow from rural to urban areas has been widely researched. In the literature, urban pull factors of urban characteristics are frequently mirrored in the lack of such characteristics as rural push factors. Out-migration may be influenced by factors such as former residential experience (Laoire and Stockdale, 2016), weak social networks in a region (Rauhut and Littke, 2016) or family members residing elsewhere (Stockdale, 2002). The lack of public services can serve as a trigger for migration for some groups of the population and school closures for others (Peters et al., 2018).

In Iceland, jobs and education are the main reasons for migration from rural areas (Bjarnason et al. 2019). In contrast, family and social ties have often been connected to staying (Haartsen and Bjarnason, 2023; Rasmussen, 2011) and as an important factor in return migration (Laoire and Stockdale, 2016).

The migration intentions of young adolescents may not always lead to actual migration but have been shown to be a strong predictor of migration (Bjarnason, 2004; Stockdale and Haartsen, 2018). Young people who believe that they have better job prospects elsewhere are much more likely to migrate (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson, 2006). Youth migration is often related to education (Johansson, 2016; Stockdale, 2002) but with this educational progression, there has been a tendency for young people in rural areas to feel that they have to leave (Corbett, 2007). This can also lead to stigmatisation, where those who remain are associated with failure while those who leave are valued more highly (Haartsen and Thissen, 2014; Hayfield, 2017).

Many rural municipalities face a downward spiral of population decline with people becoming less attached to place, whereas ”local identity and national pride both contribute to less migration intentions” (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson, 2006, p. 299). Place attachment can also be gendered, where young boys are more positive towards their municipalities and towards the possibility of living there in the future (Glendinning et al., 2003; Båtevik, 2001). Pedersen (2018) found that rural youth out-migrants could be characterised as having a “double-edged rurality”, as they sometimes showed a strong pride of place while

rejecting it at other times. Haartsen and Bjarnason (2023) also found that young people have positive and negative associations to a rural atmosphere, where positives are qualities such as quietness and knowing the neighbours and negative ones are that it is "boring" and there is "nothing to do" (p.95).

4.3 Return migration to rural areas

Counter-urbanisation with migration to rural areas is often seen as a quest for rural idyll, whereby people seek a place of peace, exotic climate and landscape (Grimsrud and Båtevik, 2016; Munkejord, 2006). There is, however, a large group within that stream of migration who are return migrants. In Sweden, return migrants account for four out of ten counter-urban migrants, most of whom have families in the destination (Sandow and Lundholm, 2023). Grimsrud (2011b) finds a similar trend in Norway, that rural in-migrants are more likely to be motivated by family relations than desire for rural lifestyle.

Family bonds are important for return migrants and matter greatly in their decisions to return (Bijker et al, 2012; Gillespie et al., 2022; Grimsrud, 2011b; Scott et al., 2017). Return migrants often hold nostalgic memories of family life, a peaceful rural life and want to raise their children in the same environment that they enjoyed themselves (Cawley, 2020; Ní Laoire, 2007). Of course, there are some social factors that young people find restricting which they then regard as positive and preferrable when raising children (Crow, 2010; Hayfield, 2017; Ní Laoire, 2008).

Return migration can be valuable for rural areas. Return migrants are often individuals who have left to seek education and return home with new skills and expertise (Dustmann et al., 2011). People may also return home after personal trauma such as a divorce, seeking emotional support and networks (Ní Laoire, 2008; Wall and Reichert, 2013). Many have strong place attachment, some so strong that it is as if they never left (Haartsen and Thissen, 2014) and the sense of belonging can be influential as well (Philip and MacLeod, 2016; Rérat, 2014).

Place attachments are fluid and individual and may be used as a coping mechanism when relocating to a new place, in order to adapt and feel good. It can also be used to form social connections and a regional identity (Pedersen, 2018). The relationship between people and places is a complicated and constantly changing phenomenon that influences migration processes. The choice to migrate is a personal decision influenced by various economic and social factors. Examining migration as a process necessitates consideration through the lens of gender dynamics as well.

4.4 Gendered migration from the rural

To understand and explore both causes and consequences of migration, one must understand gendered restrictions and gendered relations (Brettell, 2016). Rural women have been found to seek more female-friendly labour markets, education, and general services (Johansson,2016; Rauhut and Littke, 2016) as well as better marriage

opportunities in urban areas (Edlund, 2005). Single people, however, are in general more likely to migrate to the city and this applies to both men and women (Gautier, Svarer and Teulings, 2010). In Iceland, having a spouse, with or without children, decreased the odds of intending to leave (Haartsen and Bjarnason, 2023).

One negative gendered aspect of rural communities is economic. Men are more likely than women to believe that formal academic education is of limited value when remaining in a rural area (Corbett, 2007) and instead seek vocational training (Rye, 2006b). Social networks also matter and often serve as a gateway into the labour market. This can mean that less-educated men with a strong social network don't need to migrate from home to find a good job (Zahl-Thanem and Haugen, 2019; Løken, Lommerud and Lundberg, 2013). The family ties and job prospects of men have been found to dominate the residential decisions of married couples (Løken, Lommerud and Lundbert, 2013, Stockdale, 2017). Similar tendencies can be found in small communities in Iceland, where more men than women who currently live in small communities have spent their childhood years there (Bjarnason, 2022) and could therefore be regarded as locals.

Many studies indicate that more women leave rural areas than men (Argent and Walmsley, 2008; Båtevik, 2001; Bonifacio, 2014; Brettell, 2016; Carson et al., 2011; Corbett, 2007). A recent Swedish study shows that women are more likely to out-migrate from rural areas than men (Kaperstam and Håkansson, 2021). This is frequently portrayed in the media as a disadvantage for rural men; i.e. they are

depicted as less educated and left behind while women leave for urban areas for education (Wiest, 2016). One aspect of this gender difference in out-migration is that women are more likely to migrate to seek education than men, and that educational patterns can account for that gender difference (Sano, et al., 2012). Even so, their economical prospects in rural areas do not necessarily improve with academic education (Corbett, 2007).

In Iceland the migration intentions of men and women are similar (Bjarnason, 2022) but there are nevertheless fewer women than men in most rural areas for reasons that are complex and messy, as reasons for migration and residential preferences often are. One such factor is negative net-migration, whereby fewer women move into rural areas than migrate away (Bjarnason et al., 2019; Karlsson, 2013).

Glendinning et al (2003) found that in rural areas, perceived negative aspects of rural community life matter more for the wellbeing and the migration intentions of young women. One of those negative aspects is gossip, which can be gendered and intrusive, as will be shown in the main results of this research.

4.5 Gossip, shame and social control

Gossip is frequently mentioned as an important aspect of social control in rural communities, in particular the control of female sexuality (Brettell, 2016; Farstad, 2016; Glendinning et al., 2003; Haugen and Villa, 2006; Rye, 2006a; Stockdale, 2002). However, the nature of such

gossip and its role in social cohesion and social control is rarely examined in detail.

Giardini and Conte (2012) examined social control as society's way of regulating itself; those who defy social norms must be identified and subsequently avoided or punished. Informal social laws of the community are a part of social control, people want to adhere to norms and mechanisms of the community (Chriss, 2013). Going against the norm and not behaving correctly may be subject to sanctions, but the effectiveness of these sanctions may vary according to the social status of the individuals being punished and how much they have to lose if they are exposed (Goode, 2019). The social control of integrated communities involves a restriction of privacy, social interactions and freedom to explore social and individual identities (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson, 2006; Brettell, 2016; Rauhut and Littke 2016; Stockdale, 2002).

People generally approve of negative gossip in response to norm violations (Foster, 2004) and more accepting to negative gossip and the gossiper if it appeals to their own morality (Peters and Kashima, 2015). While gossip can be defined in various ways, it is mostly seen as informal, evaluative talk (Baumeister and Zhang, 2004; Chua and Uy, 2014; Wert and Salovey, 2004) or unverified news about the personal business of others (Creschimbene, 2012; Litman and Pezzo, 2004). The line between care and curiosity and between information exchange and gossip can be blurry. It can be undertaken with good intentions and care for others, and it can strengthen relationships and social networks

between people (Dunbar, 2004; Kim, Moon and Shin, 2019; Lyons and Huges, 2015; Rosnow and Foster, 2005). Gossip can be used as a means of social comparison (Festinger, 1954) and as an instrument of power by eliminating a perceived threat to power and status (Pheko, 2018). Triggers of gossip can be simple curiosity, but social circumstances vary and are important, not merely the inherent human desire to resolve uncertainty (Hsee and Ruan, 2016).

In this context it is important to note that individual perceptions of gossip may not correspond with actual levels of gossip. People have different and multiple social networks that may change individual perceptions of gossip about personal issues. There is a great chance that personal gossip may profoundly affect residential satisfaction. A person faced with malicious gossip might resort to a fight response, to confront the source of gossip. The reaction may also be a flight response, to leave rather than live with the stigma (Breugelmans and Poortinga, 2006; Gilbert, 2003; Tangley, 1996; Lewis, 1971; Wu et al., 2018).

Bonding social capital involves shared values, mutual trust, community support and normative control within the context of social closure (Coleman, 1988). Rural communities have been seen as rich in bonding social capital. A Norwegian study found rural residents more likely than urban residents to believe that people in general care for one another and can rely on each other. At the same time, 22% of rural inhabitants and only 4% of urban inhabitants in this study said that there was too much gossip or negative talk about others in their community or neighbourhood (Farstad, 2016).

Small communities can resemble a tightly knit group of people and within groups gossip can have an important role. Gossip is used to protect and strengthen the group (Chua and Uy, 2014; Lyons and Huges, 2015) and to keep the group members in line with the accepted social norm of the group (Beersma and Kleef, 2011; Turcotte, 2012). Free-riders within a group may be controlled with gossip (Dunbar, 2004) and the norm-violators that don't follow the informal rules may face punishment or even exclusion (Black 1984; Giardini and Conte 2012; Robinson, 2016).

Gossip is of course not a specifically rural phenomenon; it can be found in boardrooms, classrooms, hospitals, and everywhere else where people interact, support, and compete with one another. There still is a difference between urban and rural communities. In smaller communities out-migration might be the only way to avoid stigma following malicious gossip, while in larger urban communities, one might simply change workplaces or social groups.

Gossip requires certain power mechanisms to function. Foucault (1978) claimed that power is not something someone has, it is something done to others, an action that affects the actions of others. Gossip can thus work as a subversive form of power; it matters who says what. If an oppressed gossips about the oppressor, it is low-cost and relatively safe (Alfano and Robinson, 2017). Gossip is described as an act of communication that involves a social triad: a gossiper, a social target and an audience (Peters and Kashima, 2007, 2015; Lind et al., 2007). This triad can work perfectly in small communities, as some of the main

results in this study will show. The community is the audience, the social group that keeps the target in place by engaging in and listening to the gossip.

Shame plays a critical role as an emotion that is propagated and heightened through gossip, serving as a tool for social control. According to Lewis (1971), shame is characterized by the dread of losing social bonds with others, frequently leading to a wish to conceal oneself or flee. Goffman (1967) argues that the apprehension of experiencing shame acts as a strong instrument for social control. More recent theories focus on the damage shame has on the self-image and social image, and is associated with the 'restore and repair-motion', trying to rebuild the self-and social image (Gausel and Leach, 2011; Hooge and Breugelmans, 2010;). Some do though seek the company of family and friends rather than hiding away when shamed (Hooge et al, 2018).

Shaming takes different forms, one of them being slut-shaming. Slut shaming is a form of discrimination against those who violate gender stereotypes and gender norms (Miano and Urone, 2024). This type of shaming is rather directed at women, shaming them for their sexual activities or expressions of sexuality (Armstrong et al. 2014; Fjær, Pedersen, and Sandberg 2015; Ringrose et al. 2013). Women face a Madonna-whore double standard, where they are criticized for being either too loose or too promiscuous. Additionally, the acceptable number of sexual partners is higher for men than for women (Farvid, Braun, and Rowney, 2016; Fjær, Pedersen, and Sandberg 2015; Papp 2015; Armstrong 2014). Shame is deeply ingrained in femininity, as the

societal standards for beauty and femininity are demanding, often making women prone to feelings of shame (Dolezal 2015, Shabot, 2018).

Young women may experience the rural setting as more intrusive and constraining than young men, especially young women who are slut-shamed because of their love life or perceived sexual activities (Armstrong et al. 2014; Farvid et al, 2016; Fjær et al, 2015; Papp et al, 2015; Ringrose and Renold, 2012). Bryndísar-Karlsdóttir (2015) found that young girls in Iceland even think it better to have a boyfriend than face slut-shaming among their peers. In recent years, there has been a change in the discussion of slut-shaming and victim-blaming, with the Meetoo revolution spreading though the world (Gill and Orgad 2018; Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018; Þorbergsdóttir 2018).

5 Iceland as a case study

Iceland is a sparsely populated island with nearly 400 thousand inhabitants, with two thirds of the national population living in the Reykjavík capital area and the rest spread along the coastline in towns, fishing villages and farming communities (Statistic Iceland, 2023). The 20th century was characterized by substantial internal migration from rural areas to the Reykjavík capital area, but the 21st century has witnessed declining migration from rural areas and a net flow from the

Reykjavík capital area to adjacent exurban regions (Garðarsdóttir, et al., 2020). In fact, there has been small-scale urbanisation in all regions of Iceland, where regional population centres have benefitted from migration from nearby rural areas (Bjarnason et al., 2021).

The fishing industry is one of the country's strongest industries, with many small towns and villages built around fisheries. However, the fishing quota system and other economic aspects have changed, and many small towns and villages have faced difficult challenges and decreasing populations (Kokorsch and Benediktsson, 2017). Small towns often lack economic diversity, with a single industry or one big company in town (Peter et al.2018). This has been the case for many such towns in Iceland. Many rural communities have experienced out-migration of Icelanders and, in return, the in-migration of foreign nationals working in the fishing industry and services (Júlíusdóttir, Skaptadóttir and Karlsdóttir, 2013).

Gender equality in Iceland has been ranked the highest in the world in terms of a composite index of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2022). This report and its measurements have though been criticised for taking a narrow understanding of gender equality (Einarsdóttir, 2020) and more Icelandic scholars have pointed out that Iceland is nevertheless far from being a paradise of gender equality and various political, economic, social, and personal gender inequalities persist (Arnalds et al., 2021; Jóhannsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2015; Pétursdóttir, 2012; Júlíusdóttir,

Rafnsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2018). Icelandic women tend to find it challenging to balance personal life and work life (Hjálmsdóttir and Rafnsdóttir, 2022; Staub and Rafnsdóttir, 2019), and housework and childcare still largely remain the responsibility of women (Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Hjálmsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2019; Pétursdóttir, 2009; Gíslason and Símonardóttir, 2018; Thorsdottir, 2012). As demonstrated by the Icelandic MeToo movement, sexual harassment and other forms of gendered violence remain pervasive in most spheres of Icelandic society (Bender, 2019; Björnsdóttir, 2018).

Rural communities in Iceland are characterised by a more traditional division of labour in the workplace and at home, as well as by a strong demand for unpaid female volunteer work in the community (Gislason and Olafsson, 2005; Gunnarsdottir, 2009; Karlsson 2013; Sigursteinsdottir & Rafnsdottir, 2009; Skaptadottir, 2000). Smaller towns and villages have lower living satisfaction than the Reykjavík capital area or larger regional population centres (Bjarnason, Jóhannesdóttir and Þórðardóttir, 2022). Inhabitants in those towns who also plan to migrate away evaluate job opportunities as an important factor in their decision to migrate (Bjarnason and Karlsson, 2022).

Iceland is a land of extreme nature and unpredictable weather, and women are less willing than men to travel on roads away from home (Bjarnason and Karlsson, 2022). This is often due to mountain roads that can be dangerous. Hjálmsdóttir and Hafþórsson (2015) found that better infrastructure such as tunnels increase job opportunities for both men and women. Better infrastructure also increased the amount of

time women spend traveling and widened the area in which they seek employment (Hjálmsdóttir and Hafþórsson, 2015).

Similar to other rural communities in the Global North, educational and occupational aspirations are named as reasons for prospective migrants in rural communities in Iceland (Bjarnason et al., 2019). It is not enough to build up heavy industry for more job opportunities as has been done e.g. in the Eastfjords of Iceland. Rural youth still have a longing to migrate to urban areas (Seyfrit, Bjarnason and Olafsson, 2010). Prospective migrants also seek better access to public services and more leisure opportunities, and about one in five men and women mention gossip as an important reason for leaving (Bjarnason et al., 2019).

6 Methodology

6.1 Research design

This research uses a mixed-method design drawing on data from a large quantitative survey as well as qualitative interviews. As Creswell (2007) explains, combining these methods offers a broader understanding of a research problem. This approach is also employed to better comprehend, explain, or build upon the results obtained from the other method (2007). Quantitative data come from the Residential Stability and Migration (RSM) project in 2019-2020. Data collection and data analysis are described in detail in articles I and IV, as well as in the following chapter. The qualitative part of the research in the form of interviews is described in articles II and III as well as in the following chapter.

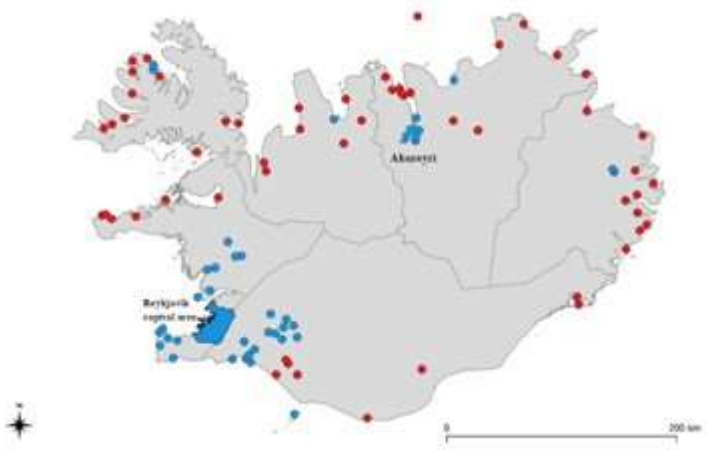

Figure 1 Location of towns and villages (in red) and larger urban settlements (in blue)

The survey data for article I comes from 56 towns and villages in Iceland which are shown with red dots on Figure 1. Larger urban settlements that with more than 2000 inhabitants are in blue, as well as those that are considered the ex-urban areas such of Akureyri and Reykjavík. Smaller settlements within approximately 60 minutes driving distance from the Reykjavík capital area are also in blue and are excluded from the survey data from towns and villages.

6.2 Feminist method of research

Women in the 19th and 20th centuries were often marginalized from mainstream channels of knowledge creation, and their experiences, concerns, and value were frequently minimized and disregarded by the prevailing societal authorities (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Feminist thinkers found themselves in an academic field where there is a long tradition of concepts based upon white, bourgeois, heterosexual masculine norms (Campell and Wasco, 2000; Harding, 1987; Rose, 1993). Where "what men were doing was relevant to men, was written by men about men for men. Men listened . . . to what one another said. (Dorothy Smith, 1978, p. 281).

This experience led women to develop a different and more critical way of thinking, prompting the call for a feminist perspective of empowerment. They began to challenge the prevailing knowledge claims made by those in privileged positions. (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Within the field of geography, feminist thinkers debated for the intersections of space, power, and knowledge (Peake, et al. 2017).

Feminist geographers like Gillian Rose argued that "various forms of white, bourgeois, heterosexual masculinity have structured the way in which geography as a discipline claim to know space, place and landscape" (1993, p. 137). In fact, feminist geographers contributed to the broader shift in human geography research towards qualitative analysis. They viewed the masculinized, quantitative techniques as inadequate for capturing the complexity and richness of women's lives (Peake et al., 2017).

There is no one method of doing feminist research but what they do have in common is the focus on the experience of women's lives and the oppression and marginalization of women within culture and societies (Campbell and Wasco, 2000). This research is done within the field of sociology although being interdisciplinary, using feminist approach to all knowledge production.

Feminist phenomenology

To analyse the data and understand gossip and slut-shaming, employing a feminist phenomenology approach is beneficial. Feminists contend that phenomena cannot be understood solely by their intrinsic characteristics, such as biology; instead, they must be examined through their interrelations within the social world (Dixon and Jones III, 2015). Phenomenology provides an in-depth portrayal and meticulous examination of the intricacies of human experience as it is lived. It acknowledges that reality is understood through embodied experiences, and researchers aim to capture the essence, meaning, and

common features of an experience or event. (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). Gossip and slut-shaming as a phenomenon can in that way never be understood purely by looking at the speaker or gossiper, social settings, power relations, gender, place and space must be considered as well.

The first and one of most influential phenomenological thinkers was Edmund Husserl, who said that a phenomenon can only exist when there is a subject that experiences it (Husserl, 2012). This is particularly relevant to the shame and negative judgment associated with gossip. The person who is being talked about certainly feels it, but this is only the case when they are aware that they are the topic of gossip. If the individual is unaware of the rumours and conversations happening about them, the gossip's intent to shame doesn't affect them. In the data for this thesis, both qualitative and quantitative, survey participants and interviewees are asked about perceived gossip, that is the gossip that they are aware of.

Husserl's writings and theories in phenomenology, as well as other theorists within the field, were rightfully criticised by feminist for not distinguishing between sex and gender. Theorists such as Judith Butler who describes gender as set of acts or a performance but not an identity or a role, something that we put on, and not passively scripted on the body. She further states that gender identity is established through behavior and therefore one can construct different genders via different behaviors (1988).

Butler wanted the groundbreaking work of women like Simone de Beauvoir, who said that 'one is not born but becomes a woman'

(1949) to be recognised within phenomenology. De Beauvoir argues that the man is considered the default, and the women is considered the 'other'. This means humanity is male, and a woman is defined in relation to men. She argues that facts of biology must be viewed in the light of ontological, economic, social, and physiological context (1949). Butler agrees with de Beauvoir as well as phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, where he claims that the "man is a historical idea and not a natural species (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This means that we need to look at the historical and cultural context of humanity, rather than it being a fixed biologically determined category. Gender is influenced by social, political, and cultural factors rather than inherent natural characteristics.

Feminist positionality

Rooted in feminist work is positionality, which acknowledges that all "knowledge is shaped by the specific context or circumstances in which it is situated or produced" (Valentine, 2002, p.116). Awareness of one's positionality as a researcher is important when shaping your research, data analysis and research findings (Kirsch, 1999; Peake et al., 2017). This way of thinking rejects the possibility of a universal or objective truth. This is based on the work of feminists such as Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway. To understand the feminist positionality, Harding's (1986) standpoint theory must be addressed. It is founded upon Marxist analysis, analysing patriarchal systems and their normalisation of the subordination of women (Wood, 2005). The

theory was criticised by another feminist scholar, Donna Haraway, who argued for situated knowledge, which requires that the "object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource" (Haraway, 1988).

Feminist research methods extend across all fields of science and feminist geographers have called for an intersectional approach, which places more attention on questions of power and social inequalities. This allows for the development of geographical thinking about the relationship between multiple categories and the significance of space (Massey, 1994; Valentine, 2002). It also allows the field of science to address multiple situated differences that speak to class, race, sexuality, religion and many other relations of power in subject formation (Peake et al., 2017; Collins, 2000).

In feminist phenomenology, social location is of the essence, though a standpoint is not a social location. A standpoint is earned through critical reflection on power relation, achieved through the struggle to construct an oppositional stance (Wood, 2005). Sandra Harding argues that feminist standpoint theory not only contributes to feminism, but more generally to contemporary scientific, philosophic, and political discussion (2004).

As a researcher, I seek to position myself and where my knowledge comes from, who I am as an actor/agent. Following feminist theories, I cannot overlook the fact that my social status, social surroundings, and gender matter in my knowledge production. The use of standpoint theory and situated knowledge is crucial for the

phenomenon of gossip and slut-shaming. Social location, gender, class, biological sex, social status and other factors affect the standpoint of the participant being interviewed, as well as the standpoint of the researcher who must also be acknowledged.

6.3 Positionality of the researcher

Feminist scholar Sandra Harding (1991) proposes the concepts of strong and weak objectivity in research. According to Harding, research is stronger when the researcher discloses the cultural and biographical influences on their work, and weaker when the researcher remains unseen and unacknowledged. I chose not to be unseen.

I am a woman living in a small town in Northeast Iceland, a local in my town, and belong to the age group that was the focus of the interviews. Icelandic rural communities are small. In the beginning of every interview or beforehand, the participants in the qualitative interviews were made aware that the researcher lives in this small town, in case of mutual acquaintances or personal information that may be problematic for them to share. I am a rural woman myself, a feminist, and a mother. All of which I believe is beneficial to my knowledge search and researching.

Taking the interviews, there were often discussion of local cultural events such as Þorrablót [festival in January or February, with traditional food, local humour and a dance] that needn't be explained to the researcher. The interviewees often used phrases like "you know how it

is," acknowledging that the researcher, being a woman from a small rural area, could relate to their experiences. This familiarity can be beneficial in understanding cultural events and social surroundings. However, it also carries the risk that some information might be overlooked if the researcher, feeling too familiar with the context, doesn't seek further clarification on certain social settings.

6.4 Quantitative data

Towns and villages – Article I

This study is based on a population survey in 2019 which examined migration intentions and living satisfaction. Every resident 18 years and older in Icelandic towns and villages with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants (Figure 1) were in the target group of the survey. The target population was 24,000 residents.

A letter of introduction was sent by mail to all registered homes in the target communities, inviting all inhabitants over the age of 18 to respond to an online survey instrument. The letter was followed up with two reminder postcards after three and five weeks from initial contact. Furthermore, geographically targeted social media ads and postings on community-based social media groups were used to encourage participation. The survey instrument was available in three languages. In addition to Icelandic, the questionnaire was available in Polish as 42% of all immigrants in Iceland are of Polish descent, and in English for other immigrant groups.

Data were collected in March and April of 2019, yielding a total of 6,788 responses. 1,146 respondents did not have their primary home in the communities (e.g. temporary residents, second homeowners, and former residents) and were omitted from further analysis. The remaining 5,642 respondents represent 24% of all registered inhabitants in the target towns and villages. Compared to official records, the share of female respondents is somewhat larger (61% of the sample vs. 48% according to official records), while the shares of the youngest and oldest age groups are smaller (18 – 25-year-olds make up 9% of sample and 15% according to records; 71 years and older make up 5% of the sample and 13% according to the records). Furthermore, respondents with two foreign-born parents make up only 5% of the sample but 14% of the population according to official records.

Migration intentions were measured by the question "Are you planning to move away from [*Name of town or village inserted*] within the next 2–3 years?" with five response categories *No, definitely not*; *No, probably not*; *Unsure*; *Yes, probably*; *Yes, definitely*. The outcome variable of migration intentions is defined as a binary measure (1: Probably or Definitely; 0: other). 14% of all respondents expect to move away from the community within the next 2–3 years, with an equal share of males and females.

The measure of love life gossip is derived from a four-item measure of perceived gossip: "How much do you think people generally gossip about each of the following aspects of your life in [*Name of town or village inserted*]?". The items asked were on perceived gossip about a)

"Your family life", b) "Your financial situation", c) "Your love life" and d) "Other things in your life", with five response categories available - 1) Very little or none, 2) Rather little, 3) Some, 4) Rather much, and 5) Very much. In article I the focus is on the dependent variable relating to love life gossip with the response categories of 1 and 2 recoded into "Little or none", 3 and 4 into "some" gossip and 5 into "a lot" of love life gossip.

Reykjavík capital area – Article IV

The article is based on a data set from a survey conducted in the Reykjavík capital region as a part of the RSM project. The main aim of the study was to provide reliable data to study factors that possibly influence the desire of former out-migrants from rural areas, to return. The focus is on the role of gossip alongside demographic, socioeconomic and relational variables. The analysis is presented through four logistical regression models: a bivariate model and three multivariate models with increasing complexity.

The survey was conducted by a professional survey company based on random quota sampling which yielded a sub-sample of 1,123 rural-to-urban migrants who (1) currently live in the Reykjavík capital area and (2) were raised in the non-metropolitan regions of the country. Two outcome variables identified the propensity for urban-to-rural return migration. First, specific *Return migration intentions* were defined as "probably" or "definitely" moving from the Reykjavík capital area to other regions of the country within the next 2-3 years. Second, general *Return migration preferences* were defined by choosing "Other

regions of the country" from a single-choice list of places where respondents most wanted to live.

The study focuses on potential return migration to rural Iceland in general rather than return migration to the community of origin as such. The respondents were asked a series of questions about their reasons for initially leaving their home communities. The roster of potential reasons included access to education, employment, health services, retail, cultural activities or leisure, proximity to friends or family and various other social considerations.

6.5 Qualitative data

The data analysed for papers II and III was collected between 2019-2021 from 18 coastal villages around Iceland with between 100 and 500 inhabitants. Interviews were conducted with 24 women ranging in age from 25 to 45 years. The researcher searched for participants using local Facebook pages as well as in radio interviews about her doctoral study. The participants were also recruited using the snowball method, where participants encouraged other women to participate (Hammersley & Atkinson 2019). The primary focus was on women currently living in these small coastal villages, but women who had moved away and settled elsewhere over the last decade were also included and encouraged to participate. This was possible because local Facebook groups often include former residents, as well as the snowball method.

The age range of the women involved was chosen in order to reach those who were most likely to be affected by gossip. Studies have shown that this age range is most likely to be impacted by the closeness of these small communities and the resulting social control and gossip (Pedersen and Gram 2018; Glendinning et al. 2003; Stockdale 2002). Semi-structured qualitative interviews, in the form of conversations with open questions, allowed the women to talk about their own experiences and their views on gossip and shaming in their villages (Crang and Cook 2007). Open questions also allow the interviewee to answer on the basis of knowledge she has immediately at hand. The researcher also asked more hypothesis-directed questions about gossip and how it functions, serving the purpose of making the "interviewees' implicit knowledge more explicit" (Flick 2006, p.156). Confrontational questions were also used, to critically re-examine the notions that appeared in the interview (Flick 2006). This was used in discussions about slut-shaming, where the researcher confronted their information or description of events by asking if the interviewee considered this to be possible a form of slut-shaming.

All of the women participating were or had been in heterosexual relationships, and none of them claimed anything other than being cisgender. Of the 24 women interviewed, 18 were married or in cohabitation at the time of the interviews and 6 were single. Nine were locals living in their hometown, six were locals or former inhabitants that lived somewhere else. Nine were non-locals but living in a small town, some of them from other rural areas. Some of the participants

had lived in more than one small town. The women were asked about their personal life and their life in the village. They were asked to describe how they had experienced verbal gossip among people in the village and the effects of gossip on their lives, their behaviour or their decisions. They were also asked to talk about the reasons for gossip and to compare men's and women's gossip, and they were asked about slut-shaming and name-calling and their effect on reputation.

The interviews were approximately one hour long and were recorded. They were then transcribed, and the participants given pseudonyms. Due to the small size of the populations in the villages concerned, the names of these communities are not disclosed in the presentation of the results.

Analysis of the interviews began with a thorough and repeated reading of the transcribed interviews. The interviews were then coded, first with initial coding and then pattern coding (Saldaña 2016) where most significant codes were identified. They were used to further analyse and look for similarities and differences in the data (Flick, 2006). Dedoose coding software was used to help code the interviews. The researcher then developed the main themes based on these codes. Themes of behaviour and morals within a culture can be derived from participants' stories in the qualitative interviews (Saldaña 2016), and the themes of reputation, shaming and slut-shaming also emerged in these interviews.

The researcher followed rules on ethical methods of qualitative research given by Icelandic universities (Háskóli Íslands, 2022) as well as

the ethical code of the University of Akureyri (Háskólinn á Akureyri, 2020). Information about the research project was given to the participants, where their participation was explained and that they could stop at any time. The use of the data was explained, and the participants signed an informed consent form. The participants were promised anonymity; therefore all published material hides their identity and only refers to age and civil status (i.e. in a relationship/single), and if they spent their childhood years in the community (local) or had moved into it in their adult years (not local). The participants were encouraged to contact the researchers if they experienced any emotional distress or harm resulting from the interviews.

6.6 Ethical considerations

Being a person who might also belong to the group of interviewees raises some ethical considerations, as the researcher is both the same age and gender as the interviewees. There are of course benefits as well, where the women identified with and referred to the researchers own rural living with comments such as “well, you know how it is”. However, there may also be concerns about researcher bias, as the issues and social spaces of small communities are quite familiar, as the researcher is a local in a small community. The researcher rarely had to ask the interviewee to explain or elaborate on social events and cultural festivals, as there was a common understanding and knowledge on how

it works in these small communities. Some important information may also be left out if the researcher felt it was too close to home.

At the time of the interview, the research was subject to the qualitative research ethics guidelines of qualitative research of Icelandic universities (Háskóli Íslands, 2022) as well as the ethical code of the University of Akureyri (Háskólinn á Akureyri, 2020). Current regulation approved in 2020 by the University of Iceland (Háskóli Íslands, 2020) are substantially the same but also require evaluation from an ethical committee. This committee was however established after the thesis data were collected and does not retroactively evaluate data collection that has already taken place.

6.7 Limitations

Most Icelandic rural communities have a share of foreign inhabitants who don't speak Icelandic. Since the topic involved verbal gossip within the community, the researcher, in consultation with the main instructor and members of doctoral committee, decided that it was acceptable to advertise only in Icelandic. This might exclude people who don't have knowledge of the Icelandic language. There were nevertheless two participants of foreign background who gave interviews, having read and understood the advertisement. One of them gave her interview in English. Exploring gossip among immigrant communities in Iceland presents a compelling subject for future studies, although it falls beyond the scope of this thesis.

This research focuses on women and how gossip affects their life through social control and shaming. There are other sides to the matter and men are of course also both gossipers and subjects of gossip. They are affected by gossip, as article I reveals in terms of increasing the likelihood of men's intentions to migrate. This research does not identify gossiper: do more women than men gossip? Is it age-related or more common between the locals who have known their neighbours for generations? There remain many unanswered questions which may be fertile ground for further research.

As for the quantitative data, questions about love life gossip suggest that people have their own ideas about how much they are gossiped about. How gossip is perceived and what is considered *a lot* or *a little* gossip of course varies from person to person. Participants are asked to answer on a scale from little or no gossip to much gossip, and no information is given as to what researchers considered to be little or much gossip. This data thus only tells us the amount of gossip about love life and nothing about what it includes. It could be slut-shaming for women but something totally different for men, within the personal space of what people consider their love life.

7 Discussion

Small rural communities in Iceland have all the features of rural idyll; a peaceful countryside good for raising children, exotic landscape and tightly knit social space where people care for one another. The downside is that these tightly knit communities where everyone knows each other are often a Petri dish for gossip. In these tight communities, personal space can be limited and forming personal identity, sexual identity and other personal identities can be a challenge. Children and young people are attentive and listen to the talk of the town and they see how people react to one another and behave. This forms their own identity and behaviour, not always for the better.

The phenomenon of gossip has been a topic of discussion in rural studies in relation to living satisfaction in small communities. Many scholars have discussed gossip as one possible reason for young people, especially young women, being hesitant to live in rural areas. However, to my knowledge, no prior research has discussed in detail the role of gossip in social cohesion and social control as an influencing factor on out-migration from rural areas. Furthermore, no prior quantitative studies seem to have demonstrated that people indeed migrate because of gossip. In the quantitative data the focus was on love-life gossip, since one of the main focus of the thesis is on slut-shaming related to gossip about love-life and sexual activities.

My research has led me to the conclusion that everyone gossips. Curiosity about people in our social surroundings is simply in our human

nature. Gossip exists in larger towns and cities as well. It may function differently and focus more on celebrities and politicians, friends, work colleagues or people in the same organisation. The situation resembles a small town within a big city, except in urban environments it is possible to change jobs or organisations if the gossip is affects one's life or well-being within that surrounding. In smaller towns one must either stay and live with the stigma that may result or leave.

Gossip seems to work like a stream of water - a small but powerful river that flows through the town, sometimes icy, sometimes warm, some love it and others don't. Gossip brings power. It is used as instrument of power in the social control of society. Social control works to build and maintain social norms and to normalise values that the community has informally agreed upon. This affects people in different ways. It can be used to bring people down and as an instrument to maintain hierarchy within communities.

Same kin and families have lived in Icelandic rural communities for generations, which means that some people have strong social capital as locals and through family networks. Other people have much weaker ties, though some in-migrants are connected to the community through a local partner. This development of social capital is establishing a power hierarchy, favouring locals who have families and friends within the community. It could even be considered a form of a rural class division, where locals occupy a higher social class than non-locals. Being a local in the context of gossip can though have its drawbacks, as fellow locals are familiar with one's family and previous actions. This familiarity

can lead to locals being perceived in a more complex, three-dimensional manner, in contrast to non-locals, who might be seen more superficially, akin to a two-dimensional perspective, due to the lack of knowledge about their background and history.

One of the most interesting aspects of my findings is the social significance and function of shaming. It is the fear of shame that controls us more than anything, the fear of being in the public eye and our personal business or flaws being revealed for everyone to talk about. People are shamed for behaviour that goes against the accepted social norm, which may not be illegal but still contrary to the social rules that we form as a society and may vary from one place to another. Within groups, shaming is used to maintain and protect the group and its members. The one who is shamed is likely to either fall out of the group or at least move towards the edge. Small communities work like small social groups, and gossip and shaming are used to control the members of the group. The wrongdoer is then punished, but the rule-breaker's position within the group hierarchy matters. The stigma that the wrongdoer faces can i.e. by governed by gender, ethnicity, age, and social capital.

The finding that gossip affects migration intentions of both men and women is crucial and interesting. The lack of difference between genders was surprising, as other rural studies researchers conclude that gossip in small communities especially affects young women and girls, as described in Chapter 4. There was also a sense, though perhaps a myth, that women who gossip more, e.g. the chatty women

(*kjaftakerlingar*) in Icelandic stories and novels. However, our result shows that in small towns, men and women are equally affected by gossip they perceive about their love life. The interviews with women go deeper into the gossip that women face in small communities, showing how gossip works as a gendered social control. It also gives an image of how gossip is used to bring shame, which ultimately controls people's behaviour and how they abide by social norms. The interview data show us how effective and controlling gossip can be, especially - slut-shaming.

The final piece in the puzzle is that women who have already migrated away from rural areas and mention gossip as a reason for migration, are statistically less likely to return than other out-migrants. This was not found to be the case for the men who mentioned gossip as a reason for prior migration to the Reykjavík capital area; they were as likely as other out- migrants to return to rural areas.

The summary of findings will cover every research question and present some final thoughts and discussion of overall results.

7.1 Summary of main findings

In the Residential Stability and Migration project (RSM), a survey was sent out to small towns and villages in Iceland in 2019. The survey included questions about migration intentions, remaining and other factors that influence participants' living satisfaction as well as questions about perceived gossip. To my knowledge, this is the first study that

attempts to quantitatively connect migration intentions and gossip that has been conducted. After thorough discussion and review of the existing literature, I decided upon this question as a leading point:

- *How does gossip about love life affect the migration intentions of women and men in small communities in Iceland? Are young women more affected by gossip than young men?*

In the bivariate setting, we find that there is no age or gender difference in migration intentions among those who perceived some or a lot of gossip. This means that when there is much gossip about a person's love life, it seems to take precedence over age and gender regarding migration intentions. This is interesting and could serve as the potential basis for further research in other rural settings or larger towns.

The multivariate analysis revealed that gossip about people's love life roughly doubles the odds of firm plans to move away. Even though the analysis controlled for gender, age, relationship status and other factors, love life gossip still statistically increases the likelihood of migration for both men and women. Gossip about a subject's love life had a similar influence on migration intentions as being single and more influence than, for example, education and having grown up in the community. Prior research indicates that women are more likely than men to leave rural areas (Argent and Walmsley, 2008; Båtevik, 2001; Bonifacio, 2014; Brettell, 2016; Carson et al., 2011; Corbett, 2007; Faber et al, 2015). Other research has mentioned gossip and other aspects of

limitations on privacy and personal freedom as a possible reason for young women leaving rural communities and moving to more urban areas (Brettell, 2016; Glendinning et al., 2003; Haugen and Villa, 2006; Pedersen and Gram, 2018; Rye, 2006a; Stockdale, 2002).

Our first findings show that gossip increases migration intentions and may very well be a reason for out-migration from rural areas. It is, however, not gendered in such a way that pushing women more than men to migrate. This lack of a gender gap is quite interesting and calls for further examination as to how men and women are affected by gossip and why people are twice as likely to migrate away. My focus, however, is on women, leaving men as a possible subject for later research.

The next step was to gain a deeper understanding and knowledge about the phenomenon of gossip. What is the essence of gossip and how does it work? In particular, how does it affect women in small communities? Small coastal communities in Iceland with 100-500 inhabitants were the sample group of the study, i.e. towns small enough for most people to know each other. Interviews with 24 young women were conducted in some of these towns, as well as interviews with women who had lived there but moved away. They were asked about their lives in the community, about social life and social space, and about gossip in the community; how they perceive gossip, if they hear it and whether it has affected their life at some point. The main research question for the qualitative part of the study is as follows:

- *How do young women experience personal space and social control in small communities regarding gossip? Are single women in these communities subject to gendered slut-shaming?*

The semi-structured interviews with the young Icelandic women who took part in this study demonstrates how effective gossip is when it comes to the social control of young women. The interview data was used for articles II and III.

Gossip is a powerful instrument of social control that forces people to try to abide by the norms and informal rules of a group or society, in this case small coastal communities in Iceland. Gossip is used to promote shame, leaving us to question whether one could survive without the other. Social control functions well when people are shamed, and their reputation damaged through gossip. People resort to all sorts of measures to avoid shame and a damaged reputation. Participants in this study live in small, close-knit communities, but destructive gossip can be found anywhere in social spaces where people communicate, be it a small group or larger town, city, workplace or other social setting (Ellwardt et al. 2012; Kurland and Pelled 2000; Pheko 2018; Lyons 2015). It is an effective form of power, as highlighted by some of the stories told by the participants in this study.

The results depict avoidance behaviour whereby young women change their behaviour or even change the course of their lives because of gossip and shame. They experience shame or the fear of being shamed, and some do indeed move away to avoid it and the

accompanying stigma. Others remain and try to repair their reputations, sometimes knowing that they will always have to live with some degree of stigma from the damaged reputation. Having done something that is perceived as shameful, they then try to be ‘good girls', as one participant clearly explained. Social capital matters within this stigma in the sense that rule-breaking is more tolerated when the rule-breaker is a local. According to Coleman (1988), social capital encompasses shared values, mutual trust, and community support. While communities tend to unite, local residents appear to hold a more secure position and receive greater community backing. Locals are not in as much danger of being pushed out of the group but might find themselves a little closer to the edge than before.

In many communities, slut-shaming and the fear of shame has controlled women’s behaviour and sexual activities. This was also reflected in the slut-shaming stories told about friends and other women who had moved away. If gossip and shame lead to a flight response, these slut-shaming stories may be a crucial factor in their decisions to move away from their hometown. These women also faced the double standard applied to women who are both mothers and sexual beings, illustrating the complexity of the Madonna-whore complex (Farvid et al., 2016; Fjær et al., 2015).

The interviews show that, despite improvement in gender equality in Iceland, there is still gendered slut-shaming in small communities. Interestingly, there was a lot of talk about women who had lived there and moved away after being slut-shamed, which might

say something about how hard it is to live in the community as a young woman with such a reputation.

Is there space in these towns for both a marital culture and people who want to live their single lives without artificial constraints? The single women who are the subject of article III clearly show that personal space clearly presents a challenge when enjoying and expressing your sexuality engenders gossip. This also makes personal space difficult for single women who want to find a partner. Research has shown that single people are in general more likely to migrate from rural areas (Gautier, Svarer and Teulings, 2010; Haartsen and Bjarnason, 2023). These results show that personal space, or lack thereof, is clearly reason for this migration. There are also signs of social exclusion, where single women are excluded from marital culture. This is something that they are more aware of themselves than married women, who don't recognise any stigma against single women in the community.

The triad function of gossip within small communities is an interesting form of power, following Peters and Kashima (2007, 2015), and Lind et al. (2007) concerning the concept of a social triad consisting of a gossiper, a social target and an audience. This triad is a powerful instrument for social control, often directing shame at those who violate the social norms and informal rules of a community. The community is the audience that listens to the gossiper and the social target is a person who has done something that the gossiper and audience considers with talking about. The results from the interview data show that gossip and

shaming have negative effects on the wellbeing and happiness of women in small communities.

After exploring the qualitative data on gossip, the feeling was that we needed to close the circle of data. Migration intentions don't always account for real migration despite being a predictor. As the results from the first article show, both men and women are twice as likely to have migration intentions if they experienced was a lot of gossip about their love life. The question then arises about real migration due to gossip, and whether people who have experienced difficulties due to gossip in their communities are likely to return. The main question is:

- *Are people who have migrated to the Reykjavík capital area because of gossip less likely to return? Is there a gender difference between the potential return migrants who have moved due to gossip?*

The result reveals a gendered pattern and a statistical gender difference as 29% of female respondents and 21% of male respondents report that gossip played a role in their migration from a rural to an urban area. These are similar numbers as in earlier research on migration intentions in small communities in Iceland, where 21% of participant mention gossip as an important reason for possible migrations (Bjarnason et al, 2019). This supports the results of article I where 21% of those that report *some* gossip about their love life and 38% of those that report *a lot* of such gossip expect to migrate (Jóhannesdóttir et al., 2021). Female respondents who migrated because of gossip are statistically less likely

to return to rural areas than other out-migrants. Male respondents who left because of gossip are not significantly less likely to return than males who left for other reason, nor is there any difference in their intentions to return to rural Iceland within the next 2-3 years. There is a statistically significant difference in both groups of female respondents, and women who left because of gossip are both less likely to return to rural Iceland and are less likely to have intentions to migrate to rural Iceland within the next 2-3 years.

In the bivariate settings, gender significantly influenced the desire to return. Female respondents show lower likelihood of returning compared to males. Having a university degree decreases the likelihood of returning and those who moved recently are more likely to return. However, both of these effects disappear when interaction term between being female and gossip as a reason for initial out-migration is added to the bivariate model. The statistically significant association between gossip and migration preferences of females cannot be explained by age, period of departure, socio-economic characteristics or the interpersonal relationship variables. Age does affect the desire to return, whereas the likelihood of returning decreases as the age of the respondent increases.

These findings show that gossip continues to have a significant impact on women, lingering long after they have moved away from rural areas, and acts as a deterrent to their potential return.

Conclusion

Small communities in Iceland face a gender challenge. The social space for women to thrive there is tight, especially for young women and single women. Forming and developing sexuality is challenging when there is gendered slut-shaming, condemning women more than men for sexual activities and their love life. Social control is strong, going hand in hand with gossip and shame. Gossip brings shame to those that don't abide by the social norm. Gossip also holds a power that has different effects on people depending on social status and social capital.

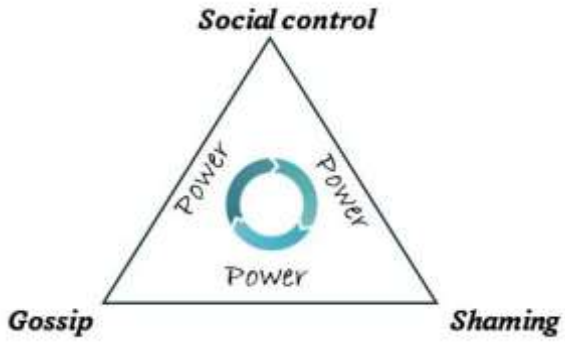

Figure 2 Triadic function of social control

My finding is that social control, gossip, and shame form a triadic relationship, with each element relying on the others to act as mechanisms of power. As a society, we establish our own norms and codes of acceptable behaviour within a social space, known as social control. This is enforced through verbal gossip and shaming of those who do not adhere to these rules. This interconnected trio functions effectively in small communities and groups. These close-knit small

communities provide a glimpse into the lives of their inhabitants and neighbours, sparking discussions and gossip about people's behaviour and actions.

Residential satisfaction in smaller towns and villages in Iceland is lower than in the Reykjavík capital area or larger regional population centres (Bjarnason, Jóhannesdóttir and Þórðardóttir, 2022). Gossip may very well be an influencing factor there.

Gossip about people's love life is positively correlated with migration intentions of both men and women from small towns and villages. It also prevents the return migration of women to rural areas. This thesis only provides answers concerning the female experience and gives clear examples of women exhibiting avoidance behaviour and sometimes a flight response to gossip.

But what about the men? This is a matter for further research. This study did not focus on the topic of gossip about men's lives, but as the results in article IV show, gossip clearly doesn't stay with men as long as it does women. At least, gossip doesn't affect their desire to return to rural areas. The same cannot be said about women, who are reluctant to return if gossip was a reason for migrating from a rural to an urban area.

There are many positive aspects to the rural idyll, e.g. a close-knit community in the peaceful countryside where people care for and support each other. Out- migration is inevitable and positive for young people to have the opportunity to see the world, get an education and gain experiences. Some of these young people come back, others don't,

which is quite typical of migration trends and population development. For small rural communities it is important that these young people want to come back. We want them to have good memories and a positive view of their community. Return migration is important for these communities, giving them diversity and a more stable population. The impact of gossip on out-migration, return migration, and the overall satisfaction of residents in these small rural communities underscores the need for reflection and action. The social control is tight and intrusive for those how don't abide to the social norm. How can we foster positive change to make small rural communities more appealing and inclusive for everyone, irrespective of gender, age, or personal characteristics?

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What's love got to do with it? Love-life gossip and migration intentions in rural Iceland

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ABSTRACT

Curiosity and gossip often underline human activities and social behavior. Gossip can work as an instrument of power, controlling people's actions but can it actively play a role in migration intentions? Migration studies often focus on structural and economic factors that influence people's decisions to relocate, but socio-cultural factors such as gossip are not often included. Gossip is considered a fixed, given characteristic of small close-knit communities. Those communities often face the fact that fewer women decide upon residency in these locations. This research reveals the influence of personal gossip about love-life on out-migration intentions in small communities in Iceland, particularly for women. The research uses quantitative data from 56 villages in rural Iceland, collected as an online survey, examining migration and migration intentions. This paper examines if gossip in small close-knit rural communities can affect migration intentions and if this is particularly an issue for women. Our data show, that this is indeed the case. That is, the more gossip there is about people's love-life, the more likely they are to have migration intentions. However, we do not find a significant gender difference in migration intentions in regards to this intimate type of gossip.

1. Introduction

Sparsely populated, rural areas are generally characterized by intimate knowledge about the personal circumstances of other people, often described as 'everyone knowing everything about everybody'. Such information about the physical, psychological, social and economic challenges facing other people can be integral to close-knit and caring communities with high levels of informal social support and social control. The informal exchange of information about the personal lives of other people in the community is often referred to as gossip, in particular when it takes a salacious turn and focuses on the most private aspects of other people's lives.

While the notion of close-knit and caring communities is integral to the 'rural idyll', young adults may also view such communities as intrusive and constraining (Glendinning et al., 2003, Haugen and Villa, 2016; Pedersen and Gram, 2018; Rye, 2006a). The role of macho culture in female out-migration from rural areas has been well documented (Dahlström, 1996; Little and Austin, 1996; Leibert, 2016; Rauhut and Littke, 2016) and moving away from the prying eyes of friends, families and neighbors can be essential for sexual exploration and the development of sexual identities (Edluna, 2005; Thorsteinsson et al., 2020; Wimark and Östh, 2014). However, although gossip is a frequently mentioned reason for the out-migration of rural women especially (Brettell, 2016; Glendinning et al., 2003; Haugen and Villa, 2006; Rye, 2006b; Stockdale, 2002), no prior studies have to our knowledge estimated the specific impact of gossip on out-migration from rural areas.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the literature on rural out-migration by examining the role of perceived gossip about love-life in the migration intentions of rural Icelanders aged 18 years and older. First, we estimate the unique effect of love-life gossip on migration intentions, controlling for age, gender, family situation, socio-economic status and community ties. Second, we empirically test the assumption that women are more negatively affected than men by perceived love-life gossip. Third, we explore the potential interactions of perceived love-life gossip with age, family status and community ties in shaping migration intentions in rural Iceland.

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2. Rural communities: comfortably tight-knit or smothering?

The contrast between close-knit rural communities based on personal attachment, informal social control and strong solidarity, and impersonal, bureaucratic and transactional cities was central to the emergence of contemporary social theory in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Durkheim 1893; Simmel, 1903; Tönnies, 1887; Weber, 1921). The assumption that small, close-knit communities and large, diffuse societies are based on fundamentally different types of social integration and social regulation continues to haunt contemporary social theory. This is perhaps most notable in contemporary distinctions between bonding social capital and community resilience on the one hand and bridging social capital and the 'strength of weak ties' on the other (Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1973; Morgan and Sorensen 1999; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

The assumption of fundamental differences in social life between rural and urban communities is also one of the defining characteristics of the somewhat mythical notion of a 'rural idyll' in many Western societies (Horton, 2008; Little and Austin, 1996; Matthews et al., 2000; Short, 2006; Grimsrud and Båtevik, 2016). As Shucksmith (2018) points out, the celebration of the rural idyll is normative and power-infused, simultaneously masking repression and supporting local power structures.

The hegemonic masculinity of many rural communities relegates women to the supportive roles of mothers and caregivers and female out-migration can in part be seen as a challenge to traditional gender roles (Campell, 2000; Campell and Bell, 2000; Dahlström, 1996; Grimsrud, 2011; Little and Austin, 1996). Furthermore, the social control of integrated communities represents a restriction of privacy, social interactions and freedom to explore social and individual identities (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson, 2006; Brettell, 2016; Rauhut and Littke 2016; Stockdale, 2002). Young women can experience the rural as more intrusive and constraining than young men, especially young women that are slut-shamed because of their love-life (Farvid et al., 2016; Fjær et al., 2015; Papp et al., 2015).

Although gossip is frequently mentioned as an important aspect of social control in rural communities generally and the control of female sexuality in particular (Brettell, 2016; Farstad, 2016; Glendinning et al., 2003; Haugen and Villa, 2006; Rye, 2006a; Stockdale, 2002), the nature of such gossip and its role in social cohesion and social control is rarely examined in detail. Rural communities have thus been seen as rich in bonding social capital involving shared values, mutual trust, community support and normative control within the context of social closure (Coleman, 1988). To care for one another is a form of social behavior and an obligation that may be intense and hard to avoid in small and rural communities where it is near impossible to be anonymous. Everyone is highly visible to each other (Parr and Philo, 2003). Indeed, a Norwegian study found rural residents more likely than urban residents to believe that people in general care for one another and can rely on each other. At the same time, 22% of rural inhabitants and only 4% of urban inhabitants in this study said that there was too much gossip or negative talk about others in their community or neighborhood (Farstad, 2016).

While gossip can be defined in various ways it is mostly seen as informal, evaluative talk (Baumeister and Zhang, 2004; Chua and Uy, 2014; Wert and Salovey, 2004) or unverified news about the personal business of others (Crescimbene et al., 2012; Litman and Pezzo, 2005). The line between care and curiosity, and between information exchange and gossip is likely to be blurred. It can be undertaken with good intentions and care for others, and it can strengthen relationships between friends and strangers alike (Kim et al., 2019; Lyons and Hughes, 2015; Ronzoni and Foster, 2005). Gossip is not just used in the means of social comparison (Festingar, 1954), it can work as an instrument of power: putting the subject of gossip down is a way of eliminating a perceived threat to power and status (Pheko, 2018).

In this context it is important to note that individual perceptions of gossip may not correspond with actual levels of gossip and the functions of actual gossip may be different from the consequences of perceived gossip. In some cases, the subject of gossip may be the last to hear it and may be blissfully unaware of the power games afoot. In other cases, however, individual perceptions of community gossip about sensitive personal issues may profoundly affect residential satisfaction, irrespective of the actual level of gossip. Gossip that the subject is not aware of is of course mostly irrelevant to migration intentions while perceptions of imagined or real gossip may be quite consequential. A person faced with gossip might then choose to leave rather than confront the source of the gossip or risk retaliation (Wu et al., 2018).

Gossip is of course not a specifically rural phenomenon; it can be found in the boardrooms of multinational corporations, in the hangouts of drug dealers, in university reading rooms and wherever else people interact, support and compete with one another. There is however a crucial difference between urban and rural communities in this respect. While urban people may be able to avoid gossip by finding another workplace, voluntary association or circle of friends, out-migration may be the only recourse for rural people to escape unwanted gossip.

2.1. Iceland as a case study

Iceland is a sparsely populated island with 364 thousand inhabitants, with two thirds of the national population living in the capital area and the remainder spread along the coastline in towns, fishing villages and farming communities (Statistic Iceland, 2020a, 2020b). The 20th century was characterized by substantial internal migration from rural areas to the capital area, but the 21st century has witnessed declining migration from the more rural areas and a net flow from the capital area to adjacent exurban regions (Garðarsdóttir et al., 2020).

Gender equality in Iceland has been ranked the highest in the world in terms of a composite index of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2020). Iceland is nevertheless far from being a paradise of gender equality and various political, economic, social and personal gender inequalities persist. Icelandic women tend to find it challenging to balance personal life and work life (Staub and Rafnsdóttir, 2019) and housework and childcare still largely remain the responsibility of women (Pétursdóttir, 2009; Hjálmsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2019; Thorsdottir 2012, Gíslason and Símonardóttir, 2018). As demonstrated by the Icelandic 'MeToo' movement, sexual harassment and other forms of gendered violence remain pervasive in most spheres of Icelandic society (Bender, 2019; Björnsdóttir, 2018).

Rural communities in Iceland are characterized by a more traditional division of labor in the workplace and at home, as well as by a strong demand for unpaid female volunteer work in the community (Gíslason and Olafsson, 2005; Gunnarsdóttir, 2009; Karlsson 2013; Sigursteinsdottir and Rafnsdottir, 2009; Skaptadottir, 2000). Many rural communities have experienced severe out-migration of Icelanders and, in return, the in-migration of foreign nationals working in the fishing industry (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013).

Prospective migrants from Icelandic fishing villages name similar reasons for leaving as their counterparts in other rural communities in the global north; educational and occupational aspirations, better access to public services, cultural events and leisure activities (Bjarnason et al., 2019). However, one in eight women name traditional gender ideology and about one in five men and women name gossip as an important reason for leaving the community within the next 2–3 years.

3. Data and methods

3.1. Data collection

The study is based on a population survey from 2019, where migration intentions and living satisfaction were examined. Every resident 18 years and older in Icelandic towns and villages with fewer than

2000 inhabitants (and with some distance from larger towns and the capital area, Fig. 1) were in the target group of the survey. The target population was just over 18 thousand residents.

A letter of introduction was sent by mail to all registered homes in the target communities, directing all inhabitants over the age of 18 to an online survey instrument. The letter was followed up with two reminder postcards after three and five weeks from initial contact. Furthermore, geographically targeted social media ads and postings on community-based social media groups were used to encourage participation. The survey instrument was available in three languages. In addition to Icelandic, the questionnaire was available in Polish as 42% of all immigrants in Iceland are of Polish descent, and in English for other immigrant groups.

Data were collected in March and April 2019, yielding a total of 6788 responses. 1146 respondents did not have their primary home in the communities (e.g. temporary residents, second homeowners, and former residents) and were omitted from further analysis. The remaining 5642 respondents represent 30% of all registered inhabitants in the target towns and villages. Compared to official records, the share of female respondents is a bit larger (61% of the sample vs 48% according to official records), while the shares of the youngest and oldest age groups are smaller (18–25 year old are 9% of sample and 15% according to records; 71 years and older are 5% of the sample and 13% according to the records). Furthermore, respondents with two foreign-born parents are only 5% of the sample but 14% of the population according to official records.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Dependent variable

Migration intentions were measured by the question "Are you planning to move away from [*Name of town or village inserted*] within the next 2–3 years?" with five response categories *No, definitely not; No, probably not; Unsure; Yes, probably; Yes, definitely*. The outcome variable of migration intentions is defined as a binary measure (1: Probably or Definitely; 0: other). 14% of all respondents expects to move away from the community within the next 2–3 years, with an equal share of males and females (Table 1).

Table 1
Descriptive statistics.

Demographic background	Range	All	Male	Female
Gender	0–1	–	.39	.61
Age				
- 18-25	0–1	.08	.07	.08
- 25-30	0–1	.08	.08	.09
- 31-40	0–1	.21	.20	.22
- 41-50	0–1	.21	.20	.21
- 51-60	0–1	.22	.21	.23
- 61+	0–1	.20	.25	.17
Family situation				
Partner in household	0–1	.75	.74	.76
Children in household	0–1	.44	.39	.45
Socio-economic status				
Employed	0–1	.81	.85	.78
University education	0–1	.29	.20	.35
Good economic situation	0–1	.61	.64	.60
Community ties				
Grew up in community	0–1	.67	.72	.63
Foreign background	0–1	.05	.03	.06
Gossip about love-life				
- Some gossip	0–1	.17	.17	.16
- A lot of gossip	0–1	.06	.06	.05
Dependent variable				
Expect to leave within 2 – 3 years	0–1	*.14*	*.14*	*.14*
N:	5275			

3.3. Gossip about love-life

The measure of **love-life gossip** is derived from a four-item measure of perceived gossip: "How much do you think people generally gossip about each of the following aspects of your life in [*Name of town or village inserted*]?". The items asked were on perceived gossip about a) "Your family life", b) "Your financial situation", c) "Your love life" and d) "Other things in your life", with five response categories available - 1) Very little or none, 2) Rather little, 3) Some, 4) Rather much, and 5) Very much. In this paper, we focus on the dependent variable relating to love-life gossip with the response categories of 1 and 2 recoded into "Little or none" gossip, 3 and 4 into "some" gossip and 5 into "a lot" of love-life gossip. About 17% of the male respondents and 16% of the female respondents report some love-life gossip about themselves, and 6% of males and 5% of females report a lot of gossip about their love-lives.

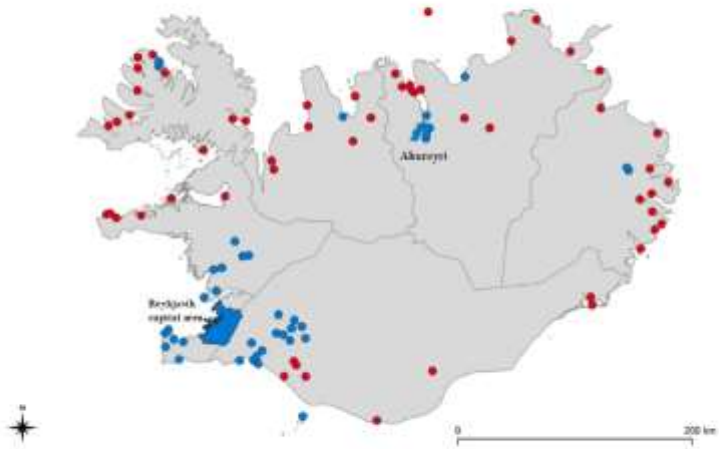

Fig. 1. Location of Icelandic towns and villages surveyed (in red) and larger urban settlements (in blue). (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the Web version of this article.)

3.4. Control variables

Gender was measured as a binary variable with 61% female respondents. The skewed gender distribution did not cause problems in the analysis as males and females are reported separately in the bivariate analysis and we control for gender in the multivariate analysis.

Age was measured in six categories; 18–25, 26–30, and in ten year increments up to 60 years or older. In the multivariate analysis, the 51–60 year old age group serves as the omitted reference category.

Family situation included the two items having a spouse or children under the age of 18 in the household (1: yes, 0: no), and was derived from a checklist of people who potentially lived in the same household as the respondent. Of the respondents, 75% lived with a spouse or partner and 44% lived in a household with their children.

Socio-economic status included three measures of *university education* (1: yes, 0: no), *employment status* (1: employed or self-employed, 0: other) and *good economic situation* based on self-reported economic status (1: rather or very good, 0: other). 81% of the respondents were employed, 29% were university educated and 61% considered their economic status to be rather or very good.

Community ties included two measures of *having grown up in the community* and having both parents of *foreign origin* (1: yes, 0: no). 67% of the respondents grew up in the community and 5% were of foreign origin.

4. Methods of analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS 25. In the bivariate analysis we test if there are significant difference in migration intentions by age and gender, when faced with love-life gossip. In the binomial logistical regression, the association of perceived gossip about love-life with migration intentions is tested, controlling for gender and age, family situation, socio-economic status and family ties. Interactions between perceptions of gossip and each of the other predictors were also tested individually. Only statistically significant interactions are reported.

5. Results

5.1. Bivariate results

Overall, there is a statistically significant difference (Chi-square: 180.1 (2), p. <0.001) in migration intentions by level of perceived gossip about love-life. About 11% of those who report little or no such gossip, about 21% of those who report some such gossip and 38% of those who report a lot of gossip about their love-life expect to migrate.

Fig. 2 shows the migration intentions between these three groups by gender and age, dividing the respondents in two age groups; those 40 years and younger and those over 40. These differences are significantly different among those who report little or no gossip about their love-life (Chi-square: 52.6 (3), p. < 0.001). The differences by age and gender were however not statistically different among those reporting some (Chi-square 4.7 (3), p. > 0.05) or a lot (Chi-square 3.7 (3), p > .05) gossip about their love-life. In other words, older men and women only reported less migration intentions if they perceived little or no gossip about their love-life. There is no age or gender difference in migration intentions among those who perceived some or a lot of gossip.

5.2. Multivariate results

Table 2 shows the results of the binomial logistic regression analysis of gossip about love-life on migration intentions, controlling for demographic background, family situation, socio-economic status and community ties.

5.3. Gossip about love-life

The results show that when controlling for other factors, perceptions of gossip generally double the probability of migration intentions. Patterns of statistical significance do however differ between males and females. The effects of some gossip about love-life are not statistically significant for females and for males the effect of perceptions of a lot of gossip does not quite reach statistical significance at the .05 level. Females that perceive a lot of gossip about their love-life are thus significantly more likely to migrate than those that don't perceive a lot of such gossip.

5.4. Control variables

The youngest two age groups are significantly more likely to migrate and the oldest group (60+) is significantly less likely to migrate than the 51–60 year old reference category. Interaction effects between age and love-life gossip were tested but were not found to be statistically significant. A statistically significant interaction term was found between the effects of having a partner in the household and perceptions of gossip on migration intentions. The main effect of having a partner in household is that the odds of intending to migrate are cut in half. However,

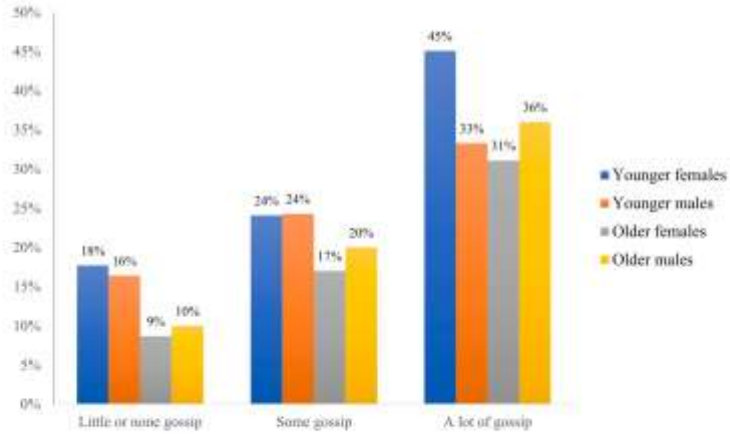

Fig. 2. Proportion of respondents intending to leave within the next 2–3 years by age and gender and perceptions of gossip about their love life.

Table 2
Binomial logistic regression model of migration intentions in Icelandic villages by perceptions of gossip about love life and background predictors.

	All	Females	Males
Gossip about love life			
Some gossip	1.57***	1.30	1.98***
A lot of gossip	2.07***	2.01*	1.94#
Demographic background			
Gender			
Female	0.87	–	–
Age			
18–25	4.52***	6.19***	2.91***
26–30	1.52*	1.91**	1.17
31–40	.92	1.17	.69
41–50	1.01	1.42	.65
51–60 (contrast)	1.00		
60+	.54**	.49**	.53
Family situation			
Partner in household	.45***	.41***	.49***
Children	1.07	1.08	1.00
Socio-economic status			
Employed	.88	.85	1.13
University education	1.38**	1.41*	1.26
Economic situation	.83	.89	.78
Community ties			
Grew up in community	.64***	.64***	.62**
Foreign background	.96	.96	.92
Interaction term			
Partner in household by a lot of gossip	2.62**	2.50*	2.91*
Pseudo R^2			
Cox& Snell	.10	.11	.09
Nagelkerke	.17	.19	.16

#p. < 0.10 * p. < 0.05 **p. < 0.01 ***p. < 0.001.

this only holds for those who do not report a lot of gossip about their love lives. The migration intentions of those who have a partner in household and report a lot of gossip about their love lives are no different from other respondents. Having children in the household neither has a significant main effect nor a significant interaction effect with love-life gossip on migration intentions.

Women with a university education are significantly more likely (1.4) to have intentions to migrate than women who do not have a university education. A similar effect of university education was not statistically significant for males and no statistically significant interaction effects were found for university education. Employment status and economic situation do not significantly affect the likelihood of migration.

Finally, those who grew up in the community were significantly less likely to intend to migrate. Controlling for this effect, an immigrant background is not significantly associated with migration intentions. The interaction terms between these two variables and love-life gossip do not have a statistically significant effect on migration intentions.

6. Discussion

In his seminal discussion of the role of social closure in the generation of bonding social capital, James S. Coleman (1988) argued that shared norms and mutual trust gradually develop within groups that interact regularly within well-defined boundaries over an extended period of time. Under such conditions of social closure, people develop intimate knowledge of the prior behaviors of other group members and a mutual understanding that breaches common norms will have negative consequences in the future. As a result, self-interested individuals can make the rational choice to provide mutual assistance without immediate compensation and entrust others with their children, property and personal well-being.

Coleman's concept of social closure would seem to fit perfectly with the proverbial rural village where most people have lived all their lives and engage in dense social interactions with other villagers at work, the grocery store, the pub and local charity meetings and where 'everyone knows everything about everybody'. While actual rural communities are much more heterogeneous and fluid than such 'idyllic' portrayals of rural villages, they nevertheless tend to be characterized by high levels of individual visibility and a higher level of belief that people in general care and can rely on each other (Farstad, 2016; Parr and Philo, 2003; Wiersma and Denton, 2016).

The exchange of information about other people is obviously central to the development of shared norms and mutual trust, and gossip can thus be seen as an important mechanism that enables both social support and social control in small, tight-knit rural communities. Gossip is thus not necessarily malicious; discussing the physical, psychological, social and economic challenges facing other people can be instrumental in enabling mutual support in such communities. Furthermore, it can strengthen in-group relationships and help integrate newcomers into the community (Kim et al., 2019; Lyons and Hughes, 2015; Rosnow and Foster, 2005).

Those who are the subjects of gossip, however, frequently experience an intrusive breach of individual privacy that can also have negative consequences for their well-being in the community (Glendinning et al., 2003; Pedersen and Gram, 2018; Rye, 2006b). Gossip about love-life in particular can be expected to play a role in strengthening and reproducing patriarchal power structures and be geared towards controlling female sexuality in particular through slut shaming. The fear of gossip may thus contribute to the perception that young people must move away for sexual exploration and the development of sexual identities (Edluna, 2005; Thorsteinsson et al., 2020; Wimark and Öath, 2014).

In this context, it is interesting to note that no prior studies have to our knowledge discussed in detail the role of gossip in social cohesion and social control or its specific impact on out-migration from rural areas. The results from our study contribute to filling this gap in the literature by estimating the impact of love-life gossip on the migration intentions of men and women in small towns and villages in Iceland.

In the bivariate setting, we find that older men and women only reported less migration intentions if they perceived little or no gossip about their love-life. There is no age or gender difference in migration intentions among those who perceived some or a lot of gossip. This indicates that when there is a lot of gossip about peoples love-life, it overwrites age and gender in regards to migration intentions. Age and gender differences in migration intentions found in prior studies may thus by partly explained by differences in perceived gossip and other forms of informal social control.

In the multivariate analysis, we find that net of gender, age, relationship status and other factors, gossip about love-life roughly doubles the odds of firm plans of moving away. This effect size is on par with the effect of being single and stronger than the effects of, for example, education and having grown up in the community. Future research should explore the effects of other types of gossip, for instance gossip about personal finances, housekeeping or work-related issues.

Our findings with regards to gender are interesting in this context. The general consensus in the literature seems to be that women are more likely than men to leave rural communities (e.g. Bonifacio, 2014; Brettell, 2016; Carson et al., 2011; Corbett, 2007; Dahlström, 1996; Rauhut and Littke 2016). Female out-migration from rural areas may have a wide variety of causes, including educational and occupational aspirations and perceptions and experiences of a macho culture and traditional gender roles in rural areas. Several researchers have in particular mentioned gossip and other aspects of limitations on privacy and personal freedom as a reason for young women to leave rural communities and move to more anonymous urban areas (Brettell, 2016; Pedersen and Gram, 2018; Glendinning et al., 2003; Haugen and Villa, 2006; Rye, 2006b; Stockdale, 2002). However, we do not find a significant gender difference in migration intentions and there is not a significant interaction between the effects of gender and love-life gossip on such intentions.

While our non-findings with regards to gender may be somewhat surprising, they are actually quite consistent with earlier research in

rural Iceland. Analysing standardized surveys of migration intentions among Icelandic youth, Seyfrit et al. (2010) found that the substantial gender gap in migration intentions in 1992 had become much smaller in 2003 and had completely disappeared in 2007. More recently, Thoesteinsson et al. (2020) found greater migration intentions among rural than among urban adolescents in Iceland. Moreover, they found that LGB + adolescents in both rural and urban communities have much greater migration intentions than their heterosexual counterparts. However, there were no significant differences in migration intentions by gender or sexual orientation between urban and rural settings. In terms of actual migration patterns, Júlíusdóttir et al. (2013) found that internal migration rates had become similar among men and women in rural Iceland, and Bjarnason (2019) found the gender imbalance in some rural communities to be due to low in-migration rather than high out-migration by women. It remains unclear to what extent these findings can be related to the high level of gender equality in Iceland according the World Economic Forum (2020) Gender Gap Index.

Our findings are however not consistent with the reported persistence of 'slut-shaming' in Icelandic society (Bryndísar-og Karlsdóttir, 2015; Guðjónsdóttir and Pétursdóttir, 2018). According to conventional wisdom, women who lead active sex lives are condemned as 'sluts' by the court of public opinion while their male counterparts are considered 'studs'. Our findings however suggest that love-life gossip equally increases the migration intentions of both men and women. Future research might for instance reveal qualitative differences in the content of such gossip between men and women, or alternatively that similar types of gossip have similar effects on the residential satisfaction of men and women.

Urban-rural differences in gossip would also be an interesting topic of future research. City-wide gossip is likely to be limited to public figures known to the majority of people or individuals suspected of sufficiently outrageous behavior to reach the attention of a large number of strangers. Most people can however be considered at risk of gossip in their personal circle of friends, co-workers or neighbors and city dwellers who experience uncomfortable levels of gossip might consider finding new friends, changing jobs or moving to another neighborhood or apartment building. In rural areas, however, leaving the community may be the only option of avoiding such gossip.

Our results clearly indicate that gossip is an important subject of future studies on social cohesion and social control as well as on migration intentions and actual migration behavior from rural communities. It should be emphasized that the association between perceived gossip and migration intentions is not only a matter of academic concern. Many of the predictors of rural out-migration uncovered in prior research are far beyond the control of rural communities, including the global economy, forces of urbanization, governmental policy and the organization of public services, and the business decisions of captains of commerce and industry. The way people in the community talk about one another and the degree of privacy and personal freedom that community members enjoy is however clearly within the control of local communities. In other words, communities might be able to influence future migration patterns by striving to be more inclusive and tolerant towards diversity in the personal lives of individual community members.

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Article II

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"You Don't Want to Be One of Those stories" Gossip and Shame as Instruments of Social Control in Small Communities

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ABSTRACT

Small, tight-knit communities often have the image of being places that are full of gossip and where everybody knows each other's business. This closeness can be claustrophobic for individuals who might not want to live by the accepted social norms of the community. Gossip and rumours can be used to keep such individuals in their place by enforcing social norms through social control. Shaming is crucial to this form of social control, where certain behaviour is punished and shamed through the spread of gossip. Shaming is gendered and is used more harshly against women than against men, particularly in regard to women's behaviour in public and their sexual activity. This paper examines how gossip and shame are a part of gendered social control in small villages/towns in Iceland, and how it affects young women's lives. The discussion here is based on interviews about gossip with young Icelandic women who either live in or come from small fishing villages. The main themes that were constructed from the analysis were the social control of women through shaming, reputation, and slut-shaming. The analysis shows that slut-shaming and the fear of shame control women's behaviour and sexual activities.

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Introduction

Icelandic coastal villages fit the description of what studies often refer to as a rural idyll: a space of peace, a place where you can raise children in a safe environment and live close to nature (Grimsrud & Båtevik, 2016; Munkejord, 2006). But at the same time, the smallness and closeness of such communities create space for gossip when everybody knows each other's business (Haugen & Villa, 2006; Pedersen & Gram, 2018). This closeness can be constraining and claustrophobic for some individuals, especially young people (Glendinning et al., 2003; Stockdale, 2002). Young women may experience this as especially intrusive because they are at greater risk of being shamed for their sexual activities (Armstrong et al., 2014; Bryndísar-Karlsdóttir, 2015; Guðjónsdóttir & Pétursdóttir, 2018; Papp et al., 2015; Ringrose et al., 2013).

The closeness of the communities doesn't just offer a space for gossip but also the social control that follows. The classical form of social control refers to the "capacity of a social group to regulate itself" (Janowitz, 1975, p. 82) and the way members of a society "attempt to assure the norm-conforming behaviour of others" (Chriss, 2013, p. 52). Feminist scholars have directed their theories of social control of women towards patriarchal societies, where women's bodies and expression of sexuality are regulated by social norms (McKinnon, 1987; Ramazanoglu & Holland,

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2002; Smuts, 1995) and towards better research on the double standards and social control of sexualities and gender relations (Crawford & Popp, 2003).

There is thus cause to examine the connection between gossip and shaming when analysing social control and control over women's behaviour. This article highlights these processes by addressing two main questions. Firstly, how are gossip and shame used as instruments of social control over young women in small communities? Secondly, how are gossip and slut-shaming used to maintain and negatively impact young women's reputation as a part of social control? The data collected for this article is a part of a larger research project on the lives of young women in small communities in Iceland where social control, gossip, and migration are examined.

After laying out the theoretical underpinnings, we describe the context of the study and the qualitative methods applied. Based on the analysis of interviews with young women concerning gossip, the results presented here focus on three themes that were constructed from the analysis of gendered social control: first, fear of public exposure and feeling of shame, second, "just being the good girl" or avoiding loss of reputation; and third, "it's talked about much more if it is a woman", gossiping about women's sex lives or the experiences of slut-shaming.

Gossip and Social Control

Gossip is not just a negative practice engaged in by people who entertain themselves by belittling others; it is a complex and heterogeneous practice regarding content, form, and function (Lyons & Hughes, 2015; Rosnow & Foster, 2005). The most common understanding of gossip is that it is an informal, evaluative conversation about a member of the discussants' social environment who is not present (Merry, 1984; Wert & Salovey, 2004) or the expression of unverified news about others' personal affairs (Crescimbene et al., 2012; Litman & Pezzo, 2005). Peters and Kashima (2007, 2015) and Lind et al. (2007) discuss three dimensions of gossip, where gossip acts as a communication form in a social triad: a speaker/gossiper, a social target, and an audience.

Gossip can be important for belonging to a group or strengthening it (Chua & Uy, 2014; Lyons & Hughes, 2015). Listening to the gossip of peers can be a step towards normalization in a social group where people learn from hearing about the consequences of not behaving "correctly." Sanctions are imposed on those who do not abide by the community's unwritten social laws, but the effectiveness of these sanctions may vary, according to the social status of the individuals being punished and how much they have to lose if they are exposed (Goode, 2019). Victims of malicious gossip and shaming may respond with avoidance behaviour or flight as coping methods. A flight response might involve leaving their social space, whereas a fight response means that the people who are talked about confront the source of the gossip (Breugelmans & Poortinga, 2006; Gilbert, 2003; Lewis, 1971; Tangney, 1996; Wu et al., 2018).

The social laws of a community are a part of informal social control—mechanisms and practices in everyday life that generate group pressure to conform (Chriss, 2013). Feminist researchers have pointed out that within patriarchal societies, many given social norms and behaviours are used solely to control women (Crawford & Popp, 2003; Fischer, 2018; McKinnon, 1987; Smuts, 1995). This informal social control can then make for an enormous group pressure on women to behave according to the given norms in patriarchal society.

Tight-knit communities, such as small, rural villages, often function as a single social group where "everybody knows everything" about everyone else. In villages like this, norm-violators—those who do not follow the informal moral rules of society—may face punishment, exposure, or even exclusion (Black, 1984; Giardini & Conte, 2012). Foucault (1978) claimed that social contact and conversation could not exist without the use and transmission of power. In his view, power is not something someone has; it is something done to others, an action that affects the actions of others. Gossip can thus work as a subversive form of power. Giardini and Conte (2012) examined social control as society's way of regulating itself; those who defy social norms must be identified and subsequently avoided or punished. Similarly, Robinson (2016) sees gossip as a means

of bidirectional social control. In the context of this study, we look at gossip as an effective form of power that not only forms and enforces social norms but also condemns and shames the wrongdoer, threatening similar shame for others who violate the norm in question.

Gendered Shame and the Self

Goffman (1967), writing about embarrassment, claimed that the fear of shame and the constant anticipation of it are powerful means of social control. Shame can result from public exposure of one's failings or fragility (Gehm & Scherer, 1988), an exposure that is likely to be executed in a social space through the flow of gossip. Shame is also closely associated with the self and self-image. A damaged self-image or a damaged social-image can explain the self-defensive motivation to hide and avoid others better than the shaming itself (Gausel & Leach, 2011). Shame that threatens the self and one's self-image has also been found to activate a "restore or repair-motion," where people try to make amends and attempt to rebuild their social image (Gausel et al, 2012; I. Hooge et al., 2010).

In patriarchal societies, women experience gendered shame imposed by oppressive structures (Beauvoir, 1949; Fischer, 2018). Conforming to standards of beauty and the feminine body is demanding, but shame is also deeply ingrained in femininity (Shabot & Korem, 2018). According to Bartky (1990) women occupy a position of oppression and subordination within patriarchal society, resulting in diminished status and a sense of inadequacy to meet societies standards (Bartky, 1990). Women who struggle to meet the standards of society may experience "chronic shame" as they are "already shame-prone" (Dolezal, 2015, p. 109)

Even though the benchmark for shame has now been lowered in western societies (Scheff, 2000), women still face extensive shaming for their sexual activities (Armstrong et al., 2014; Fjær et al., 2015; Ringrose et al., 2013). In modern media culture, stereotypes of women have shifted. No longer simply passive or responsive, they are now seen as also experiencing desire and focusing on pleasure (Farvid et al., 2016). It is interesting to consider this new perception of women as beings with desires in view of the sexual double standard that still prevails, where the acceptable number of sexual partners is still higher for men than it is for women (Armstrong, 2014; Papp, 2015). These double standards are often described as the Madonna-whore complex (Farvid et al., 2016), which is a battle between being too "loose" or being too much of a moralizer (Fjær et al., 2015). With the #metoo revolution spreading through the Western world, there has, however, been a change in the discussion of victim-blaming and slut-shaming towards women (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Mendes et al., 2018; Þorbergsdóttir, 2018).

Women in the western world encounter many different stereotypes regarding their body image and behaviour (Ellemers, 2018; Haines et al., 2016) that often lead to shaming, but mom-shaming is also a part of the agenda. There are extensive demands regarding what women need to do to be a good mother (Leonard & Kelly, 2021; Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003) or an attached mother (Badinter, 2012; Símonardóttir, 2016). In heterosexual families, fathers have become more involved than ever before as caregivers, but stereotypes still exist of mothers as the main caregivers and fathers as the breadwinners (Little & Austin, 1996; Símonardóttir, 2016). Motherhood is, however, still seen as culturally mandatory and morally imperative, where modern media frames it as "joyful, wonderful, and the way to achieve happiness" (Auðardóttir & Rudolfsdottir, 2022, p. 20). And those who dare to express different opinions about motherhood often face condemning remarks and shaming (Mustosmäki & Sihto, 2021).

Context of the Study: Icelandic Coastal Communities

Gender equality in Iceland ranks highest in the world (World Economic Forum, 2022). However, it is not a paradise for gender equality, and there are several areas of the economic, political, and social landscape where inequalities persist. Although labour-force participation is high in Iceland, responsibility for housework and childcare remains largely in women's hands (Gíslason &

Simonardóttir, 2018; Hjálmsdóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2019; Pétursdóttir, 2009; Thorsdottir, 2012). Rural areas like those where the study took place are characterized even more by a "traditional" gender division in the labour market and at home, and there are also demands that women engage in community volunteer work (Gíslason & Ólafsson, 2005; Gunnarsdóttir, 2009; Karlsson, 2013; Sigursteinsdottir & Rafnsdottir, 2009; Skaptadóttir, 2000).

Iceland is a sparsely populated country with merely 376 thousand inhabitants (Statistic Iceland, 2020). More than half the population lives in the capital area, but about one-fourth live in smaller coastal towns and villages. Fisheries play or have played a central role in many of the small villages in the study, but many have also experienced growing tourism. Whereas the economic aspects associated with Iceland's fishing communities have attracted research (Korkorch & Benediktsson, 2018), contemporary gendered aspects of fishing-community life remain largely under-researched. Earlier studies by Rafnsdóttir and Skaptadóttir (1997), Skaptadóttir (2000), and Karlsdóttir (2009) on women's lives in fishing communities showed a relatively traditional gendered division of labour. Despite decades of growing gender equality in Iceland, gendered stereotyping is still strong in the fishing industry, where people in traditionally male jobs, such as fishermen, enjoy more respect than those who take traditionally female jobs in fish processing (Rafnsdóttir, 2017).

Many of these small towns have faced challenges in population development in recent decades. A survey by Bjarnason et al. (2019) showed that the migration-intentions of women and men are similar in small coastal communities, and, although other factors were higher on the list, about 21% of all participants, men and women, mentioned gossip as an important reason behind potential migration. Jóhannesdóttir et al. (2021) found a statistically significant relationship between plans to leave small communities and perceptions of gossip about love-life. Being the subject of gossip doubled the likelihood of both men and women feeling like they needed to leave. Those studies did not present deeper analyses of the content of gossip, but they clearly depicted its effect on the lives of people in small communities.

Methods

The data analysed for this paper was collected between 2019–2021 from 18 coastal villages around Iceland that had 100 to 500 inhabitants. Interviews were conducted with 24 women who voluntarily participated, ranging in age from 25 to 45 years old. The participants were recruited using the snowball method (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), and the only requirements for participation were being a woman between the age range of 25–45 and being a resident or former resident of one of these villages. Additionally, the first author searched for participants using local Facebook pages, as well as in radio interviews about her doctoral study. The age range of the women involved was chosen to reach both young single women and young women with partners. Studies have shown that this age range is most likely to be impacted by the closeness of these small communities and the resulting social control and gossip (Glendinning et al., 2003; Pedersen & Gram, 2018; Stockdale, 2002).

Semi-structured qualitative interviews in the form of conversations with open questions (Crang & Cook, 2007) allowed the women to talk about their own experiences, past and present, and their views of gossiping and shaming in their villages. All the women participating were or had been in heterosexual relationships. The women were asked about their personal lives and their lives in the village. They were asked to describe how they had experienced verbal gossip between people in the village, and about the effects of gossip on their lives, their behaviour, or their decisions. They were also asked to talk about the reasons for gossip, compare men's and women's gossip, and discuss name-calling. The interviews were approximately one hour long and were recorded. They were then transcribed, and participants were given pseudonyms. Due to the small size of the populations in the villages concerned, the names of these communities are not disclosed in the presentation of the results. Analysing the interviews, the authors used a feminist approach in order to "understand the realities of gendered lives" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 163), supported by a feminist

phenomenological approach that recognizes women's lived experience and perceptions (Simms & Stawarska, 2013; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Themes of behaviour and morals within a culture can be derived from participants' stories in qualitative interviews (Saldaña, 2016). The analysis began with a thorough reading. Then the interviews were coded, first with initial coding and then pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). The most significant codes were identified, and they were used to analyse the data further, looking for similarities and differences in the data (Flick, 2006). Dedoose coding software was applied to help code the interviews and the analysis. The first author then developed the main themes based on these codes. Three themes that were constructed from this analysis of women's experiences of gossiping are discussed in this article: first, fear of public exposure and feeling of shame, second, "just being the good girl" or avoiding loss of reputation; and third, "it's talked about much more if it is a woman", gossiping about women's sex lives or the experiences of slut-shaming.

The first author who conducted the interviews is a woman in the same age range as the women interviewed for this study, and, like them, lives in a small village. Thus, she is very aware of possible ethical issues, as people know each other in such small villages. This is why the study was conducted in many villages, and we do not mention in the article which part of Iceland the discussion of the data comes from. The second author has conducted various studies in small rural villages in Iceland. Following ethical methods of qualitative research given by Icelandic Universities (Siðfræði Rannsókna, 2022), information about the research project was given to the participants, the use of the data was explained, and the participants signed an informed consent. They were promised anonymity, and therefore in our analysis we attempted to hide their identity, only referring to their age, civil status (in a relationship/single), and if they spent their childhood years in the community (local) or had moved into it in their adult years (not local). The participants were encouraged to contact the researchers if they experienced any emotional distress or harm resulting to the interviews.

Results

The young women who participated all described the closeness between people in their small communities and how common gossip exists in their societies. Many of them claimed they didn't listen to gossip, but later in the interview, they spoke about all kinds of events and stories connected to gossip. They used different types of coping strategies: some tried to ignore gossip, others objected to it or asked people not to gossip, and then there were those the results tell us more about—those who left their social space or town in order to avoid gossip and shame.

According to the participants, the villages in the study all seem to have a strong heterosexual "marital culture", and there are few single people in the participants' age group in these communities. That leaves the question of whether being married or co-habiting in these villages gives people access to a certain norm, where being a part of a couple is the norm.

Three main themes of social control that were constructed from the analysis of the interviews further highlight the interconnected aspects affecting women's lives raised in this article: shame, reputation, and slut-shaming.

Fear of Public Exposure and a Feeling of Shame

Shame is dependent on public exposure (Gehm & Scherer, 1988), which often leads to avoidance behaviour to escape being shamed, or to a woman hiding actions and behaviour from others. Drinking behaviour is often the source of gossip, according to the women who took part in the study. One of them, who did something she was ashamed of while drunk in a public place in the village talked about how she isolated herself after this event. She said,

> There was an incident once – something did happen, and I was working in the local store at the time, and it was really hard, the whole town knew . . . I went home one day, but then I just toughed it out, and I simply withdrew for a while, I went to work and then straight home . . . it wouldn't have mattered if I'd lived in Reykjavík, then nobody would have known. (woman, in a relationship, local)

Shame was the main issue for her, as she felt exposed in her small community, which motivated her to hide. She then described the typical self-image repair-effort (I. Hooge et al., 2010), which included going into an alcohol rehabilitation program.

Mom-shaming also featured in women's descriptions of gossip in their villages. Some expressed annoyance at the gossip about their home and household, and a young mother said she had tried hard to keep a clean house because " . . . there is talk about homes not being tidy, or even dirty", and she said, "I just try to do everything I can, so people won't [talk about her]". She associated motherhood with having a clean home, trying to meet the demands that she felt were made in order to be a good mother (Leonard & Kelly, 2021; Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003). There were other and diverse experiences of mom-shaming in the interviews. Two of the women, in different regions, both mothers of young children and both primary school teachers, had similar experiences with parents reporting them to the child protection services. Both believed this was motivated by revenge because the school had been forced to contact the authorities over these parents' own problematic behaviour. Both cases against the schoolteachers were dropped after a brief investigation, but gossip about the child protection services "looking" into these two women's homes will continue to circulate. These are merely two examples of how the social triad (Lind et al., 2007; Peters & Kashima, 2007) makes gossip work as a triangular power: a force involving a gossiper, a social target, and an audience. It is clearly a power done to others like Foucault (1978) maintained, where the social target is the one affected by it. Whether it is done simply to belittle school employees through mom-shaming or to take revenge, the triangle works in such a small community. Stories stick, negatively impact a person's reputation, and live on in local gossip. Here, gossip channels are used to make a child-protection service the speaker, the mothers the social target, and the town the audience.

"Just Being the Good Girl", Avoiding Loss of Reputation

In the small communities in this study, strong family and friendship relations are common, with the same kin groups passing on stories from one generation to the next. A woman in one of the communities in the study described her shame after having an affair with a married man soon after moving to this village. She felt local inhabitants had turned their backs on her and that after the affair ended, she had to earn their trust again, which she said took more than two years. In her words:

> They saw me steering clear, making amends, obviously feeling remorse, and, like I said, just being a good girl and trying to not show, you know, that I'm someone who should be disrespected or something. I'm a great person, but you know, this happened, I did have an affair with that guy . . . and everyone knew about it'. (woman, single, not local)

She illustrates a clear example of a repair strategy (Gausel et al., 2012; I. Hooge et al., 2010): she tries her best to restore her image in the community and shows that she was a "good girl". In this case, the woman experienced society clearly punishing her as the wrongdoer (Robinson, 2016). But according to her, the man involved, a local resident with a family in the village, was not punished by judgemental gossiping, even though he was married.

The fishermen in these towns are usually respected individuals (Rafnsdóttir, 2017; Skaptadóttir & Rafnsdóttir, 2000). But fishermen's wives in these small villages felt they were under very close scrutiny when their husbands were at sea. One of them, a 25-year-old woman, described her attempts to have an active social life and some fun when her husband was away. She said, ". . . it is as if I can't leave the house without him, there is always talk if I do". She also explained that this

often resulted in her being lonely at home while he was away at sea. In almost the same words, another woman living in another village said: "fishermen's wives—it's almost as if they mustn't leave the house if their guy is not on shore; if they do, they are definitely up to no good . . . ".

Young people partying and having fun is nothing new, but when this happens in a small community, it can leave a mark that follows a person for the rest of his or her life. Sometimes name-calling is part of this, and the name given sticks with the person for decades. Some of the women aged 35–45 who participated in the study talked about this and how they had thought a lot about their actions when they were young and single. One of them, who had moved away for a few years for her education and then moved back, said, "I was lucky that I never hooked up with anyone local, which was really good for me when I returned home". One participant said that after her wild, younger years, she felt that local people had tended to see her as a loser. She later moved away from her home village to another similar community and said, "I felt when I moved that I had been given another chance".

Given the existence of kin-groups in such small villages, it can be difficult to dissociate yourself from the actions and reputations of your relatives. Another participant, who now lives in a regional centre, said she will never move back to the village where she grew up because of accusations about her family that were the source of malicious gossip. She described moving away as follows:

> . . . it gave me a certain opportunity to start over, to just be me, not a person from that family and this that happened . . . or didn't happen . . . to start again, without this label on my back. (woman, in a relationship, local)

The extended family can work like an umbrella and shield a family member, making social interaction a likely coping method against gossip and shaming (I. E. Hooge et al., 2018). But the two women mentioned above both felt that moving away was the only way to escape the past and the stained reputation, clearly demonstrating how gossip and shame can lead to a desire to hide or escape (Breugelmans & Poortinga, 2006; Gilbert, 2003; Lewis, 1971; Tangley, 1996).

'It's Talked About Much More if It is a Woman, Slut-Shaming Gossip'

Many of the participants showed clear signs of being affected by social control when describing avoidance behaviour concerning their sexual activities, especially in their late teenage years and while single, which some of them still are. One example of this was a single mother who said, "you will never see me holding hands with anyone here in the street," referring to gossip that could spread and her fear that this gossip could reach the ears of her children. Another woman, now married, said about the past, "Better done where nobody sees you—and I did my share of stupid things, but never in [home region]," expressing her relief that she did not have a locally-known, negative reputation from her younger years. Some of the participants said they avoided being seen on the street with men other than their spouse in order to prevent gossip. Thus, many of the participants in the study in the age range 35–45 indicated that when they were younger and single, partying away from their hometown was often preferred because, as one of the women said, "you don't want to be one of those stories".

As researchers have pointed out, a higher number of sexual partners is usually more acceptable for men than for women (Armstrong, 2014; Farvid et al., 2016; Papp, 2015). Most of the participants in the study agreed with this view. They claimed that the image of a man who sleeps around being a stud still exists today, but that a woman is seen as a slut for doing the same. Some of the participants used the term slut-shaming when talking about this. Many remembered stories about other women who had lived in their village and had been the victims of slut-shaming.

Name-calling used to be common in Icelandic villages, but most participants said that this is not as common today as it used to be. However, many of the women remembered slutty names that had been given to and stuck to women who had been sexually active, but they could give only one example of name-calling like this for a man. More than one participant mentioned the word

Almannagjá, the name of a scenic site in Iceland, as a name-calling given to a woman: *almanna* (in the sense of "for everyone") and *gjá* (cleft/crack). Shaming names like this live on in the social space of a village through storytelling and gossip, and a person's reputation can be passed on from one generation to the next.

Women face harsher judgement than men when they have an affair, whether they are married or not. As one woman said,

> It's talked about much more if it is a woman, like it is more serious. You know, it's more of a habit for men . . . people think it's not as newsworthy if it is the man who is cheating – she is maybe a mother, you know, it's somehow just . . . (woman, in a relationship, not local)

This highlights the double standard and the Madonna-whore complex that women encounter (Farvid et al., 2016). The view that it is worse for a woman to cheat if she is a mother than it is for a man who is a father reflects the view that motherhood is a more virtuous state than fatherhood.

When asked about the subjects of gossip, most participants mentioned cheating on a partner as one of the contentious topics. The phrase *hjónadjöfull* (couples' devil) came up a few times in the discussion of unfaithfulness, and it only applied to women. One of the women commenting on this said,

> A [married] man cheats with a single woman; then that single woman is suddenly the couple's devil [hjónadjöfull] even though she is not the one in a marriage. It is not the man that is the couple's devil in his own marriage. (woman, in a relationship, not local)

This gendered use of the phrase "couples devil" is quite illustrative, laying the responsibility for the possible ruin of a marriage entirely at the single woman's shoulders—not on the married man, freeing him from the shame of gossip related to cheating.

Three of the participants in the study had moved away from a village due to nasty gossip about their sex-lives. Two of them, who were born and raised in the village concerned, later moved back. One of them, who had moved away as a teenager, said;

> I was accused of sleeping with my friend's boyfriend at [a very young age] . . . there was absolutely nothing to it, but it set me apart from everyone else . . . and I simply fled, got myself out of there. (woman, in a relationship, local)

She said she moved away to avoid social stigmatization, but came back when her classmates, the ones who had gossiped about her, left town to go to school elsewhere. One of the participants, describing a friend who had had an active sexual life as a young woman and then moved away said,

> I don't think she can come back without being closely watched by everyone, all of them waiting for her to put a foot wrong again. (woman, in a relationship, local)

Endemic to Icelandic culture are stories of fishermen who sail into port and look for fun with women while their boat is being unloaded; then they sail away again. A lot of words in the Icelandic language and popular songs refer to heroes of the sea (Skaptadóttir, 2000). But women in small fishing communities do not have a heroine image. They are called sluts when they engage in similar behaviour. Even though the wild party culture that was such a big part of life for fishing industry workers in small ports has more or less ceased, there are still villages where boats come in with seamen eager for a good time. One of the participants in the study talked about this, saying,

> I don't think any of the girls that I remember being talked about in connection with the coast guard ship live here today . . . if a girl has the reputation of going on board at some point and maybe sleeping with someone, then she can go nowhere near the ship without people saying she is sleeping with a seaman whether he is married or not. (woman, in a relationship, local)

Again, the fact that these men are often married does not seem to be the main issue when it comes to local gossip. The focus is typically on the girls and women who have a reputation for sexual activity with sailors; they are shamed through malicious gossip and given a reputation that will persist in their social space for years to come.

Discussion

The analysis of the interviews with the young Icelandic women who took part in this study demonstrates how effective gossip is when it comes to the social control of young women. Addressing our first question, how gossip and shame are used as instruments of social control over young women, the results depict avoidance behaviour, where young women change their behaviour or even change the course of their lives because of gossip and shame. They expressed that they feel shame—or fear being shamed—and some do indeed move to a different location to avoid it. Gossip is a powerful instrument for promoting shame, leaving us to question whether one could thrive without the other.

Addressing our second question, how gossip and slut-shaming are used to maintain and negatively impact young women's reputation as a part of social control, we demonstrate how young women are often strongly affected by gossip and slut-shaming, resulting in a negatively impacted reputation. Slut-shaming and the fear of shame control women's behaviour and sexual activities. Some stay and try to repair their reputations. Having done something that is perceived as shameful, they try to be "good girls", as one participant clearly explained. The gossip commonly lives on in stories that are hurtful to women's reputations, often without the victims having a chance to defend themselves. And the stories will reach the ears of young girls taking their first steps into adulthood, enforcing them into the same socially acceptable norms and behaviour, in order to avoid gendered shame and slut-shaming.

The participants in this study live in small, close-knit communities. These results give us better understanding of the complex relationship between gossip and shame, and how gendered shaming is towards women. Further research on gossip could show if other tight social spaces show similar power formations and shaming, and maybe lead us to challenge this power. Despite major improvements in gender equality in Iceland, there is still gendered slut-shaming in small communities. Gendered social control of gossip and shaming has negative effects on the wellbeing and happiness of women who live in a small community where everybody knows their name.

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Article III

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

"This Fawning, Flirty Type": Singlehood, Gossip and Power Dynamics—Young Women in Rural Communities

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Abstract

Singlehood has received increasing attention from academic researchers in recent decades. However, when it comes to understanding the lives and experiences of single women in small rural communities, research is sorely lacking. In such communities, singles may have limited opportunities for finding companionship. These tight settings create the perfect environment for social control through gossip. This has damaging effects on young women who find their social lives and sexual activities under the microscope, as well as their expressions of sexuality. Drawing on interviews conducted with young women in small fishing villages in Iceland, this paper examines the lives of single women in small Icelandic communities, particularly when it comes to their social space, love life, and sexual activities as well as gossip about them. The findings reveal patterns of social exclusion against single women in these communities. Moreover, the study uncovers gendered slut-shaming practices and power dynamics that emerge between local and non-local inhabitants.

Keywords Young women · Gossip · Sexual freedom · Social control · Rural communities

Introduction

Being single in a culture or a community that prioritizes married couples can be a challenge. This is particularly true for single women residing in rural areas, which have often been perceived as more masculine spaces leaning towards hegemonic masculinities (Dahlström, 1996; Darcy, 2014; Rahut & Littke, 2016). This can then regulate women in rural areas to supportive roles of mothers and caregivers, sometimes leading to out-migration of women (Grimsrud, 2011). As for single people in rural areas, they are in general more likely to migrate to urban areas (Gautier

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et al., 2010; Haartsen & Bjarnason, 2023). Glendinning et al (2003) find that negative aspects of rural areas matter more for the wellbeing of women than men. One of those negative aspects is gossip. Spreading shame and protecting reputations though gossip is an effective means of social control and preserving the social norms of the community (Jóhannesdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2023). There is also a tendency for the same kin groups to live in these rural areas for generations, creating power blocks of locals. This might contribute to upholding the local power dynamics that Shucksmith (2018) addresses, highlighting how the idealization of rural life is both normative and imbued with power.

This article sheds light on the experiences and lives of single women in rural communities, focusing on how they are affected by the social control mechanisms of gossip and gendered slut-shaming. The study addresses two central questions: First, how does the limited space of small communities' impact single women's personal lives and opportunities? Second, how does gendered slut-shaming affect the experiences and lives of single women in small communities? After laying out the theoretical underpinnings, the article describes the context of the study and methods applied. Interviews with young Icelandic women about their lives in small communities and the impact of gossip on their lives were analyzed, with four themes constructed from the results. First: social space, or the feeling that there's no space or privacy. Second: social exclusion, "just a couples' thing". Third: gendered slut shaming, "this fawning, flirty type". Fourth: power dynamics, or where you are in the hierarchy.

Singlehood and Stigmatization

An increasing number of adults are choosing to live their lives single and are satisfied with their single status (DePaulo, 2006; Træen & Kvalem, 2022). According to several recent studies (DePaulo, 2006; Oh et al., 2021; Pollmann-Schult, 2018; Trimberger, 2006), comparing single people to couples, or single mothers to married mothers, solely based on life satisfaction is ineffective. There are more complex and important predictors of life satisfaction than just relationship status. One important predictor of life satisfaction is sexual satisfaction, which has been linked to less interest in getting married. In fact, sexual satisfaction was shown to be positively connected to the belief that people can be happy without marriage (Park et al., 2021).

Coleman's (1988) saw social capital as a social structure and network of relationships among people, functioning within social groups of people. This applies quite well to small communities, where the town and place form a social relation and the community and close relations between people form the social capital. In Norway, Farstad (2016) found that there is more social interaction and neighborly care in rural areas, as well as more gossip. Friends and support systems are also important, and singles with low relationship desire have been shown to be more social, with strong support systems of friends (Kislev, 2020). For older single women, close connections to extended family and kin decreased the likelihood of seeking out new partnerships (McCann & Allen, 2018). For single mothers, social capital and close family support are very important (Ciabattari, 2007; Sano et al., 2012). Kislev

(2019) finds that singles not only present higher social capital, but they also derive greater happiness from equal levels of social capital than married people. This might be one angle of the "greedy marriage" argument (Coser, 1974; Gerstel & Sarkisian, 2006), which maintains, among other things, that marriage weakens both men's and women's ties to people other than their spouses.

Hidden prejudice against singles is often built on stereotypes of singles as not having families or lives outside of work. Many researchers refute those stereotypes and have found that singles actually have similar work-life conflicts as married people (Casper et al., 2015; Sidani & Al Hakin, 2012). There is also a certain discrimination in the characterization of singles as self-centered, unhappy, and lonely, while married people are often seen as mature, stable, and happy (DePaulo & Morris, 2006). This even then increases with age, where older single women often face the "old maid" stereotypes (Lahad & Hazan, 2014). Many younger singles also find themselves in the frustrating situation of having to justify their single status when they do not follow the "culturally prescribed life course" (Sharp & Ganong, 2011, p. 974). They are even reminded of being aging, and as Lahad (2014) describes it, women of late singlehood "lose their entitlement to maintain the selective stance". (p. 23). The clock is ticking, and women sometimes have their whole set of friends and family with them 'waiting' for the one (Lahad, 2019).

Many people, singles and non-singles alike, are unaware of the stigmatization of single people (DePaulo & Morris, 2006). However, recent shifts in the discussion have made singles more aware of their stigmatization. Surprisingly, both singles and non-singles tend to view discrimination against singles less severe compared to discrimination against other groups (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020; Morris et al., 2007). Older single women are even more stigmatized than younger single women, effecting their self-esteem and marginalization (DePaulo, 2006; Reilly et al., 2020). All this research paints an interesting picture of singlehood and singles' lives. Less is known about what it is like to be single in small communities in tight and personal social settings.

Gossip in Rural Settings

Various social factors significantly influence life satisfaction in small communities. Place attachment, for example, plays a crucial role, with family roots and proximity to close family members fostering a sense of belonging (Clark et al., 2017; Glendinning et al., 2003). Although gossip has received surprisingly limited attention within the field of rural research, researchers have acknowledged that it might influence the lives and life satisfaction of women and youth in small communities (Brettell, 2016; Farstad, 2016; Glendinning et al., 2003; Stockdale, 2002). Foucault (1978) suggested that the voices and interests of the powerful often shape the dominant discourse in society, institutionalizing norms while silencing opposing perspectives. His theories on power are relevant in small settings such as rural communities where everybody knows each other and are interesting when examining the power flow of gossip. In a small community, locals, who have more social capital and power than non-locals, shape the dominant

discourse. If we imagine the community as a group of people standing together, the non-locals might be closer to the edges of the group or even entirely outside it. A group of people will always exercise some kind of social control, in order to enforce norms and expectations of behavior, informal laws of the group (Chriss, 2013). Within groups gossip is then used to enforce such social norms and strengthen the group (Beersma & Kleef, 2011; Chua & Uy, 2014; Lyons & Huges, 2015; Turcotte, 2012). Those who violate against the norms and unformal rules of the group may face punishment or even exclusion (Black, 1984; Giardini & Conte, 2012; Robinson, 2016).

In small communities, gossip can be an effective means of social control and can be particularly intrusive for young people (Glendinning et al., 2003; Pedersen & Gram, 2018). This personal small-town gossip can also greatly affect an individual going through a difficult period, like a divorce or a break-up (Haugen & Brandt, 2014). According to Haugen and Brandth (2014) and Brandth et al. (2013) small communities in Norway frequently conceptualize social control and sanctions against those who stand out. This is called "the village beast", like a menacing creature keeping everybody in their place, ensuring conformity and upholding communal social norms (Brandth et al., 2013; Haugen & Brandth, 2014). This could also be hard for people that don't follow the heteronormative values and heterosexual relationships attitudes in the community (O'Brien, 2009).

In fact, gossip can lead to migration, with both men and women living in small communities in Iceland being twice as likely to express an intention to move away if their love lives are frequently the subject of local gossip (Jóhannesdóttir et al., 2021). However, the question arises as to whether this form of social control has different effects depending on age and gender. Studying young people in the Norwegian countryside, Haugen and Villa found that young girls were more vulnerable to gossip and rumors than young boys, their behavior more closely scrutinized (Haugen & Villa, 2006). This close monitoring of women often results in slut-shaming; gossip is wielded like a weapon or an instrument of power to shame young women, whose sexual activities are more harshly judged than those of young men (Jóhannesdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2023). In fact, slut-shaming, the stigmatization of an individual based on actual or perceived sexual behavior, primarily targets women and girls (Armstrong et al., 2014; Ringrose & Renold, 2012). Slut-shaming can be used as a form of empowerment, to bolster the social capital at the expense of others (Williams, 2021). But this fear of stigma also makes young girls and women constrain their sexual behavior (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009).

Gossip serves a variety of social roles and purposes. Giardini and Conte (2012) find that in natural and artificial societies, social control and gossip are societies' way to regulate itself while Baumeister and Zhang (2004) see gossip as an aspect of cultural learning. In a recent study by Loew and Mackin (2023) interviews with rural women in Iowa show that they use gossip as a way to practice responsible sexual behavior. Rumors were a way of knowing the sexual history of potential partners, where "using information from the social environment was a way to manage risk". More serious is that these women even let their fear of the rumors and gossip about their sexual behavior hinder them in buying contraception in their local town (Loew & Mackin, 2023).

Gossip and slut-shaming can be used as a form of violence and bullying against young girls (Fjær et al., 2015; Miller, 2016), and in fact, the word itself, a slut, is feminized, with no equivalent English term used for men (Farvid et al., 2017). In the Icelandic language, nouns have grammatical gender. The word for slut [*drusla*] is grammatically feminine and is defined as "a woman of low morals" (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 2023). There is no equivalent grammatically masculine word, but *drusla* is also used for men. This slut-shaming and the gender-specific use of derogatory terms are just one manifestation of how patriarchal societies impose certain social norms on women's bodies and their sexual expression. This practice undermines women's dignity and control over their own bodies, perpetuating a system of sexism (Fischer, 2016; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002; Smuts, 1994; McKinnon, 1987).

This paper focuses on gendered aspects of life in rural communities, specifically for single women, paying particular attention to the influence that gossip has on their lives. Although Iceland is the field of study, the knowledge gleaned from this research should contribute to the discussion of gender in similar communities and the broader conversation on stigmatization of single people.

Context of the Study: Iceland

Iceland ranks as having the highest level of gender equality in the world (World Economic Forum, 2022), but there are still plenty of battles that must be won to achieve full gender equality. Workforce participation is high, with 86% of men and 80% of women active in the job market (Statistics Iceland, 2020). But even though women's participation in the workforce is so high, they still bear a disproportionate amount of responsibility for housework and childcare compared to men (Gíslason & Símonardóttir, 2018; Hjálmsdóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2019; Pétursdóttir, 2009; Thorsdottir, 2012).

In 2019, the mean age of a woman with a first-born child was 28.6 years, up from 22 years in 1980. The birth rate has been under 2 per 1000 for a few years and is currently 1.7 (Hagstofa Íslands, 2020). Every year, there are 5.0 new marriages and 1.9 divorces for every 1000 inhabitants, with approximately 40% of all marriages ending in divorce (Hagstofa Íslands, 2021). With the concept of family no longer limited to the traditional heterosexual nuclear family, family forms now include various constellations of cohabitating adult individuals, with or without children, with single mothers making up 12.4% of households nationwide. If we exclude the capital area and larger towns, the portion of single mothers in small rural settings is 8.4% (Hagstofa Íslands, 2022).

Iceland has a mere 376,000 inhabitants (Hagstofa Íslands, 2022), of whom only one-fourth live in smaller towns and villages spread along the coastline, each one often a considerable distance from the next larger town. In these small towns, fisheries have always been the main industry, and there are still signs of a more traditionally gender-divided labor market (Gíslason & Ólafsson, 2005; Gunnarsdóttir, 2009; Karlsson, 2013; Sigursteinsdóttir & Rafnsdóttir, 2009), with young women finding

they don't have the same opportunities as men and have lower chances of ascending to positions of power (Karlsdóttir, 2009).

The discussion of locals and non-locals is complicated, as there are signs that living satisfaction and place attachment can be affected by being recognized as a local (Bjarnason, 2018). In smaller communities, only a small portion of inhabitants, around 16%, have never lived anywhere else, and around 50% say they were born and mostly raised in their current community. That group report higher living satisfaction than inhabitants who were not born and raised there. Life satisfaction in these small communities is slightly lower overall than in larger towns and the capital area (Bjarnason, 2022), but there are indicators that partnered individuals in smaller communities have higher life satisfaction than singles (Bjarnason, 2018).

Method

The data analyzed for this paper was collected from 2019 to 2021 in 18 coastal villages across Iceland with 100–500 inhabitants each. It is a part of a larger study on the lives of young women in small Icelandic communities, with an emphasis on social factors such as gossip and shaming. This paper considers data from qualitative interviews with 24 women, ranging in age from 25 to 45. Some of them were single at the time of the interviews, and all had been single at some point in their adult years. None of them claimed or mentioned anything other than being cisgender and heterosexual. Interviewees were identified using a snowball method (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) as well as through local Facebook pages and shared Facebook posts. The primary focus was on women currently living in these small towns, but women who had moved away and settled elsewhere were also included. All women within the age range who had lived in the communities being studied were encouraged to participate, regardless of marital status, ethnicity or sexual orientation. The overall focus point of the interviews was gossip, with the semi-structured format giving the women the opportunity to talk about their own experiences living in small communities and share their views on gossip and how it affected their communities (Crang & Cook, 2007). Young women in the selected age range are likely to be affected by the tightly woven social fabric of these small communities and social factors such as social control and gossip (Glendinning et al., 2003; Pedersen & Gram, 2018; Stockdale, 2002).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Participants' names and locations are not given due to the small population in Iceland. In the analysis, Dedoose coding software was applied. Using initial (open) coding (Saldaña, 2016), the first cycle of coding was guided by the overall research questions of the study from which this data is drawn. The second round of coding was then aimed at constructing a pattern or themes from the codes, which contain participants' descriptions of behavior and morals (Saldaña, 2016). Four themes were constructed from this analysis of women's experiences and are discussed in this article. First: social space, or the feeling that there's no space or privacy. Second: social exclusion, "just a couples' thing". Third: gendered slut shaming, "this fawning, flirty type". Fourth: power dynamics, or where you are in the hierarchy.

The author followed ethics guidelines for qualitative research for Icelandic universities (Jónsson, 2022). All participants were given appropriate information about the study before the interviews. The participants gave written consent and received information about how their data would be used. In order to protect their anonymity, the results only refer to each participant's age, civil status (married/in a relationship/single) and whether or not they are a local. The meaning of the term "local" is debatable, of course, but is defined here as someone who spent most of their childhood years in the town in question, while a "non-local" is someone who moved there in their adult years.

Results

The participants were asked about their lives, including gendered aspects, and asked to reflect on gossip in their communities. In terms of power and social position, most participants considered their communities to be more favorable to men, though many of them said things have been changing in recent years. One woman described the growing number of women holding better jobs and political positions within her community:

> This is a fishermen's community, but just in the last 10 years or so cracks have really started appearing in the foundation of the patriarchy. (woman, married, not local)

Earlier research (Dahlström, 1996; Grimsrud, 2011) referred to rural communities as masculine spaces, but many of the present study's participants said that things had been moving in the right direction in recent years in terms of gender equality.

Overall, the participants described these small Icelandic fishing villages as close-knit communities and good places to live, supportive when people are in need but still with flaws, such as nasty gossip and a lack of privacy—not so unlike the Norwegian "village beast" (Brandt et al., 2013; Haugen & Brandt, 2014). The focus here is on single women and their lives in these small towns. Some participants were married, others in relationships and still others single; none claimed anything other than heterosexual orientation. All of the partnered participants have been single at some point in their adult lives, and also had some insights into the lives of their single friends.

The participants seemed to agree that their communities had changed a lot in recent years when it comes to social life and parties. Many of these villages no longer have pubs or active community centers, and there may be just one or two country dances at the local community center each year. The result is a changing social landscape, especially for young single people who may want to pair up with others for companionship or sexual activities.

Social Space: There's No Space or Privacy

A decreased desire for a relationship is associated with increased life satisfaction (Kislev, 2021). Small communities that offer other things contributing to overall life satisfaction should be places where single people can thrive. Seeking companionship in a small community can be problematic, however, especially if there

are few other singles your age and the social life is built around married couples. Those who seek to increase their life satisfaction by finding partners must often face the fact that the pool of potential partners in a small community is limited. A woman in her thirties who moved to a bigger town as a teenager has the desire to move back now with her family but says:

> I didn't dare to move back to [hometown]. And it wasn't because of gossip or anything like that, it was just that I was so afraid of ending up alone. You know, I just imagined my mom there, a single mother just stuck there with no choice. (woman, in a relationship, local)

Her reflection on her mother's situation, the fear that she could end up stuck like her mother, is interesting. Now, with a partner, children, and a strong desire to move back to her small hometown, she has no reason to be concerned about the small dating pool there. She says that's where her roots are and she longs to be home around her people, revealing clear signs of place attachment (Clark et al., 2017; Glendinning et al., 2003). Clearly, though when single, she let the limited number of potential partners get in the way of her desire to move back home.

One participant, a single mother in her thirties, said that she doesn't feel she has the space or opportunity to have a love life even though she lives close to a bigger town where she works. She had moved there because of a good job offered in a larger town nearby. She doesn't date locally, one of the reasons being fear of gossip reaching her children, which shows that even the perceived threat of gossip is an effective means of social control (Jóhannesdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2023). About her love life she said:

> At this point it's just nonexistent… that's just how it is, and there aren't so many men to choose from either. I wouldn't want to introduce my kids to some boyfriend unless things were getting serious, but at the same time I feel like there's no space or privacy to reach that point. (woman, single, not local)

Her social life is active, clearly seeking and enjoying support from friends—primarily women—both through sporting activities and in a group of close friends that she says are in a similar place in life. That group is based in the bigger town close by, so she has a social network of friends to choose from, which is not always possible in the smaller towns around the coastline. She is a clear example of someone with strong social capital and a solid social network, like Kislev (2019, 2020) discussed. While she did not explicitly express a longing for a partner, she talked about lacking romantic opportunities, which might stand in the way of her sexual satisfaction, an important predictor of life satisfaction (Park et al., 2021). Even though family and friends can be there 'waiting' with them (Lahad, 2019) and the local gossips may constantly be "pairing" the single women up with partners, it doesn't necessarily mean that those women have any longing for partners, as one twenty-something single mother says:

> You know, like for me, as far as I'm concerned, being single here, you know, I think it's just fine now because I just want to be left alone. And I know I

> can do that here, I don't need to be thinking about any guys here right now. (woman, single, local)

Her view on opportunities for pairing off is clear; she doesn't have to worry and can be left alone since there are no potential partners. She seems to see her town as a place where there is no possibility of finding a partner and feels that that's what she wants at this point in her life.

Social Exclusion: "Just a Couples' Thing"

Many of the participants mentioned that there were not many single people in their towns, that somehow most people were coupled up living family lives. One single mother in her twenties who moved back home to be closer to family says that many of her childhood friends have moved away:

> I'm not part of some group of friends here because my old friends aren't here and… somehow, everyone is just with a partner and children and so on and I… well, being single here now, there is no one inviting me for dinner, you know, or for a visit. (woman, single, local)

For single mothers, family support matters a great deal (Ciabattari, 2007; Sano et al., 2012), a support which she clearly has. She felt lonely but was in a place in life where her young child and closest family were the most important people in her life and her greatest supporters. She sees that everyone else is coupled up and feels excluded from that marital social space. Another single participant in her thirties said that she hung out and partied more with younger people since people her age were all married and so on. She and her other single female friends seemed to be aware of being socially stigmatized and said that she and her single friends had discussed this a few times as they were getting older. This might be a change in recent years from people being less aware (DePaulo & Morris, 2006). She describes a conversation with her friend:

> Well she was with X and they were often invited [for dinner]… and my friend was just like, "Wait, I'm friends with these girls too, why am I not invited?" But it was like, "it's just a couples' thing". (woman, single, not local)

When the married participants were asked if single women were socially excluded in some way, they said no and talked about all kinds of friendships and social circles that were available to the women. Some of them did say, however, that there was a lot of family "stuff" and "couple's things". Two mentioned that being the third wheel wouldn't be much fun, which sounded like an attempt to justify the exclusion of single women. In other words, they assumed their single friends would feel like third wheels and didn't give it much further thought. This supports what DePaulo and Morris (2006) claim, that there is so much stigmatization that people are unaware of, married and singles alike (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020). There is an interesting contradiction between what the married women say about singles being welcome to join and what the single women say.

One immigrant woman felt that after 6 years, she didn't have any real friends among the locals. She also found there to be cultural differences regarding friendships:

> It's not that they don't care, it's just the intimate friendship that you develop where you need emotional support and you know, they've all been foreigners. Men and women who are married maybe aren't usually friends here and you know, you don't hang out with married men and I've always hung out with men… I was used to that coming from a dance community where everyone is chatting and you're friends and I was just used to a different space between people. (woman, single, not local)

Her feeling is that there is a cultural difference between her homeland and Iceland, specifically that mixed-gender friendships and communications are less common in Icelandic communities. The reason might be that cross-gender friendship often stirs up gossip and rumors, making social life difficult for single people seeking company and friendship, or as one single woman phrased it:

> If a woman and a man are friends, then there are often stories saying they're doing it here and there, just like behind some house or whatever, and people always talk badly about the woman and not the man. (woman, single, local)

This gossip and stories make cross-gender friendship difficult. Even more so for a woman, who is more likely to be slut-shamed and talked about in a sexual manner if frequently seen with a man with whom she is not in a relationship. In a small community that already has so few residents, limiting the options for friendship and companionship only further tightens the social space.

Gendered Slut Shaming: This Fawning, Flirty Type

The best spice in small-town gossip is infidelity (Jóhannesdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2023). The participants felt that in the case of a single woman who has an affair with a married man, the responsibility of the broken marriage is often laid squarely upon the woman's shoulders, and many of the participants talked about women who had been stigmatized and slut-shamed for 'breaking up' marriages. Many of the women in question, like this single mother discussed here, moved away from the villages where the affairs occurred:

> He owned a company in town and was respected in the community so there was more talk about the woman, that it was all her fault and that she was ruining a marriage… he still lives in town, married to the same woman. (woman, in a relationship, not local)

The man in this story is at the top of the hierarchy, a local man with power and money, while the woman, who was not a local, was in a weaker position. The dictionary defines the Icelandic word for homewrecker, *hjónadjöfull*, as a person who comes between a couple (*Íslensk nútímaorðabók*, 2022). Although it can be used for both men and women, it seems to be mostly used for women. Many of

the participants could remember stories and gossip about cheating and dissolved marriages where the woman was shamed but not the man:

> When a man cheats with a single woman, it's the woman who's the home-wrecker even though she's not married. But the man isn't a homewrecker in his own marriage. (woman, married, not local)

They are well aware of the fact that slut-shaming is primarily aimed at women (Armstrong et al., 2014; Ringrose & Renold, 2012). Some of the participants also mentioned that is it somehow considered worse for a woman to cheat when she is a mother, that motherhood is somehow more virtuous than fatherhood when it comes to sexual behavior and cheating. Many of the participants, some of them now married, mentioned that married men often came on to single women. One of them, a single woman who has lived in two small towns, said that she was not a part of the "married couples' things". She also said that it was quite common for married men to make passes at her:

> Really common that someone's hitting on me and dancing and saying I'm pretty and blah blah blah, you know… there's a lot of married men, you know… but I usually just laugh it off. (woman, single, not local)

If this is common behavior for married men, it might explain why single women are excluded from couples' activities and why there is so little cross-gender social mingling in these communities. This exclusion and stigmatization might not be done consciously, but it occurs, nonetheless.

There is not much discussion around single motherhood in particular; Icelandic society generally has a very liberal and accepting attitude when it comes to single parenting. But single mothers do get some slut-shaming gossip though:

> Like when a single mother moves here, like I myself once did, they get a lot of gossip and are just, well, sleeping with everyone [according to gossip] they even look at. (woman, married, not local)

This woman saw herself in others, having had the same experience and been the subject of nasty sexual gossip at the time. It often sparks gossip when a single woman moves into a small town, and slut-shaming soon follows if the gossip is that she is just "sleeping with everyone".

When asked if there was any social exclusion or stigmatization of single women in her town, one participant said:

> Well, there's just no one like that here – you know, this fawning, flirty type, this type maybe just… (woman, married, not local)

Interestingly, while the question was about single women in general, she responded with a comment about flirtatious women. She didn't want to comment any further on this point but there is a certain tone towards flirting single women which could then justify for them to be stigmatized or excluded (DePaulo & Morris, 2006; Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020; Morris et al., 2007).

Power Dynamics: Where you are in the Hierarchy

Icelanders are quite a small nation, and in rural areas the discussion about locals and non-locals is fraught. Some of the participants mentioned the fact that being a local subjects you to more—or at least more intrusive—gossip; if your history and family relations are known, they can easily get mixed into the spicy gossip if you do something worth gossiping about. With half of the inhabitants being born and raised in these towns (Bjarnason, 2022), they are fertile ground for gossip. Being a local is still considered favorable, and the participants agreed that it did matter, especially when social norms or laws were broken.

When asked about the community's reaction to sensitive issues such as cheating, one participant said that when it comes to the wrongdoer, "it depends on where you are in the hierarchy, local or not, foreigner…" (woman, married, not local). This hierarchy can easily support and maintain the power-structures in the rural areas that Shucksmith discussed (2018). There are all sorts of power dynamics other than gender that get mixed into the gossip agenda. The locals are in-group and the non-locals are near the edge of the group, with the risk of falling out entirely. Being a foreigner might then intensify the out-group agenda. This means that rather than slut-shaming women across the board, the situation is more complex and the person's origin also comes into play. Comments from two different participants about affairs that happened in their towns and were being discussed and shamed through gossip show us that being a local matters:

> It ended up with her moving away from the village… he's from here, she [a woman who cheated] isn't. (woman, in a relationship, local)

In this case, the woman was not a local and left town after divorcing a local man in the wake of her own cheating. She might have a weaker social capital, since being non-local, at least not with her closest family around. In the second example, the situation is reversed, with a man cheating on a local woman:

> He was judged more for the affair by the locals… he isn't very popular here somehow, and this friend of mine, well of course she was born and raised here, he wasn't, and this girl [that he cheated with], is a foreigner so… well people were just like, he [man who cheated] can just leave. (woman, in a relationship, local).

It seems that as a non-local, he has less agency than other married men and was subjected to out-group treatment from people who thought they were justified in insisting that he leave. He violated the norms of the group and faces punishment and possible exclusion (Black, 1984; Giardini & Conte, 2012; Robinson, 2016). Cheating with a single foreign girl also seem to be a point of discussion; she too clearly has little agency in the community, which seems to make the cheating even worse. One of the participants, a foreign woman who had an affair with a married local, felt that it took a long time for the community to accept her again:

> People literally ignored me, you know, turned their backs on me at the café and it was pretty rough and I thought, okay, I have to take this, my reputation

> is damaged…And he had affairs with other people after me, it's almost like an ongoing thing anyway, but after about a year that started to move on maybe and I felt like people who were probably disappointed in my actions shall we say, started to acknowledge me again and…I really had to be good though (woman, single, not local).

What she describes, being ignored and shamed, could be a form of out-group treatment. She decided to stick it out and remained in the community a few years after the affair, slowly inching towards becoming a part of the community, although she always felt like an outsider due to her limited Icelandic skills. She said that the man with whom she had the affair was talked about and blamed for his cheating but wasn't treated as badly as she was. The participants gave a few examples of a female survivor of sexual assaults moving away, while the offender, a local with a big kin group, stayed and even still lived in the town without the inhabitants having anything to say.

Discussion

The results show the complexity of the social space that single women face in small, tight-knit communities in Iceland. Their behavior is more closely scrutinized than men's behavior, making them a target for slut-shaming, as observed by other researchers as well (Armstrong et al., 2014; Haugen & Villa, 2006; Jóhannesdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2023; Ringrose et al., 2013). Addressing the first question, "How does the social space of a small community limit single women's personal space and opportunities?", it becomes evident that single women often perceive a lack of social space for having a love life or sex life without becoming the talk of the town and even facing slut shaming.

This aligns with the writings of Pedersen and Gram (2018) and Glendinning et al (2003) about how intrusive small communities can be for young people. This social control limits the freedom of young women and chances of sexual satisfaction. Park et al. (2021) show us a link between sexual satisfaction and the belief that people can be happy without marriage. This limited space in small communities to have privacy for sexual activities, is then likely to decrease the life satisfaction of single women. The gossip and shaming tighten the social space and can hinder singles in finding partners if they don't want to risk being the subject of gossip. Then there is the fact that there is a limited number of people in such small communities and not such a large selection if you want to find a partner.

Addressing the second question, "How does gendered slut-shaming affect the lives of single women in small communities?", the results show that gendered slut shaming is directed largely toward single women, as also discussed in Armstrong et al (2014) and Ringrose and Renold (2012), and is especially directed towards those having affairs or perceived affairs with married men. The town gossip places the responsibility for the dissolved marriage on the woman involved and not on the married man. Complex social hierarchies and social capital are able to outweigh gendered shaming up to some point, as there are clear indications that

being a local may be enough to counter or outweigh the consequences of deviating from social norms.

Single women are stigmatized in these small towns. The institution of marriage holds a significant influence and the culture surrounding couples is strong. Social life is gendered and aligns with the greedy marriage concept where couples mingle predominantly with other couples, and singles with other singles. The married women comments about single women not wanting to be the third wheel confirm what others such as DePaulo and Morris (2006) have argued, that there is hidden and unaware stigmatization against singles. At least a lack of awareness of possible exclusion of single women within this strong culture of couples.

There is also a hierarchy within these communities, where being a local means you are in-group and have stronger social capital. This social capital can exist in closest kin and family, as well as childhood friends. Being local also means other locals know the depth of your life, family history and your past behavior, like in a 3-dimensional view where one can not only see the width and height of an object, but the depth as well. There is deeper public knowledge about your personal life and the generations of people living there can judge you and gossip about you according to that 3-D view and knowledge. However, the non-local exists only in a 2-dimensional view, lacking the depth since there is limited knowledge of their person, family, and past behavior. That can give the non-local some protection for the deep negative gossip, at least from it being mixed with judgements on your past behavior and family history. In other words, in the case of someone violating the social norms or internal laws of a community, a local may be stigmatized and find themselves sliding down the hierarchy, but a non-local may be pushed out of the group entirely. Further research in these communities would be interesting to explore further power relations and hierarchy, gender and social space. Are there other forms of stigmatization against singles to be found within small, tight-knit communities? To achieve this goal, conducting research on social media and online platforms would be engaging and pertinent, given that a significant portion of communication and gossip occurs within these digital environments.

Single women in small communities in Iceland face a challenge where their personal life is under close monitoring. Social control through gossip and slut-shaming affects their life and life satisfaction, and brings up a lot of questions about gendered space in rural communities. Small communities frequently encounter structural challenges due to limited population. Limited job and educational opportunities can work as push factors for young people, especially young women if the communities are more masculine spaces. Stigmatization, gossip and shaming towards young women can work as obstacles as well, but these are socially constructed push factors and can be addressed through collective community efforts.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest There is no potential conflict of interest with the author.

Ethics Approval This study was conducted according to ethics guidelines for qualitative research for Icelandic universities (Jónsson, 2022. Research ethics: practical considerations and ethics guidelines]. University of Iceland. https://www.hi.is/sites/default/files/sverrirg/opj_kynning_um_sidanenfd_og_sidfraedi_rannsokna.pdf). Also according to the Ethics rules of the University of Akureyri. https://www.unak.is/is/haskolinn/stjornskipulag/sidareglur

Consent to Participate Written informed consent was obtained from the parents.

Consent for Publication The author affirm that human research participants provided informed consent for publication.

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Article IV

Bjarnason, T., Jóhannesdóttir, G.B. and Garðarsdóttir, Ó. (In review). From city lights to country nights? The long-term effects of gossip in rural communities on rural return migration preferences and intentions.

From city lights to country nights?
The long-term effects of gossip in rural communities on rural return migration preferences and intentions

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Abstract

This study explores the role of gossip in rural communities as a barrier to return migration to rural Iceland. Previous research indicates that perceptions of social control and a lack of tolerance for diversity diminish residential satisfaction. Especially among young women and sexual minorities, and perceptions of gossip predict migration intentions among both young women and men. This research explores the long-term effects of leaving rural areas due to gossip on return migration preferences and intentions, on the basis of survey data from rural out-migrants in the Reykjavík capital area. Controlling other predictors of return migration, we find significantly less interest in return migration among women who left because of gossip. While gossip acts as a push factor for both men and women, it only shows long-term negative effect on female return migration. These results offer new insights into the mechanisms of return migration and have important implications for rural development.

Introduction

Rural return migration is important to the vitality and sustainability of rural communities. While studies of counter-urbanization often focus on urbanites moving to rural areas in search of affordable housing, slower pace of life, closeness to nature or more elusive notions of the "rural idyll" (Berry, 1976; Halfacree, 2008; Mitchell 2004), a growing body of evidence demonstrates that rural out-migrants returning to their place of origin or another rural community represent a major current of urban-to-rural migration (Bijker et al., 2012; Grimsrud, 2011; Gillespie et al 2021; Johansson 2016; von Reichert et al., 2014; Sandow and Lindholm, 2023; Scott et al., 2017). Such return migration can indeed be argued to be crucial to maintaining both demographic stability in rural communities and the human capital necessary for endogenous regional development (Dustmann et al., 2011; Stockdale 2006).

Both qualitative (e.g. Alexander, 2023; Ní Laori, 2007; von Reichert et al 2014) and quantitative (e.g. Gillespie et al 2021; Rérat, 2014; Scott et al., 2017) studies of the processes for rural return migration in various countries have tended to focus on the motivations for such return migration, in particular employment opportunities, ties with friends and family, and more broadly attachment to community and place. Choosing not to return is generally treated as the norm and the urban pull factors that motivated out-migration in the first

place are frequently assumed to be the major gravitational forces keeping rural-out-migrants from leaving the urban orbit.

Negative social experiences that actively led to rural out-migration may however also prevent rural return migration later in life. Prior research has found that perceptions excessive social control, intolerance of diversity and limited freedom to explore social and individual identities in rural communities contribute to the out-migration of young people in general and young women and sexual minorities in particular (e.g. Brettell, 2016; Farstad, 2016; Glendinning, 2003; Rye, 2006a; Stockdale, 2002). Such informal social control tends to be achieved through gossip (Haugen and Villa, 2006; Jóhannesdóttir and Skaptadóttir, 2023), and Jóhannesdóttir et al., (2021) found that both women and men who perceived much gossip about their love-life were twice as likely to expect to leave rural communities within the next 2–3 years.

In this study, we will evaluate the long-term impact of gossip in rural communities on return migration intentions and preferences later in life. Drawing on a sub-sample of rural out-migrants in the Reykjavik capital area of Iceland, we will use data from a large-scale survey of residential mobility and mobility intentions to estimate the independent effects of having left rural areas because of gossip on the return migration intentions and preferences of males and females, controlling for age, length of stay in the city, education, perceived

affluence, labor market status, family circumstances, and the residence of friends and family members.

Rural return migration and gossip

Introductory sociology books, mainstream media and popular culture alike tend to conceptualize rural-to-urban migration as a stepwise and unidirectional march up the urban hierarchy from the most remote rural communities towards the global megacities of the world. However, even Ravenstein (1885), the legitimate father of this "law of migration", acknowledged the existence of a weaker "counter-stream" from urban to rural 19th century Britain. In the contemporary world of domestic and international mobilities (e.g. Appadurai, 1990; Bauman, 2011; Urry, 2000), the long-term sustainability of rural communities does not simply depend on rates of out-migration, but also on messy processes of urban-to-rural migration, parallel migration between rural areas, and rural return migration (Stockdale, 2016).

Rural in-migration may involve a motley crew of e.g. affluent urbanites in search of a primary or secondary dream home in the rural idyll or urban families with limited means looking for affordable housing. There are lifestyle migrants, willing to find or create their own jobs in the rural to pursue their specific interests, counter-cultural back-to-landers who reject modernity and seek self-sufficiency in harmony with nature. Then there are immigrants and

refugees seeking a better and safer future for themselves and their families (Halfacree, 2012; Mitchell 2004).

However, in many countries in Northern Europe rural return migrants represent close to half of all rural in-migrants. Almost half of all counter-urban movers in rural Ireland were for instance originally from a rural area (Scott et al., 2017), four out of ten young families with children moving to a rural area in Sweden were returning to the home area of at least one parent (Sandow and Lindholm, 2023), and 41–49% of domestic in-migrants in rural towns, villages and farming communities in Iceland were return migrants (Bjarnason et al., 2021). The return intentions of different groups of rural out-migrants thus have important implications for the future development and composition of rural communities.

Rural out-migrants leave their home communities with a range of future intentions. Some may be determined to leave their home communities for good while others are determined to move back or perhaps do not consider themselves to be out-migrants, even if they are planning to live elsewhere for a while (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014). Many rural out-migrants may also have conflicted or unclear intentions for the future or may not have seriously considered the question of returning to their home community. The association between future residential intentions and actual behavior is also far from

straightforward as some fail to return while others fail to stay gone (Bjarnason, 2014). Residential intentions are nevertheless a moderate to strong predictor of individual behavior (de Groot et al., 2011; Kley and Mulder, 2010; van Dalen and Henkens, 2013) as well as the collective migration behavior of cohorts in rural communities (Bjarnason, 2014).

Out-migration from rural areas is motivated by various considerations, including the pursuit of further education and professional careers, better access to modern and urban amenities, and more generally an 'urban ethos' that celebrates the diversity, opportunities, and excitement of urban life (Bjarnason and Thorarinsdottir, 2018; Gabriel 2002; Hayfield, 2017; Rye 2006b). In addition to such urban 'pull factors', however, close-knit traditional rural communities have been argued to drive young people away because of gender inequalities (Dahlstrom, 1996; Rauhut & Littke, 2016), intolerance of sexual minorities (Annes & Redlin, 2012; Thorsteinsson et al, 2022), bullying (Bjarnason et al., 2021) and gossip (Haugen & Villa, 2006; Jóhannesdóttir et al., 2021).

Rural return migrants can be expected to have less romantic or unrealistic ideas of the rural idyll than true urbanites considering counter-urban migration, but they are nevertheless frequently motivated by notions of close-knit communities, slower pace of life, closeness to nature and safe settings for

raising children (Cawley, 2020; Ní Laoire, 2007; Pedersen & Therkelsen, 2022). Rural return migration also tends to be motivated more specifically by an emotional attachment to place and community (Philip and MacLeod, 2016; Rérat, 2014; da Silva et al, 2021) and concrete social relations with friends and family (Bijker et al, 2012; Gillespie et al., 2022; Grimsrud, 2011; Sandow and Lundholm, 2023; Scott et al., 2017).

Rural out-migrants may however also have negative or conflicted feelings about their experiences growing up in rural communities and such feelings may affect rural return migration (Pedersen, 2018; Pedersen & Therkelsen, 2022). It is less clear to what extent specific negative experiences that motivated people to leave rural communities in the first place also prevent return migration in later life. Qualitative research in rural Iceland nevertheless suggests that women who become the subject of malicious gossip are both likely to leave and unlikely to return in the future (Jóhannesdóttir and Skaptadóttir, 2023).

As an instrument of social control, gossip is used to protect and strengthen a social group and keep group members in line by exposing and shaming those who violate group norms (Chua & Uy, 2014; Giardini & Conte, 2012; Lyons & Huges, 2015; Jóhannesdóttir and Skaptadóttir, 2023; Robinson, 2016). Gossip is of course not a specifically rural phenomenon; it is integral to social life and can be found everywhere people interact and communicate, form emotional

bonds and strategic alliances, as well as compete, fight, and seek to dominate one another. However, whereas the average city person may be able to shed a tarnished reputation by simply changing workplaces or social circles, out-migration may be the only way to escape the social consequences of gossip in a rural community (Jóhannesdóttir et al., 2021; Jóhannesdóttir and Skaptadóttir, 2023). Conversely, the trauma of having been subject to malicious gossip and having left one's rural home community with a tarnished reputation may prove to be an unsurmountable obstacle against considering returning home or even living in any type of rural area again.

Migration and return migration in Iceland

Iceland is sparsely populated country with about 400 thousand inhabitants on a landmass of roughly 103 thousand km^2 (about 40 thousand square miles) shown in Figure 1. Two-thirds of the national population is however concentrated in the Reykjavík capital area which accounts for one percent of the landmass (Statistics Iceland, 2024).

The rural regions of the country include about 50 thousand people in the Southwest exurban regions within 100 km from the Reykjavík capital area, about 20 thousand people in the northern regional center of Akureyri and the remaining approximately 80 thousand widely spread in towns, villages, and farming communities around the coastline.

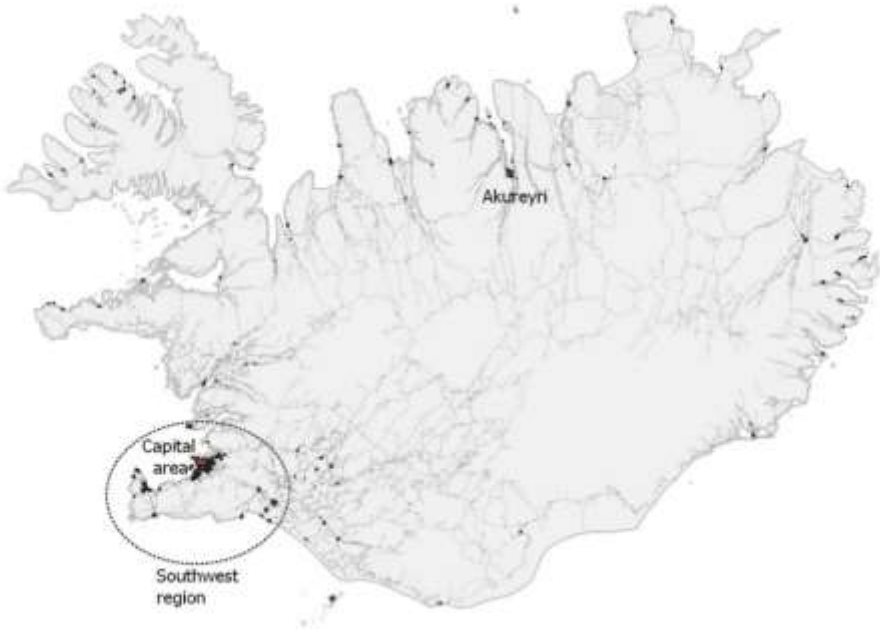

Figure 1
The Reykjavík capital area, Southwest exurban regions, northern regional center of Akureyri and more rural regions of Iceland

Population development in 20th century Iceland was characterized by high natural population growth and internal migration from rural regions to the Reykjavík capital area (Bjarnason, 2022). In the first decades of the 21st century, however, international immigration became the main driver of population growth while the proportion of the national population living in the Reykjavík capital area remained stable around 64%. Domestic out-migration from the city to exurban regions has increased while in-migration from more rural and remote regions has decreased, leading to net migration rates close to

zero between the Reykjavík capital area and rural Iceland as a whole (Gardarsdottir et al., 2020).

Rural communities in Iceland are generally characterized by high rates of population turnover and stability or slow population decline. A population survey of all towns and villages with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants thus revealed that 44% of the adult population had grown up elsewhere and the majority of those who grew up locally were in fact return migrants (Bjarnason, 2020). Only 16% of the population had thus been raised in the community and never lived elsewhere. In other words, the vast majority of adult villagers in Iceland decided to move there at some point in their lives and about half of the in-migrants are in fact return migrants to the community where they grew up.

As in many other countries in the global north, rural and remote communities in Iceland tend to be characterized by relatively few young people in general and relatively young women in particular. However, while such population imbalances are frequently attributed to patterns of selective out-migration, earlier work in Iceland suggests that skewed gender ratios in in rural communities are due to differences rates of in-migration rather than high out-migration of young women (Bjarnason, 2022; Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013; Karlsson, 2013).

Data and methods

This study examines the factors influencing return migration intentions and return migration preferences among rural out-migrants living in the Reykjavík capital area. The focus is on the negative impact of having left because of gossip, net of demographic, socio-economic, and relational characteristics. The results are presented in cross-tabulations and four binary logistic regression models: a bivariate model and three multivariate models with increasing complexity.

The data are drawn from a large-scale research project on *Residential Stability and Migration* in Iceland (Byggðafesta og búferlaflutningar), funded by the Icelandic Regional Development Institute. A survey conducted in 2021 by a professional survey company based on random quota sampling yielded a total sample of 9.664 urban and exurban respondents and a sub-sample of 1,123 rural-to-urban migrants who (1) lived in the Reykjavík capital region at the time of the survey but (2) were raised in a rural region of Iceland.

Descriptive statistics

The two outcome variables measure the propensity for urban-to-rural return migration. First, specific *Return migration intentions* were defined as "probably" or "definitely" moving from the Reykjavík capital region to other regions of the country within the next 2–3 years. Second, general *Return*

migration preferences were defined by choosing "Other regions of the country" from a single-choice list of places where respondents most wanted to live.

It should be noted that intending or wanting to return to a rural area does not necessarily involve returning to the community of origin. Respondents who left their home community because of gossiping might for instance be reluctant to return to that particular community, yet willing to move to another rural community. Our study focuses on potential return migration to rural Iceland in general rather than return migration to the community of origin as such.

As shown in Table 1, 4% of both female and male rural-to-urban migrants were planning to return to rural Iceland within the next 2-3 years. As could be expected, general return migration preferences are more prevalent than specific return migration intentions. In our sample, 9% of the females and 14% of the males thus indicated that they would prefer to live in rural Iceland.

The respondents were asked a series of questions about their reasons for initially leaving their home communities. The roster of potential reasons included access to education, employment, health services, retail, cultural activities or leisure, proximity to friends or family, and various social considerations. Gossip was considered a factor in out-migration if getting away from gossip had been a somewhat or very important reason for leaving. Statistically significant gender differences were observed with 29% of female

respondents ($CI_{95\%}$: 26-32%) and 21% of male respondents ($CI_{95\%}$: 17-24%) reporting that gossip played a role in their earlier rural-to-urban migration.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for return migration intentions and preferences, gossip as a reason for initial out-migration from rural Iceland and covariates

	Range	All	Females	Males
Dependent variables				
Return migration intentions	0-1	.04 (.01)	.04 (.01)	.04 (.01)
Return migration preferences	0-1	.11 (.01)	.09 (.01)	.14 (.02)
Reason for leaving				
Gossip	0-1	.26 (.01)	.29 (.02)	.21 (.02)
(contrast: Other reasons)				
Gender				
Female	0-1	.60 (.01)	---	---
(contrast: Male)	*0-1*	*.40 (.01)*		
Age and period				
Age (in years)	19-86	51.2 (.45)	49.5 (.58)	53.9 (.71)
Move to capital area				
- 0–5 years ago	0-1	.18 (.01)	.18 (.01)	.17 (.02)
- 6–10 years ago	0-1	.13 (.01)	.15 (.01)	.10 (.01)
- 11–20 years ago	0-1	.21 (.01)	.23 (.02)	.19 (.02)
- (contrast: More than 20 years ago)	*0-1*	*.48 (.01)*	*.44 (.02)*	*.54 (.02)*
Socio-economic factors				
University degree	0-1	.55 (.01)	.60 (.02)	.48 (.02)
(contrast: Other education)	*0-1*	*.45 (.01)*	*.40 (.02)*	*.52 (.02)*
Perceived affluence	1-5	3.68 (.03)	3.62 (.03)	3.78 (.04)
Active in labor market	0-1	.71 (.01)	.70 (.02)	.73 (.02)
(contrast: Student, homemaker, retired etc.)	*0-1*	*.29 (.01)*	*.30 (.02)*	*.27 (.02)*
Relationships				
Spouse				
- Spouse raised in capital area	0-1	.29 (.01)	.29 (.02)	.29 (.02)
- Spouse raised in rural Iceland	0-1	.37 (.01)	.36 (.02)	.39 (.02)
- (contrast: None or other)	*0-1*	*.63 (.01)*	*.64 (.02)*	*.61 (.02)*

Children in household	0-1	.33 (.01)	.35 (.02)	.29 (.02)
Most or all closest family in capital area	0-1	.48 (.01)	.49 (.02)	.46 (.02)
(contrast: Most or all elsewhere)	*0-1*	*.52 (.01)*	*.51 (.02)*	*.54 (.02)*
Most or all closest friends in capital area	0-1	.64 (.01)	.67 (.02)	.59 (.02)
(contrast: Most or all elsewhere)	*0-1*	*.36 (.01)*	*.33 (.02)*	*.41 (.02)*
N		*1.129*	*677*	*452*

Unfortunately, the number of intended return migrants is too small (30 females and 19 males) for a meaningful multivariate analysis of gossip as a reason for out-migration by gender, controlling for age and period of move, socio-economic factors, and social relationships. It is nevertheless possible to cross-tabulate gender differences in return migration intentions by reasons given for the initial out-migration and compare the results with the more general return migration preferences.

Females were about 60% of the rural-to-urban migrants participating in the survey ($CI_{95\%}$: 57-63%). Age was measured in years from 18–86 with an average age of 49.5 years for female respondents ($CI_{95\%}$: 48.3-50.6 years) and 53.9 years for male respondents ($CI_{95\%}$: 52.5-55.3 years). A similar proportion of female (18%) and male (17%) respondents had lived five years or less in the Reykjavík capital region, but female respondents were significantly less likely ($CI_{95\%}$: 39-47%) than males ($CI_{95\%}$: 50-59%) to have lived there for more than twenty years.

Various other measures are included as controls in the multivariate model. A larger proportion of females ($CI_{95\%}$: 56-63%) than males ($CI_{95\%}$: 43-53%)

had completed a university degree. Perceived affluence scores are marginally lower for females ($CI_{95\%}$: 3.55-3.69) than males ($CI_{95\%}$: 3.69-3.86) while active participation in the labor market does not differ significantly by gender ($CI_{95\%}$: 67-73% for females, 69-77% for males).

No significant gender differences were found in the proportion of spouses raised in the capital area ($CI_{95\%}$: 26-33% for females, 25-33% for males) or rural Iceland ($CI_{95\%}$: 33-40% for females, 34-43% for males), and no gender differences were found in the prevalence of children under the age of 18 in the household ($CI_{95\%}$: 31-38% for females, 25-34% for males). Furthermore, no significant differences were found in the proportion of males and females who reported that most or all their closest family members ($CI_{95\%}$: 45-53% for females, 41-50% for males) or closest friends ($CI_{95\%}$: 63-70% for females, 55-64% for males) lived in the Reykjavík capital area.

Return migration intentions and preferences

Figure 2 shows the patterns of return migration intentions and return migration preferences by gender and the role of gossip in the initial out-migration from rural Iceland to the Reykjavík capital area.

Males who left their home communities because of gossip are not significantly less willing to return to rural Iceland. While 11% of those who left because of gossip would prefer to return compared to 15% who left for other

reasons, this difference is not statistically significant (χ^2: 0.87(1), p. > .05). About 4% of the male respondents intended to return to rural Iceland within 2-3 years, regardless of the role of gossip in their initial out-migration (χ^2: 0.01(1), p. > .05).

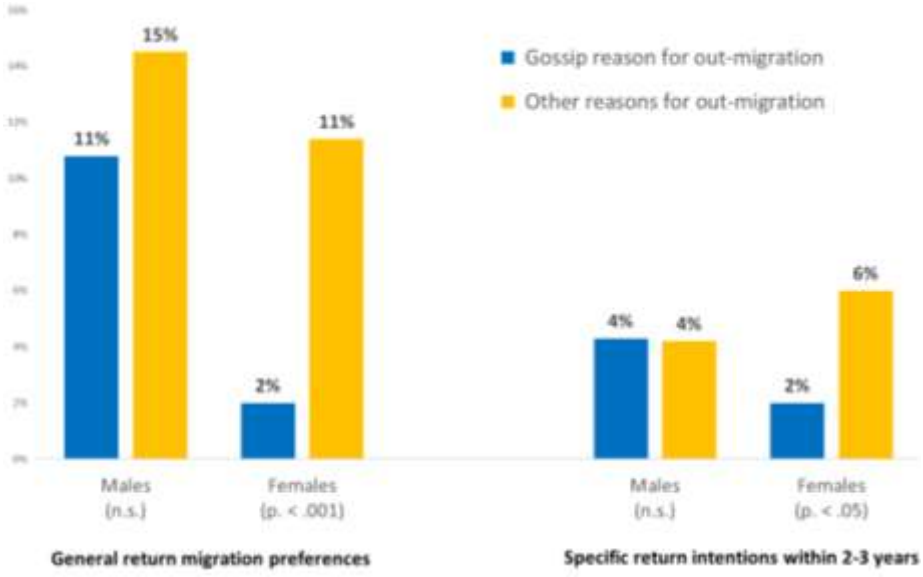

Figure 2
The association of gossip with general return migration preferences and specific return intentions among rural out-migrants in the Reykjavík capital area

In contrast, females who left their home community because of gossip are significantly less willing to return to rural Iceland. Only 2% of the women who left because of gossip preferred to live in rural Iceland, compared to 11% of those who left for other reasons (χ^2: 15.4(1), p. < .001). Similarly, 2% of the women who left because of gossip intended to return to rural Iceland within the

next 2-3 years in rural Iceland, compared to 6% of those who left for other reasons (χ^2: 3.7(1), p. < .05).

While 29% of female respondents and 21% of male respondents reported that gossip had played a role in their earlier rural-to-urban migration, such experiences only seem to affect the willingness of women to return to rural Iceland. Furthermore, significant gender differences in the willingness to return are only found among those who left because of gossip and not among those who left for other reasons.

Multivariate analysis of gossip and return migration preferences

Table 2 shows the bivariate associations between return migration preferences, gossip as the reason for initial out-migration and several covariates established in prior studies.

Gender significantly influences the desire to return, with females showing lower odds compared to males in the bivariate model (OR = .60, p < .001). Having left rural Iceland because of gossip is also associated with lower odds of return migration preferences in the bivariate model (OR = .35, p < .001). These patterns are not significantly affected when both gender and gossip are included in Model 1 alongside controls for age and period of departure.

In Model 2, an interaction term between being female and reporting gossip as a reason for the initial out-migration is added to the model. This yields a

statistically significant negative interaction effect while rendering non-significant the main effects of both gender and gossip. Consistent with the cross-tabulations presented in Figure 1, this indicates that the negative effects of gossip on return migration preferences are limited to females and that there is no significant difference in such preferences among respondents who left their home communities for other reasons.

In Model 3, further controls for socio-economic factors and relationships are added to the model. The results show that the interaction effect between gender and gossip remains unaffected by these controls (OR = .22, $p < .01$), while the main effects of gender and gossip remain unaffected. This implies that the statistically significant association between gossip and return migration preferences for females only, reported in Figure 1 and Model 1, cannot be explained by age, period of departure, socio-economic characteristics, or the interpersonal relationship measures.

The controls nevertheless yield interesting findings that confirm and expand the results of prior studies. Age inversely affects the desire to return across all models, with the odds of return migration preferences decreasing by a factor of .97-.98 for each additional year. Those who recently moved to the Reykjavík capital area are more likely to prefer living in rural Iceland, but this becomes non-significant once socio-economic characteristics and interpersonal relationship measures are added to the model.

Table 2

Binomial logistic regression models of out-migrants wanting to return to rural Iceland (odds ratios)

	Bivariate	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Reason for leaving				
Gossip	.35***	.33***	.63	.60
(contrast: Other reasons)				
Gender				
Female	.60***	.57**	.69	.70
(contrast: Male)				
Interaction				
Gossip x Female			.23**	.22**
Age and period				
Age (in years)	.98***	.98**	.98**	.97***
Period				
- 0–5 years ago	2.71***	2.05*	2.04*	1.16
- 6–10 years ago	.83	.69	.67	.48
- 11–20 years ago	1.44	1.25	1.43	1.15
(contrast: More than 20 years ago)				
Socio-economic factors				
University degree	.68*			1.02
(contrast: Other education)				
Perceived affluence	.73**			.79*
Active in labor market	.76			.74
(contrast: Student, homemaker, retired etc.)				
Relationships				
Children in household	.72			.80
Spouse				
- Spouse raised in capital area	.54**			.53*
- Spouse raised in rural Iceland	.92			.84
(contrast: None or other)				
Most or all closest family in capital area	.57**			.96
(contrast: Most or all elsewhere)				
Most or all closest friends in capital area	.34***			.37***
(contrast: Most or all elsewhere)				
R square				
Cox & Snell		.05	.05	.08
Nagelkerke		.09	.10	.17

The bivariate odds of return migration preferences decrease by a factor of .68 if respondents have completed a university degree, but this effect disappears in the full Model 3. In contrast, the decrease in return migration preferences by a factor of .73 for each unit increase in perceived affluence is only minimally affected by the addition of other predictors. In other words, university education as such does not seem to affect the odds of return migration preferences but the increased affluence that may in part be the result of educational attainment is associated with lower odds of preferring to live in rural Iceland. Active participation in the labor market does however not significantly influence the desire to return in any of the models.

Finally, the geography of various interpersonal relationships appears to be associated with return migration preferences, net of other factors. In particular, respondents are much less likely to report a preference for living in rural Iceland if most or all of their closest friends live in the Reykjavík capital area (OR = .37, $p < .001$) or their spouse was raised in the Reykjavík capital area (OR = .53, $p < .05$). Neither children under the age of 18 in the household nor having a spouse raised in rural Iceland is associated with such preferences and most or all closest family members in the Reykjavík capital area is rendered non-significant in the final model.

Discussion

Prior research has found that perceptions of gossip contribute to rural out-migration intentions in Iceland, in particular among younger generations. About a quarter of intended out-migrants from farming communities and almost half the intended out-migrants from smaller villages indicated that gossip was a somewhat or very important reason for their migration intentions (Bjarnason, 2022). In the rural villages, a third or more of those who perceived significant gossip about their love life intended to leave within the next 2–3 years, and controlling for other predictors of out-migration, both males and females who experienced such gossip were twice as likely to intend to leave their home communities (Jóhannesdóttir et al., 2021). According to the results of the current study, a quarter of the rural out-migrants currently living in the Reykjavík capital area maintain that gossip was one of the reasons they decided to leave rural Iceland.

Migration intentions are not the same as actual migration and using gossip to predict intentions may not accurately reflect the impact of gossip on rural our-migration. Conversely, retrospective accounts of migration decisions, perhaps made many years or decades ago, may reflect processes at work in earlier time periods as well as a subjective rearrangement of complex life events into a coherent biographical narrative. Together, however, these results

provide a rather compelling case for the gossip contributing to rural out-migration in rural Iceland and beyond.

Rural return migration is an important part of rural in-migration and in several Northern European countries close to half of all rural in-migrants are in fact rural return migrants (Bjarnason et al., 2021; Sandow and Lindholm, 2023; Scott et al., 2017). The long-term effects of gossip as a reason for out-migration on rural return migration in later life can therefore be quite important for the growth or decline of rural communities. The results of our study suggest that while men and women are equally likely to leave rural areas because of gossip, there is a gender difference in the long-term effects. Women who moved from rural Iceland to the Reykjavík capital area to escape gossip are significantly less likely to intend to return to rural Iceland within 2–3 years and significantly less likely to prefer to live there. Such patterns were not statistically significant for men who moved to the Reykjavík capital area to escape gossip in their rural home communities.

Our multivariate analysis was limited by the fact that only 19 male and 30 female rural out-migrants intended to return to rural Iceland within the next 2–3 years. We were therefore unable to estimate a robust logistic regression model of specific migration intentions and were limited to a more statistically robust analysis of the weaker measure of general residential preferences. Such

preferences can be expected to reflect the general attitudes of respondents towards returning to rural Iceland, but they are likely to be much less restrained by practical considerations than actual migration intentions. Future studies drawing on a larger sample of rural out-migrants are needed to adequately address the impact of gossip on return migration intentions, net of other predictors.

In the multivariate analysis, we find women to have significantly less return migration preferences than men, but this appears to hold true only for women who originally left their home communities because of gossip. Once the strong and statistically significant interaction term between being a woman and having left because of gossip is added to the equation, the main effects become non-significant. It should however be noted that the direction of the weakened main effects remains unchanged, and a future study based on a larger sample might well find that the main effect is weaker but still significant for men.

These results align well with earlier qualitative studies that have emphasized the gendered aspects of gossip and its negative effects on residential satisfaction and willingness to stay in rural communities among young women in particular (Haugen and Villa, 2006; Jóhannesdóttir and Skaptadóttir, 2023). They are however inconsistent with earlier quantitative research suggesting that gossip has a similar negative effect on men and women (Jóhannesdóttir et

al., 2021). It thus seems that even if gossip drives both men and women from rural areas, it has a stronger long-term effect on women and later becomes an obstacle to even considering living in a rural area in the future. Further research is needed to confirm these findings and explore the underlying mechanisms. This may for instance be due to differences in the subject or severity of gossip about men and women or more generally gendered differences in the impact of gossip on reputations and social identities. Further research is also needed to understand the impact of gossip on non-binary and transgender people in rural communities.

While gossip emerges as an important predictor of return migration preferences among women in particular, our control variables also yield results that confirm and extend the findings of earlier research on rural out-migration and return migration. It should however be emphasized that while many earlier studies have focused on return migration to a specific community or area where the respondents were raised, our study focuses on preferences and intentions to move back to rural Iceland in general. This allows us to focus on the implications of gossip for rural return migration defined in terms of urban-to-rural migration flows rather than place-specific considerations. Further studies are needed to explore the place-specific context of gossip in particular rural communities, controlling for factors such as place attachment and family and friends in the community.

We find that rural return preferences decrease with age and that the most recent arrivals from rural areas are most likely to return. This aligns with earlier findings that young out-migrants who move temporarily to urban areas to pursue further education can in many cases be classified as ‘mental stayers’, as they intend to return soon and may not consider themselves out-migrants, even if they are temporarily staying elsewhere (Haartsen & Thissen, 2014). Furthermore, lower return migration preferences among those who have completed a university degree and consider themselves more affluent corresponds to the findings that rural out-migration is to a considerable extent fueled by the pursuit of further education and professional careers (Bjarnason and Thorarinsdottir, 2018; Hayfield, 2017).

In line with the bulk of the literature on rural return migration (e.g. (Bijker et al, 2012; Gillespie et al., 2022; Grimsrud, 2011; Sandow and Lundholm, 2023; Scott et al., 2017), we find that being close to friends and family is an important consideration in rural return preferences. Our design does however depart from earlier studies in its emphasis on social ties in the city as obstacles to return migration rather than social ties in the rural community as pull factors. This is interesting in its own right, but also necessary as we focus on rural return migration as return to rural Iceland in general rather than return to a particular community where family and friends might reside.

We were however able to distinguish between the potential effects of having a partner who is also from a rural area or having a partner who is from the Reykjavík capital area, using single people and others as the omitted contrast variable. As expected, we found that having an urban partner reduces return migration preferences, but contrary to expectations we did not find an independent effect of having a rural partner on such preferences. This needs to be explored in more detail, taking into account the origins, circumstances and residential preferences of the rural partner.

Interestingly, we find that children in the household do not influence rural return migration preferences. This is not consistent with the findings of earlier studies that childhood experiences and perceptions of family-friendly rural communities encourage rural out-migrants to return to rural areas once they have children (Cawley, 2020; Ní Laori, 2007; Pedersen & Therkelsen, 2022; Sandow and Lindholm, 2023). This may be a culture-specific finding pertaining to Iceland, but it is also possible that the willingness of parents to move with their children to rural areas is cancelled out by the increased practical complexities of moving with children.

The emergent literature on the effects of gossip on migration patterns in rural areas has to date largely been focused on northern European settings. Given the relatively high levels of gender equality in these regions, relatively

strong welfare systems and the geographical remoteness of the rural communities under study, it would be important to study such processes in more traditional societies with perhaps greater urban-rural differences in gender equality and weaker welfare systems that place greater burden on women. Investigating the role of gossip in return migration intentions across different cultural contexts can illuminate how varying social norms and values influence the impact of gossip. Such studies could help distinguish universal patterns from culturally specific dynamics, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the role of gossip in rural return migration.

Conclusion

As Mark Shucksmith (2018) has argued, notions of the 'rural idyll' tend to be normative and power-infused, often helping to maintain rural hierarchies of inequalities and social control. A critical examination of such processes is essential to move beyond nostalgic and exclusionary visions of an imagined idyllic past towards a socially just, inclusive 'good countryside'. Close-knit communities can for instance provide a strong sense of solidarity, help those in need and curb deviance, precisely because they demand conformity, regulate mutual support and ostracize those deemed deviant. Much as Simmel‘s social types, the 'slut', the 'slob', the 'drunk' and the 'cheat' are generic social roles assigned to particular individuals through gossip, drawing boundaries and defining the virtues of modesty, meticulousness, temperance and honesty for

other community members. Indeed, the very act of sharing other people ‘s secrets create a particular type of social relationships, establishing boundaries of trust and cohesion within groups and excluding those who do not belong (Simmel, 1906).

In the context of regional development, the maintenance of social cohesion through the ostracization of those who do not conform to the virtues of the idyllic rural can lead to increased rural out-migration. Those who are for an instance assigned the roles of the slut, the slob, the drunk or the cheat are understandably likely to abandon those roles along with the community itself and are unlikely to return to reclaim such dubious distinctions. This raises important questions regarding the role of community culture in endogenous rural development. While inadequate infrastructure, limited public services and thin labor markets may be beyond the control of the local community, breaking old traditions of shaming and exclusions may certainly contribute to a better countryside for stayers, in-migrants and return migrants alike.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Information letter to participants

Háskólinn á Akureyri
University of Akureyri

Áhrif nærsamfélagsins á búsetu ungra kvenna í sjávarbyggðum
Upplýsingar til þátttakenda rannsóknarinnar

Ágæti viðtakandi

Með þessu bréfi viljum við greina frá rannsókninni **Áhrif nærsamfélagsins á búsetu ungra kvenna í sjávarbyggðum.** Rannsóknin er doktorsverkefni Grétu Bergrúnar Jóhannesdóttir við Félagsfræði í Háskólanum á Akureyri. Aðalleiðbeinandi er Þóroddur Bjarnason prófessor við skólann, netfang: thorodd@unak.is, ábyrgðarmaður er Gréta Bergrún Jóhannesdóttir, netfang: greta@unak.is, sími: 847-4056 Fámenn byggðarlög á Íslandi búa oft við ójafnt kynjahlutfall þar sem færri konur en karlar kjósa sér búsetu þar. Nokkuð hefur verið skoðað er varðar atvinnulíf og efnahagslega þætti, og það sem tosar yngra fólk til þéttbýlisstaða. Minna hefur verið horft til samfélagslegra þátta byggðanna sjálfra en þessi rannsókn snýst um að skoða samfélagslega þætti sem geta haft áhrif á búseturánægju ungra kvenna. Þar er meðal annars horft til jafnréttisviðhorfa, samfélagsþátttöku og samfélagsábyrgðar, og annarra samfélagslegra þátta svo sem slúðurs. Þátttakendur taka þátt í einu eða tveimur viðtölum, sem eru um það bil klukkustundar löng. Viðtölin verða hljóðrituð og eftir að þau hafa verið afrituð orðrétt er upptakan eyðilögð. Auk viðtala mun viðmælandi kynna sér samfélag þátttakanda s.s. íbúasamsetningu,

samfélagsþátttöku og menningarlíf. Allar upplýsingar sem koma fram í viðtölum eru meðhöndlaðar samkvæmt ströngustu reglum um trúnað og nafnleynd og farið að íslenskum lögum er varða persónuvernd, vinnslu og eyðingu frumgagna. Rannsóknargögn verða varðveitt á öruggum stað á meðan á rannsókn stendur. Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar verða gerðar ópersónugreinanlegar.
Tekið skal fram að þér ber ekki skylda til að taka þátt í rannsókninni og getur hætt hvenær sem er án fyrirvara eða útskýringa á ákvörðun þinni. Einnig er þér frjálst að neita að svara einstökum spurningum rannsóknarinnar.

Virðingarfyllst

Gréta Bergrún Jóhannesdóttir, doktorsnemi í félagsfræði við Háskólann á Akureyri

Appendix 2

Informed consent of participants

Áhrif nærsamfélagsins á búsetu ungra kvenna í sjávarbyggðum

Upplýst samþykki

Ég undirrituð/undirritaður hef lesið kynningarbréf um þátttöku í rannsókninni: Áhrif nærsamfélagsins á búsetu ungra kvenna í sjávarbyggðum. Ég hef fengið tækifæri til að spyrja spurninga um rannsóknina og fengið fullnægjandi svör og útskýringar á atriðum sem mér voru óljós. Ég hef af fúsum og frjálsum vilja ákveðið að taka þátt í rannsókninni.

Rannsóknin er liður í doktorsverkefni Grétu Bergrúnar Jóhannesdóttur í félagsfræði við Háskólann á Akureyri. Leiðbeinandi er Þóroddur Bjarnason, prófessor við Háskólann á Akureyri.

Þátttaka í rannsókninni felur í sér 1-2 u.þ.b. klukkustundar löng viðtöl.

Farið verður með allar upplýsingar sem trúnaðarmál og þess vandlega gætt að ekki verði hægt að rekja þær.

Ég samþykki hér með að taka þátt í rannsókninni eins og henni er lýst.
Mér er frjálst að hætta þátttöku á hvaða stigi hennar sem er.

Dagsetning

Nafn þátttakanda

Undirritaður, starfsmaður rannsóknarinnar, staðfestir hér með að hafa veitt upplýsingar um eðli og tilgang rannsóknarinnar, í samræmi við lög og reglur um vísindarannsóknir.

Gréta Bergrún Jóhannesdóttir

Upplýst samþykki fyrir þessari rannsókn er í tvíriti og heldur þátttakandi eftir öðru eintaki af því.

Appendix 3

Viðtalsrammi – Gréta Bergrún

Slúður og umtal

- Segðu mér fá þínu samfélagi og aðeins frá þinni búsetu og lífi hér/þar
- Hvernig upplifir þú slúður í þínu samfélagi/samfélaginu sem þú fluttir úr? Umfang, aðstæður, áhrif? Jákvætt/neikvætt
- Hvernig líður þér í aðstæðum slúðurs, þar sem rætt er um fjarstaddan einstakling?
- Eru kringumstæður þar sem slúður eða umtal hefur breytt þínum ákvörðunum eða hegðun? Líðan því tengd?
- Hvaða tilfinningar tengir þú við slúður?
- Hefur slúður eða skipti á upplýsingum hjálpað þér í einhverjum aðstæðum?
- Hefur slúður breytt þínu viðhorfi til annarra svo þú vitir til? Eða til samfélagsins
- Eitthvað fleira sem þú vilt bæta við?