"The unsung heroes of Ireland": Masculinity, gender and breadwinning among Ireland's "Euro-commuters"

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Abstract:	Here I examine the masculinity/breadwinning nexus among a group of intra-European migrants, namely those who commute for work between European states—or, Eurocommuters. I focus specifically on professional male Euro-commuters, who live in the Republic of Ireland but work in another EU28 country. Examining their mobility decision-making process, I argue that the impetus behind Euro-commuting is strongly influenced by normative gender-based expectations around masculinity and breadwinning. Threatened with socio-economic insecurity in austerity-hit Ireland, respondents struggled to sustain strongly gendered identities as their families' primary breadwinners. Consequently, by securing professional white-collar work in another EU28 country, not only is downward social mobility from the Irish middle class offset but equally so too is the threat to their firmly-held masculine breadwinner identities. In securing this employment, then, my respondents were compensating for what they felt to be their "failed" masculinity during bouts of under-employment or unemployment; they were now performing masculinity "successfully" by working overseas. Effectively, Euro-commuting is a further means of reasserting hegemonic gender-based identities as middle-class, male breadwinners. This mobility thereby contributes to novel patterns of reproducing privileged gender subjectivities.

Introduction

How do professional men who have been re-employed following a period of unemployment frame, present and understand their masculinity once they have resumed their former breadwinner roles? A vast literature exists exploring middle-class male unemployment and how experiences of joblessness are not simply "scarring" for future employment prospects but can also disfigure men's sense of their own sense of manhood (Anderson 2009; Conroy Bass 2016). Similarly, another voluminous body of research focuses on the experiences of in-work middle-class men across a variety of professional settings and how different masculine ideals play out in and through each sector (Hodges and Budig 2010; Townsend 2002). But what is less fully understood is how white-collar men who have endured involuntary career interruptions respond to normative expectations of masculinity after restarting full-time professional work once more. Is masculinity exalted, denigrated or redeemed differently in the wake of such career disruptions? Or, are middle-class masculine subjectivities resistant to altering hegemonic definitions of what it means to be a man, particularly as it relates to prescriptions around breadwinning?

The lives of men have been subject to major changes in the last four decades in most post-industrial economies. In this period, significant structural, macro-economic shifts have seen a move away from manufacturing to a greater emphasis on the service sector (Howard and King 2008). This has created ever-greater opportunities for female employment, and in many cases altered dynamics around paid work and childcaring between couples (Bolton and Houlihan 2009). At the same time, employment opportunities for working-class men in the former industrial heartlands of North American and Europe have suffered substantially. The manual-based occupations once the dynamo behind these economies have become obsolete, or outsourced to lower-cost countries. The negative consequences of this economic retooling on working-class men's masculinity have been detailed at length (see McDowell 2003).

But this forty-odd years of restructuring of the world's wealthiest economies has had significant consequences for middle-class men's lives too (Davis 2001). Downsizing and de-skilling as a result of technological innovations has meant that men in non-manual professions have also been casualties of advanced capitalism's various upheavals. There are numerous studies that consider how professional males act out masculine ideals around breadwinning and family in the light of corporate layoffs and career changes (Alvesson and Due Billing 1997; Bach 2017; Borras Catala et al. 2012). However, less scholarly attention has centred on middle-class men than on working-class men as a whole. This is partly explained by the fact that, overall, the sectors middle-class men work in have been better cushioned from the depredations of the neoliberal orthodoxy than those traditionally occupied by working-class men. As stated, one area of research into middle-class men's lives that has received insufficient attention has been the question of how such men – after undergoing a period of unemployment but then regaining their former breadwinner status within families – might redefine or reimagine masculinity.

In this paper I address a gap in the study of professional, middle-class men. Specifically, I examine how gender operates as a decisive mechanism – and in particular around normative expectations of male breadwinning – for a group of mobile EU workers who live in one EU country but work in another, commuting between the two routinely. Such transnational EU citizens I term "Euro-commuters". In what follows, I show how the recent economic crisis in the Republic of Ireland (hereafter referred to as Ireland) undermined strongly-held gendered identities as professional, middle-class male breadwinners there. Elaborating on this, I show how as much as the decision to Euro-commute is about the monetary awards they gain from working overseas across the EU, at the same time it is about protecting deeply-engrained gendered subjectivities as strong provider figures for their families. It might be assumed these men would somewhat revise the hegemonic masculinity/breadwinning nexus in the wake of Ireland's economic crisis, having suffered significant setbacks to their provider role as a result. However, much more in evidence was how Euro-commuting helped to compensate for vulnerabilities to normative gendered expectations of

men-as-providers. In fact, this work-related mobility, I argue, is one way in which white-collar professional males maintain and reproduce their privileged gender positions. Before doing this, however, I first review the state-of-the-art on masculinity, gender and breadwinning, particularly as it relates to white-collar men.

Masculinities, breadwinning, gender

If men were once peripheral to the study of gender – seen as "non-gendered humans" (Hibbins and Pease 2009, 5) – such blind-spots no longer exist. Emerging in the 1980s, scholars sought to examine not just a singular masculinity but rather important distinctions between dominant and subordinated masculinities (Connell 1995). That is, they analysed how certain men come to occupy positions of privilege not only in relation to women but also in relation to *other* men. The concept of "hegemonic masculinity" has been central here. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 832) define hegemonic masculinity as the "currently most honoured way of being a man" in a particular culture. Some men live up to these hegemonic ideals, others fall short – but the ideals have a strong influence on men's practices and beliefs, regardless of whether they are bearers of gendered privilege or in more disadvantaged male positions. Some of the characteristics commonly associated with contemporary hegemonic masculinity are whiteness, wealth, assertiveness, openness to high-risk behaviours, sexual promiscuity alongside heterosexuality, a readiness and ability to be violent if necessary, mental and physical toughness, and devotion to work/career (Connell 2000). Note, however, research here often stresses the socially constructed underpinnings of masculinity, with scholars emphasising how the list of attributes deemed quintessentially masculine are forever shape-shifting, with little (if anything) intrinsic to it (Risman 2009). In other words, masculinity is performative—manhood is only ever achieved by masquerading it in ways deemed appropriately manly (Walsh 2010).

Drawing distinctions between dominant and marginalized masculinities calls attention to the multitude of experiences that constitute what it means to be a man. Here, scholars spotlight how there is no unitary Masculinity accounting for all men's behaviour but instead place the emphasis on the plural –

masculinit*ies*. Addressing this plurality, a wealth of research now exists (to name but a few) on the lives of gay men (Anderson 2002), black men (Wright 1998), metrosexual men (Hall 2015), incarcerated men (Ricciardelli 2015), migrant men (Donaldson et al. 2009), young men (McDowell 2002).

How different men experience privilege and disadvantage in different ways has been central to the analysis of masculinity and class. Taking an intersectional approach, this literature shows how particular enclassed gender regimes foster and reinforce particular masculinities (Reay 1998; Skeggs 1997). That is, there is an intimate relationship between a man's class location and the acting out of particular variants of masculinity (Willis 1977). As mentioned, the most well-established strand of this scholarship considers the ongoing peripheralization of working-class men in the wake of macro-economic restructuring in western economies. In many such studies, breadwinning is seen to be at the core of working-class male identity, with unemployment felt as deeply stigmatizing and resulting in a major loss of male self-esteem (Nixon 2009). Often lacking the educational, social and occupational nous to succeed in this new economy, others have examined how working-class boys and later working-class men cope with these indignities. One response is to develop various "rebel" or "protest" masculinities to such dramatic socio-economic change (Eastman 2012; McDowell 2002). Another is to adapt and re-skill in order to navigate the increasingly feminized workplace (Simpson 2004), or, alternatively, find employment in "traditional" masculine nickes, for example in so-called "dirty work" like bin and refuse collection (Simpson et al. 2016; Thiel 2007).

Other research has investigated how working-class fathers engage in parenting alongside their labour market involvement. Some researchers demonstrate how working-class men's self-identity is seriously threatened by a waning of their ability to fulfil a classic breadwinner role (Legerski and Cornwall 2010). Interestingly, others show that despite an ideal of hegemonic masculinity as strong provider-types, in practice many working-class men actually undertake considerable parenting and other emotional, care-giving labour (Pyke 1996; Shows and Gerstel 2009). As Shows and Gerstel (2009, 179) state: "Our data

accords with the few qualitative pieces that suggest that fathers who are least likely to ideologically endorse gender equality (the working-class) are the most likely to engage in equitable actions."

How do men from more advantaged backgrounds perform their masculine selves? Or, adapting West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of "doing gender", have middle-class men different ways of "doing masculinity"? In an early review of research on white-collar professional men, Collinson and Hearn (1996) suggested there was a "strange silence" around the relationship between masculinity and management. Two decades on that same silence no longer exists (even if, as noted, the research is less voluminous than that examining working-class men). There is now a sizable literature exploring the centrality of work and continuous career advancement to middle-class professional men's self-identities (Kimmel 2006). Similarly, numerous studies examine how men contribute to the prevailing "occupational cultures" of different professions, from engineering (Tolston 1977), to architecture (Sang et al. 2014), to bureaucratic institutions (Kerfoot and Knights 1998), to banking and finance (Blomberg 2009), to academia (Knights and Richards 2003). Broadly, this research finds that particular masculine traits come to monopolise the underlying ethic in many of these professions – emotional flatness in the workplace, technical mastery of a specialist area, uninterrupted career history, adherence to organisational hierarchy.

Middle-class men can be seen, in some instances, as beneficiaries of the new economic dispensation. But that does not mean they have escaped the chronic job insecurity that labour market restructuring has had on working-class men's occupations (Acker 1990). The so-called "crisis of masculinity" is not exclusively a working-class affair, put differently. The old verities contributing to a relatively "stable masculinity" across the adult lifespan for middle-class men have also undergone significant transformations (Ridgeway 2009). No longer can the transition from the educational system, to continuous career employment, to promotion along a clearly-defined occupational ladder, to retirement with a generous pension be taken-for-granted. Resonating with McDowell's (2003) research on working-class men's "redundant masculinities", Clare

(2001) suggests the taint of unemployment in a fast-changing world of shifting white-collar employment leaves some professional males feeling, metaphorically, like little more than a "dying phallus".

Empirically, research finds that disruptions to middle-class men's careers are often experienced as disruptions to masculine identities, who after years of loyal service to an organisation emerge bewildered in the face of corporate layoffs (Lane 2011). In particular, loss of their breadwinner status can precipitate serious setbacks to these men's sense of self-worth, resulting in feelings of embarrassment, shame, inadequacy (Moen and Roehling 2005; Ehrenreich 2006). One well-documented reason for this is that male social networks are often heavily work-centred – therefore, male identity suffers precipitously when work is taken away, as a considerable part of their social network is also taken away (Kelan 2008). Women, on the other hand, tend to suffer less as they have more non-work, home-centred social activities and networks upon which to rely (Russell 1999). Meanwhile, in an occupational landscape said to be increasingly bidding "farewell to the organisation man" – to borrow Erickson and Pierce's (2005) phrase – others focus on the adaptability of some professional males now working in female-dominated occupations. Here, the focus is on the various strategies they deploy to re-establish their masculinity in such atypical, non-traditionally male spheres (Lupton 2000). Schrock and Scharbe (2009, 284) terms such strategies as gendered acts of "compensatory masculinity" – "that is, how they modify their manhood acts—when they are unable or unwilling to enact the hegemonic ideal."

Regarding middle-class professional fathers, qualitative investigations show that such men routinely endorse an egalitarian model of parenting when contrasted with working-class fathers (Blair-Loy 2003). Yet, in reality, they often fail to enact this model, prioritizing work over domestic commitments, only fitting in childcare on the peripheries of daily schedules (Coltrane 2004; Lareau 2003; Shows and Gerstel 2009). In Shows and Gerstel's (2009, 179) words, they adopt a "neotraditional model of masculinity" whereby providing financially continues to take precedence over other domestic responsibilities, and in the process

continue to reproduce conventional gendered patterns around work-family life. LaRossa's (1997) distinction between men's professed "culture" of fatherhood and their actual "conduct" is apt here.

There is a curious gap in this copious, ever-growing literature on white-collar masculinity, however. As mentioned, this gap concerns how professional men who have been re-employed following a period of unemployment frame, present and understand their masculinity once they have assumed breadwinner roles once more. How do such professional males who have endured involuntary career interruptions respond to ideals of masculinity after restarting full-time professional work once more? Will masculinity be exalted, denigrated or redeemed differently in the wake of such career disruptions? Or, are middle-class masculine subjectivities resistant to altering hegemonic definitions of what it means to be a man?

With this omission from the existing scholarship in mind, this paper considers a group of mobile EU professional men who live in one EU country but work in another, commuting between the two routinely. Specifically, I ask: Why do such men they undertake this unorthodox "Euro-commuter" mobility? And in so doing, how do they reconstruct middle-class masculine ideals through Euro-commuting? Before drawing this out in the analysis, however, I detail the context of the current study first.

Background to the study

Like their counterparts elsewhere, Irish men have historically dominated the main spheres of Irish public life—from politics, to business, to law, to sport, to the media. Like many other contexts too, the study of gender in Ireland was seen as a woman's issue for a long time. It is only recently that critical attention has centred on Irish men *as men* and how they (re)produce their privileged gendered positions within a patriarchal society. Because of the agricultural nature of the Irish economy, alongside the moral monopoly the Catholic church held over people's everyday lives, as well as the centrality of marriage to household formation, research here has shown how hegemonic masculinity was traditionally understood as rural,

celibate outside of procreation, and based on the family (Ferriter 2009). And in basing masculinity around the conjugal family in independent Ireland, men were the primary, if not the sole, breadwinners (Inglis 1998). By contrast, women's rightful place was seen to be the domestic sphere – a place safeguarded in the 1937 Constitution where Article 41.2 states, "The State shall . . . endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home." The rightful place for men,then, was the workplace, with Ferguson (2001, 123) arguing:

> The assumption of the male breadwinner was so enshrined in Irish society that the "marriage bar" legally required women, once married (irrespective of whether or not they had children), to give up their jobs in public service employment, such as teaching and the civil service, a law that was repealed only in 1973.

In that same year Ireland joined the European Union, setting out on a process of rapid modernization, moving the economy away from agriculture towards manufacturing- and service-based sectors (O' Hearn 1998). And overlapping this economic transformation was a rapid socio-cultural transformation. Fahey and Russell (2001) argue that the state's dominant family policy of "patriarchal familialism" shifted to a more "egalitarian individualism" in the decades following EU membership. Converging belatedly towards European norms, fertility rates subsequently plummeted (from four children per women in 1970 to two in 2008), while female participation in the labour force soared (McGinnity and Russell 2008).

A small number of studies have examined whether these sweeping changes led to any major gendered domestic re-orderings. Broadly, these inquiries have found that drastic shifts away from a male breadwinner ideal for Irish men's identities have been, at best, reluctant. McKeown et al. (1998) show how Irish fathers consistently understanding their familial roles as better served in the public than the private sphere. Similarly, Goodwin's (2002) examination of Irish men found that masculinity continues to be

centrally defined around economic provisioning., Meanwhile, Ni Laoire's (2005) research into young Irish farmers found that most still relied heavily on a "conventional masculinism" when accounting for why they remained in the dwindling agricultural sector. Taking into consideration the long hours worked by fathers during the "Celtic Tiger" years in Ireland (46 for working fathers compared to 31 for working mothers), alongside the practically non-existent provision of paid paternity leave, as well as the earnings gap between men and women, Ferguson (2001, 124) concludes, "If anything, the hegemonic construction of Irish masculinity emphasises the 'good family man' as a hard-working man more intensely than ever."

A more recent nationally representative survey examining family formation in Ireland found "very positive" attitudes towards maternal employment among those surveyed (Fine-Davis 2011). There was also "quite high support" for "co-parenting". Yet so too was support high for more traditional roles. Some 52% agreed that "being a wife and mother are the most fulfilling roles any woman could want". Again, 53% agreed that women continue to want "the kind of support that men have traditionally given them". Effectively, these findings show no real evidence of any sort of "genderquake" in familial relations in contemporary Ireland. Rather, they point towards an underlying ambivalence around men's relationship with caring responsibilities, particularly when this conflicts with breadwinning (Ralph 2016).

With the ending of the "Celtic Tiger" years Ireland suffered its worst recession since the post-World War II era, going from near-full employment in 2007 to 14.7% unemployment in 2012 (Kelly and McGuinness 2013). All sectors of the economy suffered, as did all socio-economic groups. But the fallout from the crisis had specifically gendered effects, too. Men's employment rates plummeting greater than women's, partly explained by the fact that sectors recording the greatest layoffs – construction, finance, the motor trade, industry – were male-dominated pre-crisis (Addabbo et al. 2015). Given that women occupy jobs in high numbers in sectors traditionally more sheltered from cyclical economic declines – health, education, the civil service – the extent of female job losses were slower than males'. While some have dubbed this

gendered nature of the recent crisis a "man-cession", as the economy tentatively recovers there has also been evidence of a so-called "man-covery" in some corners of the economy, with figures for male employment increasing faster than those for females (Duvvury and Finn 2014).

A further social issue has run alongside the economic turmoil of recent years. Emigration has returned as a significant fact of contemporary Irish life. Ireland has recorded some of the highest per-capita rates of out-migration in the EU since the crisis. With a population of approximately 4.5 million, in 2007 the Central Statistics Office recorded net in-migration of 100,000 (CSO 2014). By 2013 there was net out-migration of 51,000. This is a sharp reversal in migration flows in a short period. At the same time, there has been evidence of an increase in "unconventional emigration" – namely, where people undertake temporary, circular forms of migration instead of permanent emigration (Glynn et al. 2013). Accounting for high rates of this mobility among certain groups, *Irish Emigration in the age of Austerity* (2013, 31) suggested:

> It is likely . . . that these are the kinds of areas from which "commuter migrants" are likeliest to be found, that is, where one household member is working outside the country and returning home on a more or less regular basis.

This is the overall context of the current study. In this paper, I detail one instance of commuter migration, examining the experiences of professional men who "Euro-commute" between Ireland and other EU-28 states. But first I consider the study's data collection and analysis methods.

Data, methods, sample characteristics

After securing approval from a university ethics committee, the evidence presented here emerged out of 37 in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with Irish-based male Euro-commuters. Interviews lasted between one-to-three hours. Recruitment was initially through personal contacts, followed by

snowball sampling. Later, I sought interviews through the Irish media, through Human Resources departments of major companies, and through Irish expatriate organisations. All interviews took place between December 2013 and December 2015. Most were conducted in respondents' homes in Ireland.

The recruitment strategy did not exclude those in lower socio-economic positions. In fact, I actively sought out such respondents – but failed to locate any. It is probable the cost of travelling regularly (by air) between two countries is prohibitive for those in less-generously remunerated occupations. As a result, all respondents occupied managerial, professional or associate-professional positions in their overseas workplaces. All also had tertiary-level education. And while acknowledging that class is a notoriously difficult concept to define, all respondents could be classified as belonging to the Irish middle-class. I follow Acker (2006) here, understanding class in terms of differential access to resources, especially salary-related earnings and other objectively measurably criteria including education and consumption practices.

Furthermore, gender parity in recruitment was also my initial aim. However, my final sample was overwhelmingly male. A plausible explanation for this is the persistence of gender ideologies around parenting in Irish families, which continue to see men as primary breadwinners, women as primary carers (Fine-Davis 2011). In the context of mobility decision-making, then, the normative assumption would be for men to become overseas breadwinners while women remain in Ireland as primary carers.

The men I interviewed worked across a range of occupations, from finance and banking, to technology and academia, to media and medicine. And in terms of this work, the most popular commuter destination was London; almost half of respondents commuted there. Others commuted to: Manchester, Bristol, Glasgow, Brussels, Paris, Hamburg, Vienna, Geneva, Stockholm, Malaga, Frankfurt. All respondents were aged 30-47 years. All bar two were homeowners; all were in long-term relationships (married/co-habiting) with partners back in Ireland; several had school-going children. Most spent Monday-Friday overseas, departing

for home on Fridays (though some commuted bi-weekly). In a given calendar-year, most spent upwards of 200-days in the commuter destination, the remainder in Ireland. For my purposes, inclusion criteria for those "Euro-commuting" I defined as someone who returned to Ireland at least once per month. Those returning less frequently I excluded. Definitions of what can be classified as commuting are moot, but to best capture the lived realities of Euro-commuting I focussed only on those returning frequently.

Descriptive Data on Euro-commuters and their Families (n = 37)

Educational attainment

Master's degree (12)

Bachelor's degree (25)

Age of men

Range=30–47

Median=38.5

Duration of unemployment prior to Euro-commuting

Range=2 months–18 months

Median=10 months

Years married/cohabiting

Range=2–20

Median=11

Spouse/partners' employment status

Works full-time (7)

Works part-time (8)

Works full-time in home (22)

The interview guide had six sections, including: 1) general background information (age, education, relationship status); 2) working history (types of employment and career trajectory since completion of

education, experiences of job loss); 3) reasons for commuting (how decision was arrived at, negotiation with partners); 4) aftermath of commuting decision (division of household labour and gender roles, family finances, family life, relationship quality with partner and children, intimacy); 5) future working and career aspirations; 6) any further comments/questions. While the interview guide did not specifically ask about "masculinity" per se, questions were posed – especially those around finances, home life, gender and career aspirations – so as to elicit responses on this issue.

All respondents were given pseudonyms, and the interviews were digitally recorded, then transcribed. Following the principles of grounded theory methodology, the transcripts were analysed using open-line and focused coding. Reading the transcripts repeatedly, the coding process identified broad themes inductively, then by a more fine-tuned line-by-line analysis identified relevant sub-codes. It is from this iterative coding process that the paper's findings on masculinity, gender and breadwinning emerged.

Findings

Economic consideration

Unquestionably, Ireland's economic distress was a key motif running throughout all respondents' accounts of why they relocated their working lives overseas. Many had suffered job losses as a result of the Irish economic downturn, and, as they stressed repeatedly, this was a prime reason driving their cross-border commuter mobility – to re-find the professional work they had lost in Ireland. Meanwhile, even for those who had not become unemployed during the recession, considerable increases in personal taxation, significant pay cuts, and decreased job security had undermined workplace conditions, all but forcing them, they felt, to consider employment opportunities overseas. A common – and not an unexpected – thread to emerge then from respondents' narratives was how the decision to Euro-commute was made principally as a matter of economic livelihood.

Take Oliver, an accountant working in London, returning to Dublin at weekends. Detailing his situation, he said: "Look, this is work, not life. It's about having an income – it's survival." Elaborating on what this "survival" entails, respondents like Oliver referred to the absolute necessity of keeping abreast of mortgage repayments on family homes purchased in Ireland. Oliver bought his home in 2006 – when Irish property prices were nearing their historic peak. At that time, Oliver had a well-remunerated job in Dublin's financial centre, comfortably covering his mortgage and other living expenses. He stated:

> If it wasn't for this [house], things could be a lot different. I mean, we love the house, we have invested a lot of money and energy in it. But if we had a . . . what you call them, a jingle mortgage like they do in the States, then the keys might be in the postbox.

Echoing Oliver's sentiment, the high cost of servicing mortgage repayments featured heavily in several respondents' accounts. By travelling overseas for work, they could earn sufficient income to meet their day-to-day living costs (mortgage, insurance, health, children's education) back in Ireland. The reference to American-type "jingle mortgages" is especially relevant to the Irish context. A jingle mortgage is a euphemism for a loan whereby a borrower strategically defaults – oftentimes posting the keys of a house (hence the "jingle") back to the lender. Under Irish law, strategically defaulting in this manner is not possible – as the borrower remains liable for the balance of the original loan. For respondents like Oliver, then, one solution out of their economic dilemma was to commute overseas for work as part of a livelihood strategy to help meet their ongoing financial commitments in Ireland.

In this, there is little surprise that respondents' frame their Euro-commuting in largely rational choice terms. Motivated by a desire to re-establish certain material privileges associated with being members of the Irish white-collar professional class, they took individual steps to rectify their financial straits as best they could by finding well-paying work overseas. The alternative – remaining in austerity-ravished Ireland

on much-reduced income – was not a situation they found palatable. Their preference was for working overseas in a commuter-style arrangement in order to reverse their precarious economic position after suffering significant fiscal setbacks during Ireland's recession.

Masculinity, gender, unemployment

But delving further into this initial, surface explanation of respondents' reasons for Euro-commuting, another explanation ran alongside this strictly monetary, rational choice one. Elaborating on the decision to leave behind families during weekdays while working abroad, what emerged was a sharply gendered account of their relationship to work and their professional lives. In the first instance, then, for many the experience of unemployment or under-employment immediately prior to Euro-commuting was understood as an assault on their sense of themselves as strong breadwinners for their families. Put otherwise, amidst a challenging bout of un- or under-employment, respondents felt as if they were not living up to their own and others' gendered expectations of them in the sphere of productive work. Namely, an important part of respondents' hegemonic ideal of manhood was to be in full-time, well-paid professional work. Without this work, without their role as breadwinner, the majority of those I interviewed understood themselves to be at a loss, adrift from their former professional selves. As such, their experience of labour market disruption in uncertain economic times was sharply shaped by gender – as their masculinity was seriously unsettled by economic contraction.

Andrew's account was typical here. Pre-crisis, Andrew's family life, he said, was "comfortable" – two holidays annually, two cars in the driveway, a nice big house in a nice safe neighbourhood. Throughout the crisis, his income contracted considerably, until such point in 2010 where he was made redundant by the company he had worked for as an accountant for several years. Of this experience Andrew said:

> It was horrible really. You're this one person your whole life. Like, you go to school, you go to college, you get a good job . . . You get married, kids, and so on . . . And then – BAM! You're let go from work, and when you look for similar work there is none. So what do you do? You look around and go, "Jesus, this is strange." Your confidence just drains away, to be honest.

Throughout his subsequent job search – a phase that lasted over a year – Andrew encountered numerous rejections from prospective employers. Ultimately, this only served to amplify his sense of inadequacy after becoming unemployed, intensifying the feeling that he was now superannuated – even if he was only 45 years old at the time of interview.

Peter's situation was similar, even if for him it was a case of under- rather than unemployment that led to a profound questioning of his personal and professional worth. In fact, he was even more explicit than Andrew on the issue of how his masculinity was unmoored after he endured a significant reduction in his employed hours in Dublin's financial district during the downturn. He said:

> Look, for years I was walking around, thinking I was cock of the walk. Good jobs, good money. And all that goes with that. But then I've just got the few hours, a bit of consulting here and there, and it's . . . What the fuck! How do I pay for all this shit now? You kind of go off the rails, I don't mind admitting to that. It really knocked me out of my stride. I'm walking around during the day, trying to avoid all the places I used to have lunch in case I'm seen, you'd be almost embarrassed.

Such was the impression for Peter that he was not "displaying gender" in a socially sanctioned manner after his employment circumstances were curtailed that he felt he had to seclude himself away from former colleagues in fear that he would encounter them in public and have to explain his situation. For him, working only part-time meant that he was not fulfilling a gender appropriate role as a man – namely,

that of being in a full-time professional position. Consequently, this new part-time role he found himself occupying left him with feelings of shame and stigma at the loss of his full-time status. Here Peter's account resonates with other research showing that because male social networks are often predominately work-related, removal from the productive sphere is especially scarring for men as with the loss of work also comes the loss of those social networks (Russell 1999).

Seamus's story echoed much of this. In 2012, he was made redundant from the engineering firm he had worked for in Dublin for over a decade. He said that whenever he meets people socially, one of the first questions they tend to ask him is, "What do you do?" But, he continued, "after I'd been let go, I'd start to mumble, saying something about being 'in between things', and you'd come away feeling like absolute shit cause you're not actually working." Put simply, when Seamus found himself unable to answer the ubiquitously-asked question "What do you do?" he found himself discredited as a man.

In fact, it was a commonplace experience among my sample to understand under-employment or unemployment as a deviation from a gendered norm of continuous, full-time employment along a defined career path. When this path was fractured by a period of temporary labour market disruption, the deviation was framed by a majority of respondents in terms of a crisis. For some, the threat to their masculine identity was almost existential in nature.

Masculinity, gender, breadwinning

But there is a further instance in which respondents' economic fortunes were framed by gender. In several cases, those I interviewed spoke forcefully of how they corrected this deviation from gender normative expectations that men be their families' primary breadwinners by seeking out and securing full-time professional work across the EU28 so as to again become strong financial providers. This was a key impetus behind their decided to Euro-commute, and this was preferable than remaining under- or unemployed in

Ireland. In effect, these respondents adopted what Shows and Gerstel (2009, 179) call a "neotraditionalist model of masculinity" in reprising a breadwinner role they had occupied prior to Ireland's economic crash by commuting overseas for work. For them, being a good husband/partner and/or good father was principally about being a good economic provider. Therefore, regaining this position after a period where their breadwinner status was interrupted restored to them a real sense of themselves as themselves.

Joe's account epitomized this strong "neotraditionalist" stance. Like those quoted in the last section, he felt frustration, even a loss of self-belief, after becoming unemployed from his engineering job during the "Celtic Tiger" implosion. But, as Joe phrased it, he refused to "sit around on my laurels" once his career began to deteriorate from mid-2008 onwards. He could easily have stayed in Ireland, reduced his outgoings, and undertaken occasional freelance work, he said. In this way, Joe and his family could have got by, survived. Instead: "I got out there," Joe stated, "and earned money whatever way I could."

This sentiment was shared by several, the attitude almost taken-for-granted: "You do what you have to do," said one in relation to the need to earn a living; "I mean," said another, "you follow the work. That's it basically; no work in Dublin – fine. Put me on the plane!"

Joe continued:

> I was hanging around [unemployed] for a few months, and I said to myself, "Fuck this! I can't be watching day-time television at my age [forty-one], I need to be out there, doing something." So I made some calls, did the whole CV thing—and soon I was getting on the red-eye at 6.30am.

In a time of crisis, Joe reasserted control over his environment by Euro-commuting. His account accords with Connoll's (2005) observation that men (in their own estimation, at least) are under heavier social

pressure than women to remain in full-time employment, and that social definitions of what it is to be a man is to be working full-time. Unable to live up to this hegemonic ideal in Ireland, Joe counteracted his feelings of male inadequacy and regained a sense of agency by commuting from his home outside Cork city to work in Glasgow. For him, his rightful place was in the workplace, bringing back a paycheque.

And a number of others chimed with Joe's notion that Euro-commuting was restorative of their masculinity. "Look, I'm doing this, I'm away. But I take great satisfaction in the thought that my kids see me as a good role model, willing to get out and work," was how one respondent summed up his situation. Another stated: "You're back on the horse, you're back in the game, and it's good, believe me." "Doubts you might have had creeping around for a while, they're gone really," a further respondent added.

The economic vulnerability these respondents endured as a consequence of the "Celtic Tiger" demise was solved by leaving recession-blighted Ireland, finding work further afield. There were suggestions here of Euro-commuting being another form of "compensatory masculinity" that other research has explored in varying contexts (Ezzell 2012). By redeeming their breadwinner status, they were also redeeming a sense of their own manhood, their own confidence in themselves. In a manner of speaking, what commenced as a personal "man-cession" transformed into a "man-covery" through the act of Euro-commuting.

And, interestingly, the language in which respondents describe these attempts at "manning-up" rest on stereotypical masculine scripts of fortitude, sacrifice, denial, renunciation. Several spoke of the reserves of mental strength they had to tap into to cope psychologically with the pressures of working overseas while still supporting family back home. Others still detailed the considerable self-discipline required to master a commuter's schedule regarding pinpoint punctuality in getting to airports on time, and so on. Meanwhile, almost all alluded to the stoical attitude they had assumed to undertake this transnational mobility—commuting was emotionally tough, not for the faint-of-heart, was the implication.

It is noteworthy, however, that this resurgent breadwinner persona was not a unanimous or uncontested narrative thread running throughout all interviews. Frequently, even as respondents extolled the benefits of Euro-commuting in one breath, in the very next they spoke more reluctantly, more ambivalently about their new working arrangement. Many who embraced Euro-commuting also lamented the fact they now had to compromise on more egalitarian ideals around parenting/fatherhood as a result of working overseas. The reality was that a "neotraditional model of masculinity" did clash, and openly at times, with a more contemporary, non-traditional model of fatherhood/working. Most respondents were mindful of the major sacrifices their female partners were now making so they could fulfil their provider role. This was something they alluded to unprompted, something a number expressed considerable regret over.

"She's essentially a single mother while I'm gone," complained one respondent of his wife's greater childcare responsibilities now. "It's sad seeing the kids' haircuts on Skype, not in person," said another of being away from his school-age children during weekdays. Another still said, "You read about these 'deadbeat dads' – guys who are just not there, you know. And, well, I mean I work for them and everything, but . . ."

Damien summed up these dilemmas that Euro-commuting provoked among a sizable number in the sample. "I'm the provider, sure," he said of his weekday absences overseas working, "but there's so much else you can't provide for because you're doing this." Damien appreciated that Euro-commuting allowed him to be a good earner for his family again. Nonetheless, he could no longer offer his family the same emotional support – could no longer do the same "emotion work" (Rao 2017) – compared to when they cohabited as a more orthodox nuclear family.

As such, what emerged from analysis of a number of the transcripts was a normative discourse of involved fatherhood running alongside a more "neotraditionalist" normative discourse of masculinity and breadwinning. Or, put otherwise, there was a tension at times between the opportunities (breadwinning) and the challenges (reduced childcare involvement) that Euro-commuting afforded. No, respondents did not want to be separated from their families; and yes, they wanted to share in childcare and other household labour; but, tellingly, providing for them financially trumped these familial responsibilities.

Masculinity, mobility, immobility

In and through their work-related mobility overseas the vast majority of respondents saw themselves as living up to important masculine ideals around breadwinning that had been undermined as a result of enduring a lay-off or a reduction in employed hours back in Ireland. Paraphrasing West and Zimmermann (1987) again, they understood themselves to be "doing masculinity" appropriately now: Euro-commuting was restorative of a sense of proper manhood. They were able again to be the men they were.

But among a subset of my sample there was another layer to how they framed this particular form of commuter mobility. The analysis shows that, for certain respondents, positioning themselves in relation to the hegemonic ideal of the male provider also involved opposing themselves to others – and specifically other *men* – who did not live up to this ideal. For them, men who had not become mobile for work after becoming unemployed were somehow not fully men, had somehow failed to fully internalize normative codes of masculine behaviour by remaining out of work in Ireland.

For instance, Brendan, in discussing his commuting routine, talked at length of "guys stagnating" since the recession started who had neither emigrated nor undertook any commuter-style mobility in search of gainful employment. "There's fellas sitting around on their arses at home who could do this [Euro-commuting], but choose not to," he went on. Another, Eoin, similarly stated: "I know a half-dozen mates of

mine let go lately who are still lounging around, doing fuck all . . . Like, they could show a bit of initiative, if you know what I mean." Meanwhile, Peter, quoted earlier, seeking to distance himself from men who had been made redundant in Ireland, made repeated references to those he suggested were now "scrounging" off the welfare system, "stewing" in their predicament. What might reasonably be expected here is a greater empathy for those men – like them – who had had to endure involuntary unemployment or a significant drop in paid employment hours. This, however, was not the case.

Instead, rather bluntly, and rather divisively, these respondents sought to contrast their mobility with that of their peers who had remained in Ireland, setting up a binary notion of those who showed a sort of resilient masculinity (by Euro-commuting) and those who did not (by staying). What they constructed, in effect, was an explicit relationship between manhood and mobility itself. Those like themselves who commuted cross-borders for work were displaying a "successful masculinity", whereas those who did not engage in some form of transnational mobility thereby displayed a "failed masculinity".

Interestingly, while such dichotomous tropes of "successful masculinity/mobility" on the one hand and "failed masculinity/immobility" on the other ran throughout a number of interviews, they were most in evidence among those who made the firmest connections between masculinity and breadwinning itself. Put otherwise, the more committed a respondent was to the idea of men as breadwinners, then the more likely they were to hold unsympathetic views of out-of-work professional males in Ireland. In this, their behaviour accords with findings from other research suggesting that the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity is not simply a matter of men domineering and denigrating women but also involves intra-gender power dynamics so as to create subordinate masculinities (Connell 1995; Kimmel 2006).

One respondent took this relationship between Euro-commuting and conforming to normative masculine codes of behaviour a step further. Discussing his schedule, Peter reinforced this strongly gendered

narrative underpinning Euro-commuting. He said he now recognizes many faces on his weekly flight to Munich, and had recently begun to get friendly with some of the other passengers. Of these other passengers, these other faces, he said, "The lads on that flight, you know, we're doing this [working overseas] for our families." Here, Peter failed to countenance that part of the Euro-commuting population was composed of women – and not only "lads". For Peter, Euro-commuters were men, and such men had families in Ireland reliant on them. The longer Peter was a Euro-commuter the more homosocial it became. As he got to know others on his flight, Euro-commuting took on the characteristics of a fraternity, the plane filled with men like him. In fact, for Peter, such behaviour was exemplary of how a man should behave, and he added, "If you ask me, we're the unsung heroes of Ireland."

All considered, Peter saw his actions and those of men like him as amounting to a display of gallant, courageous masculine agency in the face of severe socio-economic dislocation. His reference to heroism may be an exaggeration in the overall context of the other narratives. And yet, it was also instructive. By Euro-commuting, Peter understood himself not only as a stalwart keeping his family financially afloat. Through the remittances he sent back to Ireland, he understood himself too as keeping a bankrupt country from complete fiscal collapse. Peter may not be celebrated. He may not be exalted. Actually, he may not even be recognized. But, in his view, men like himself were saviours of the nation.

Conclusions

By focusing attention on a peculiar form of intra-EU mobility, I have illustrated explicitly the enduring link between masculinity and breadwinning for middle-class, professional men. The empirical presentation has shown how respondents' decision to Euro-commute related closely to their precarious economic status in austerity-hit Ireland. Consequently, the motivation to become a Euro-commuter and find well-remunerated work overseas was framed initially as an expedient way of maintaining and/or restoring class-specific lifestyles and consumption practices they had grown accustomed to in Ireland. But probing behind

this opening and obvious monetary account of Euro-commuting, it soon became apparent that a strong and distinct gendered dimension influenced their mobility decision-making too. For these professional male respondents, it was clear that the fallout from the economic downturn jeopardized not just their financial situation – but also their privileged identities as robust familial breadwinners. In order to compensate for the sense of inadequacy felt in the face of this threatened breadwinning capacity, they opted to commute overseas for work instead of remaining unemployed or under-employed in Ireland. And in resuming what they saw as their rightful place in the world of professional work, their gendered identities as primary provider figures in their households had now been largely restored, largely shored up. As such, much of the confidence in their own sense of manhood that had eroded during the tumult of the economic crisis had now been repaired.

As the analysis here demonstrated, there were few hints to suggest that through this commuter mobility respondents were in any meaningful way "undoing gender" (Deutsch 2007). Some certainly expressed regret over the fact that they could not be as present around the house as they would like so as to partake in a more equitable share of childcare and other duties. Their current absences from the domestic sphere as a result of working overseas directly contradicted their commitment to ideals of involved, active fatherhood. But rather than reinventing gendered strategies and practices around financial provisioning and emotion work in the wake of the economic crisis – in other words, rather than reorganising the household along less traditional lines where the male partner retreats somewhat from the role of primary breadwinner – instead they relied on more time-honoured, hegemonic ideals of masculinity defined primarily by their position as main household provider. In essence, the manner in which they coped with the shock of economic insecurity was by a valiant display of manliness—they felt their actions to be a performance of "successful" masculinity in a time of crisis. Interestingly, they pitted these actions against the supposedly "failed" masculinity of unemployed men who opted to remain in Ireland and not seek work

abroad. In this binary framing of successful/failed masculinity there is a circular logic to some respondents' accounts: I commute, therefore I am a man; I do not commute, therefore I am not a man.

These findings underscore three significant issues. First, in terms of white-collar professional employment, the economic opportunities in globalized European countries like Ireland may no longer offer all professional groups adequate opportunities to realise career ambitions there. As a result, some members of certain professional groups may be forced to strategically transnationalize their career trajectories across the EU in order to fulfil such aspirations. Second, and related to this, this professional white-collar strategizing appears to be crosscut in important ways by particular gender ideologies. Extrapolating from the findings above, the likelihood seems to be that it is predominantly male partners in heterosexual partnerships who will undertake cross-border mobility when local economic disruption undermines earning/promotion prospects. It would appear that professional male identity and self-worth are especially vulnerable to such economic setbacks. Third, and finally, as a consequence of this brittle masculinity, a certain re-traditionalizing of gendered dynamics can be seen to play out in such middle-class professional households whereby the breadwinning role of male partners appeared to be prioritized in major family decision-making processes. A certain redrawing of the conventional boundaries of the caring division of labour between male and female partners might be expected during such periods of economic dislocation. But, tellingly, in my study this redrawing was very much along the lines of restoring the breadwinner status of respondents in the face of challenges to this role. Arguably, the most salient point about this Euro-commuting phenomenon is how it emphasises the continued centrality of breadwinning as a principal prescription of hegemonic heterosexual white-collar masculinity.

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