Trawling Deeper Seas: the gendered production of seafood in Western Australia.

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University 1998.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Leonie Stella.
Dedication

For my three wise and bold daughters who go everywhere and do everything.
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Abstract

This thesis explores the sexual division of labour in three worksites associated with the Western Australian fishing industry: fishers’ households, a seafood processing company, and fishing vessels. There has been no previous substantial study of the labour of women in Australian fishing industries.

My research has been undertaken primarily through interviewing women and men who work in the Western Australian fishing industry, and my findings are presented through a comparison with overseas literature relative to each site. As I found, in the households of fishermen, women do unpaid and undervalued labour which includes servicing men and children; managing household finances and operating fishing enterprises. In seafood processing companies women are allocated the lowest paid and least rewarding work which is regarded as “women’s work”. On the factory floor issues of class, race/ethnicity and gender intersect so that the majority of women employed in hands-on processing work are migrant women from a non-English speaking background. The majority of women who work at sea are cook/deckhands who are confronted by a rigid sexual division of labour, and work in a hyper-masculine workplace. The few other women who have found a niche which enables them to enjoy an outdoor lifestyle while they earn their own living, are those who work as autonomous independent small boat fishers.

In each site there is evidence that women - individually and collectively - exercise some power in determining how and where they work, but they remain marginalised from the more lucrative sites of the industry, and have limited access to economic and social power.
The findings suggest that the masculine domination of the fishing industry symbolically and structurally maintains a conventional sexual division of labour. In this the industry follows general Australian trends: Australian historical and sociological literature confirms women’s constant battle with a rigid sexual division of labour in both the so-called public and private spheres of their lives. Australia also has a peculiarly masculinist culture which supports and maintains sex-segregation. At the same time, the fishing industry has unique features which are not replicated throughout the whole of Australia. These include the extensive responsibilities carried by women during lengthy absences at sea of their men; and the possibility for women to be “tough”, to push “confining notions of femininity” through involvement in this industry. The thesis tries to make sense of such findings.
Acknowledgments

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Introduction

“There aren't any women in fishing, are there?”

In this thesis my aim is to explore the labour of women in the Western Australian fishing industry. My interest is in three worksites related to the industry: fishers’ households, seafood processing plants, and fishing vessels. Before undertaking this exploration a review of what is already known about Australian women in fishing is necessary.

Any account of women's labour in the Australian fishing industry must begin in Australia’s pre-colonial history. The first fishers were Aboriginal women and men, and archaeological evidence of their exploitation of marine resources can be found all along the coast, in rivers and estuaries. Aboriginal women used various methods for gathering shellfish and crustaceans and hunted fish through spearing with “gidgees” or striking with “kylies”\(^1\). By the end of the nineteenth century however, the labour of Aboriginal people, especially women, had been exploited in the development of whaling, sealing and pearling industries (Reynolds, 1982; Hunt, 1986; Lines, 1991). Although whaling and sealing were the first export industries developed by the European colonisers they showed little interest in developing other fisheries, preferring instead to exploit the land and develop the primary industries of wool, wheat and gold and timber production (Bolton, 1981; Lines, 1991; Tull, 1993).

In general Aboriginal people have been marginalised in the twentieth century development of the major commercial fisheries especially trawling (Zann, 1995: 26), but many have continued to use the marine resources in

\(^{1}\) Aboriginal people use “gidgees” (long spears), and “kylies” (throwing sticks), while wading in shallow water.
their daily subsistence, and a few have participated in the development of community based commercial fishing enterprises (Wilson, 1990; ATSIC, 1994).

The major commercial fisheries such as lobster, snapper, prawn and scallop fisheries did not develop until after the 1950s and Italian, Greek, Portuguese and Yugoslav people as well Anglo-Celtic Australians played a major part in "pioneering" these fisheries. Difficulties associated with a poor market, keeping fish fresh and transporting them to market restricted the growth of the industry until after World War II and fishers and their families frequently faced poverty (Tull, 1992; Australian Fishing Industry Oral History Project²). Increasing concern about the depletion of local fish stocks, the lack of export potential and competition from imported fish products eventually reduced the numbers of traditional professional fishers continuing to work in a minor industry which catered for the local market. Those remaining lived what Malcolm Tull refers to as a "traditional lifestyle" living and working as family groups along the rivers and estuarine areas around Fremantle, Mandurah, Bunbury, Albany and Esperance well into the mid-twentieth century. In contrast to this situation the rock lobster, prawn and scallop industries of the mid-West and North West coast became increasingly lucrative and capital intensive ventures as they developed after the 1960s.

Malcolm Tull (1992; 1993) published his papers on the development of the fishing industry in response to a challenge issued by Broeze (1989) suggesting that the history of the fishing industry in Australia had been neglected. This neglect has made my task of researching women's

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² In 1992 I was employed by Malcolm Tull as a research assistant collating Australian fishing industry oral history transcripts collected for a proposed publication. The project was funded by the Australian Fishing Industry Research and Development Council. The Western Australian transcripts are held in the oral history section of the Public Records Office of Western Australia (PRO 1989, OH2266) The transcripts for other states, copies of which are held by Dr. Tull and were made available to me, have not been catalogued.
participation in the industry doubly difficult for, as Paul Thompson noted (1985: 3), the “masculine image” of the fishing industry conceals fishermen’s dependency on the labour of women. Records of the industry, published and unpublished accounts of fishing communities, articles in professional fishers’ journals, and government reports concentrate on the successful development of the industry, the exploits of men and boats, or the quality and quantity of the product. The contribution of women to the development of the industry is rarely acknowledged. Their unpaid labour as wives/partners of fishers is taken for granted and undervalued; as labourers in processing plants they are treated as invisible; as cook/deckhands and professional fishers, they are either ignored or treated as “exceptional women”. Information about women associated with the industry has to be gleaned from oral history transcripts, or reading between the lines of government reports or archival material.

Working for the Family: Fishers’ households

In an Australian Fisheries publication of 1993, Michael Kailis was described as “a legend in an industry which is not short of self-made, entrepreneurial leaders”, and was asked to reveal the secret of his success as an owner of fishing vessels and processing plants (Joll, 1993:26-7). When establishing new fishing enterprises in remote areas he claimed that the secret was to “keep the family unit together”. He said: “Put the factory there [adjacent to the new fishing grounds], have the family there, end of story.” In a half page article he referred to the family seventeen times but made no direct reference to the labour of women as wives, cook/deckhands, skippers or processors his company had employed. His only reference to women was in his statement that when establishing a new venture support for the family had to be provided because “Australian women are tough, they’ll go to

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3 When a woman is employed as a deckhand it is assumed that her primary role is that of cook but she is also expected to ‘assist the men’ sorting and grading the product. Men are employed primarily as deckhands and usually only cook if there is no female deckhand on board. The last hired or least experienced male deckhand is then usually pressured to take on the cooking.
tough areas. But at the end of the day you’ve got to give them what they want” (Joll, 1993:26-7). This statement is based on the stereotypical image of women in Australian pioneering legends passively and stoically enduring deprivation, hardships and isolation in remote areas, but it also reveals that women make demands in their own interests that are sometimes met in recognition of the fact that they will “stand by their man”.

In oral history projects the few fishermen’s wives who have been interviewed recalled how they balanced the incorporation of their labour into their husbands’ work with performing household labour and child rearing while working under primitive conditions or facing poverty. The women responded differently to this experience depending on the extent to which they actually enjoyed living an outdoor lifestyle or managing a family business. One woman who worked between the 1950s and 1970s with her fisher husband claimed that it was often she who insisted that her husband stop doing the dishes and go fishing with her. Although she found it hard to balance her housework and child care with fishing she loved it so much she became a professional fisher in her own right (PRO, 1989, OH2475). A woman from the same community, however, claimed she hated fishing and had never wanted to have anything to do with it (PRO, 1989, OH2266). She recalled how ineffectual her resistance was, and described taking her baby onto a boat in a pram, injuring herself trying to beach a boat, and selling the product from home. She complained bitterly about fishing lengthening the hours she had to work and interfering with her ability to run her household.

Fishermen interviewed for oral history projects (cited above) rarely mentioned their wives but some of the “traditional lifestylers”, who

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4 This section draws on material from the Australian Fishing Industry Oral History Project and that of Wills (1989) which is also held in the Public Records Office of Western Australia (PRO, 1989, OH2475/1-7).
claimed they fished primarily because it was their preferred lifestyle, did
acknowledge their assistance. Arthur Horner, a fisher during the 1940s to
1970s recalled his wife’s ability to do “pretty heavy work” including loading
boxes of fish, and stated that she was a “wonderful manager” who had
operated a guest house to enable him to continue fishing (PRO, 1989,
OH2266). Bill Tatham referred to his wife Rita as if she was an indispensable
appendage; he called her his “right arm”, and said she filleted fish for hours,
kept the books, and ran a fish shop and caravan park while he worked as a
fisherman (PRO, 1989, OH2475). In the households of some fishers women
as well as men had to work at other jobs because they could not live solely
from fishing and Ethel Toussaint worked with her husband “…fencing and
all this sort of business” as well as fishing (PRO, 1989, OH2266).

In her work on the labour of wives who are “married to the job”, Janet
Finch (1983) suggested that the notion of being a “helpmeet”⁵ justified the
incorporation of wives’ labour into their husband’s occupations. As
“helpmeets” they worked as assistants or junior partners and regarded
themselves as working in a team. Australian historian, Marilyn Lake (1987),
asserted in her study of soldier settlement in Australia (1915-1938) that the
colonial term “helpmate” was promoted by the state in its push for the
establishment of a yeomanry - with a family unit of production - pioneering
the land. She noted that the result was gross exploitation of women’s labour
and illhealth, even death, for some women who worked like “slaves” to
keep the family enterprise going. Settlers’ wives were expected to take
primary responsibility in the domestic sphere as ideal wives and mothers
but “in the interests of their husbands, agricultural production and the
state” they were also required to labour in the “rough outdoors”(Lake, 1987:
184-5). Lake, who dealt only with farm wives, suggests that the term

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⁵ Although the term helpmate is used in everyday language, I follow Janet Finch (1983) in using
helpmeet because it reflects the biblical origins of the word, and the meaning associated with the role of
being the “wife of” a man: a complementary but unequal assistant/helper or partner.
helpmate “served the hegemonic purpose of reconciling the contradictions of rural women’s position”. The observations by fishers, noted above, suggest that fishers’ wives may well have something in common with farmers’ wives in this regard.

**Factory workers: Seafood processing plants.**

As far as I am aware no women working in processing factories have been interviewed by oral historians, and no research on their work in Western Australia has been published⁶. There are no reliable statistics available to show how many have been, or remain employed, and they are the least visible people in the industry. At different times during the development of the industry fishers’ wives and other female relatives have been called upon to process produce, especially when an unexpectedly big catch has required immediate processing, but the seasonal nature of the work has also involved itinerant workers or travellers. There is some anecdotal evidence that this side of the industry was not very closely regulated in the past, and that people were often unofficially or even illegally employed. The history of this labour force requires research which may reveal the changing profile of the workers. It appears that female relatives have been used, that it is now considered work of “last resort”, and that in recent years it has been rare for fishers’ wives to take it on. There is also increasing evidence that the majority of process workers, especially in prawn and scallop processing, are most likely to be recently arrived migrant women from a non-English speaking background. In the lobster industry, however, there appear to be fewer women handling the product because most lobsters are prepared for live export. They are no longer cooked but held live in tanks supervised by men. One factory I visited in 1995 had twenty men looking after hundreds of live lobsters, and one woman - who had been with the company for thirty

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⁶ The only paper on seafood processing by women that I have been able to access is an Honours Thesis on the employment of Chinese Timorese women whom the author suggested were refugees coerced into accepting the work in order to gain residential status (Berger, K: ‘A Study of Chinese Timorese Women in the Prawning Industry in Darwin’, Dept. of Anthropology, UWA, 1983).
years - was brought in once a week to cook lobsters for the local market. In
other larger companies such as the Fremantle Fishermen’s Co-operative, the
processing work is now contracted out and the workers sub-contracted.

Working on Boats
Men interviewed for the Australian Fishing Industry oral history project
revealed a stereotypical attitude towards women working on fishing vessels.
Although none actually invoked any old superstitions or taboos about
women on boats, some claimed that women were “troublesome” and others
suggested they were most useful for keeping the boat clean and “civilising”
the male crew. One skipper, who stated that he had a reputation akin to that
of Captain Bligh because he ran a tight ship and made rules to be obeyed,
said he banned women and dogs because “one brought fleas, and the other
trouble”. The fleet Master of a major trawling company in Western
Australia suggested a solution to the “problem” caused by women on boats.
He stated:

I am always happy when I hear of a new girl recruit on
a boat if she is with a boyfriend, or she falls in love with
somebody and she becomes a partner of somebody on
the boat, because - how would I put it? It causes less
friction. Instead of, let’s say, five males or six males
saying, “Gee, isn’t she nice, I’d like to do so and so, and
so and so...”, I try and encourage the girls to try and fall
in love with somebody, at least [pause] you know?
Everybody else accepts it better when they are in a
paired relationship (PRO, 1989, OH2266).

Amongst the 250 interviews in the Australian Fishing Industry oral history
collection, two “exceptional” women who had skippered boats as
professional lobster fishers in Western Australia during the 1980s were
interviewed. Malcolm Tull included them in his history of the
development of the Western Australian industry and compared them to the
“traditional lifestylers” because of the way they fished (Tull, 1993). There
have been other women working fishing boats in Western Australia, some as wives assisting their husbands and a few as independent fishers. From my own preliminary research it appears that at least ten women have qualified as Masters and skippered prawn trawlers in Western Australia since the late 1960s.

**Western Australian Fisheries**

The only community study of a Western Australian fishery that I am aware of is that of Guy Wright (1992). It is a participant observation study of the social relations and fishing practice of seasonal lobster fishers working from the Houtman Abrolhos Islands. Wright’s study is rare and valuable as an ethnography of a seasonal Western Australian fishing community, but it contains no gender analysis; the masculine domination of the industry is merely implicit in the author’s account of the lifestyle of the fishermen and their crew. However, he makes an important observation in suggesting that the Western Australian rock lobster fishery is “as different as it could be” from that in Newfoundland where fishermen are “lionized as impoverished but proud inheritors of a longstanding tradition, and the carriers of the primary social identification and symbolism of the province” (Wright, 1992: iv). Wright attributes this to the limited entry management system in W.A. which has produced a fishery of “immense wealth” which is frequently “touted as the best managed fishery in the world”. The Western Australian fisheries also differ from other fisheries which have been the subject of academic research because the fishers are not descendants of generations of fishers who have “lived the fishing” (Thompson, Wailey and Lummis, 1983) for hundreds of years, or been exclusively dependent on maritime economies.

The capital intensive and limited entry fisheries of Western Australia provided $504 million to the national fishery income of $1.5 billion for the
1992/3 year (Kikeros, 1995: 5). This is about one third of the value of the production for the whole of Australia (Australian Fisheries V. 52, No. 2, February 1993). The industry is dominated by entrepreneurs, almost exclusively men, who own the fishing licences, vessels and processing companies. They also dominate Fishing Industry Advisory Councils, which are made up of professional fishers and processors who influence State and Commonwealth governments’ resource development and management policies. While fishers often come into conflict with government over such issues as restricted access to the resource the government does support “free enterprise” and capital development of this primary industry with links to the international political economy.

In summary then, the limited research which has been carried out on the fishing industry suggests that the industry has had the potential to create income earning opportunities for women as well as men, but the production of seafood is highly sex-segregated. Very few women have entered the industry as professional fishers or owners of fishing enterprises. Using census data from 1991, the WA Department of Training estimated in 1994 that men represented 96% of those employed as fishers, deckhands and seamen. Women accounted for 56% of those employed as fish process workers and 60-70% of them were from a non-English speaking background (DOT, 1994: 15-20). Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women; Anglo-Celtic, Italian, Greek, Yugoslav and Portuguese women, have all contributed to this development of the fishing industry but their role and contribution has never been recognised. These tentative findings are in accord with feminist research regarding the horizontal and vertical division of labour between men and women (Cockburn, 1983; 1986; Game and Pringle, 1983; Matthews, 1984) and “confining notions of femininity” (Enloe, 1989: 16). As Claire Williams asserts, this sexual division of labour has been a central feature of
the development of the Australian economy (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 67).

In her analysis of the sexual division of labour in the international political economy, Cynthia Enloe claimed that all industries depended on the exploited labour of women who worked as wives, mothers and “sexy broads” (1989). She suggested that if we want to know anything about any industry we should ask the women themselves.

My thesis is that the Western Australian fishing industry is dependent on a sexual division of labour which is of benefit to individual men as well as the industry itself. I suggest that the industry has a masculine image and culture as well as a structure which maintains and sustains a sexual division of labour. However, I also consider the experiences of women within the wider context of Australian society which has been described as a society of “institutionalised gender oppression” (Connell, 1987: 220). Through interviewing women who work in the fisheries as paid and unpaid labourers my aim is to demonstrate the extent to which women adapt to the conditions of their work, participate in making their own lives, or ‘break out’ and live autonomous and independent lifestyles.

Chapter 1 is my methodology chapter. Although I also interviewed men my priority was to ask women to share their experiences as fishers’ wives, process workers, cook/deckhands and skippers. Chapter 2 traces the history and social construction of the sexual division of labour in Australia. This is presented in two parts: a brief historical overview of the development of the sexual division of labour within the context of a colonial history of class, race/ethnic and gender relations is followed by a discussion of contemporary changes and the continuity of ideas and practices which have resulted in Australia having one of the most sex-segregated workforces of the OECD countries.
In the following three chapters I analyse the experiences of women in fishers' households, processing plants, and on fishing boats: In Chapter 3 I analyse gender relations within fishermen's households to show the impact of the men's work on the lives of their wives within the context of marriage. I also assess the extent to which these women participate in the shaping of their own lives and are able to negotiate space for themselves. The primary theme in Chapter 4 is the labour process in a seafood factory and I explore the intersection of class, ethnic and gender relations as well as the women's struggle with a sexual division of labour. The women share their stories of how they struggle for a "fair deal" at work, while providing for their families. Chapter 5 is structured in two parts to enable a comparison between the experiences of independent women fishers, and women employed as cook/deckhands or trainee skippers on trawlers. In these three chapters, a review of overseas literature relevant to each site precedes the presentation of the material, and a variety of feminist theories are drawn in to support the analysis.

In Chapter 6 I summarise my findings to show the extent to which the industry is dependent on the unpaid and undervalued labour of women and how women negotiate the sexual division of labour in their pursuit of autonomy and economic security. I also present some conclusions about the industry in its Australian context and make recommendations for further research.
Chapter 1

"Don’t let the men fob you off:
methodology for research for women.

Western Australian Fishing Industry Research

As noted in my introduction, the fishing industry of Australia has rarely been the subject of historical, sociological or economic research\(^1\) and in 1989 a maritime historian, Frank Broeze, suggested that the reason for this neglect was that “Fishermen and their communities have never mustered the numbers to make any significant inroads into the social and economic histories of urban or rural Australia” (1989: 94). He also suggested that writing a history of the industry would be difficult because it has been dominated by small, often family operations which have left few formal records. It was in response to Broeze’s challenge that Malcolm Tull published his two articles; "Profits and Lifestyles: Western Australia’s Fishers" (1992) and "The Development of the Australian Fishing Industry: A Preliminary Survey" (1993). He also co-ordinated the Australian Fishing Industry Research and Development Council (FIRDC) Oral History project (PRO, 1989: OH2266), and the publication of a select bibliography (Smith and Tull, 1990). These projects were funded by the FIRDC and I was invited to assist with the collating of the 250 interviews. The interviews had already been conducted and transcribed and it was my task to “cut and paste”, and organise them into themes in preparation for a publication. The project was never completed due to a lack of on-going funding, but it was through

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1 Two recent unpublished studies are Wilson, Vicki, "An analysis of factors influencing the development of policy for management of Trochus", a Thesis submitted for Honours in Environmental Science, Murdoch University, 1990, and Wright, Guy, "Island Season: Social relations and fishing practice at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands, Western Australia", a Doctoral Thesis presented at the University of Western Australia in 1992. The former is a study of a remote Aboriginal community enterprise and the latter, based on an anthropologist’s participant observations, makes no reference to the sexual division of labour.
working on this project with Dr Tull that I developed the ideas for a project focussing on the labour of women. I was initially interested in researching the history of women's participation in the fishing industry but as I was at that time tutoring in a sociology of women's work course I became more concerned about the impact of the sexual division of labour on the lives of women in the contemporary context. Both the bibliography and the collection of interviews for the FIRDC confirmed the "masculine image" of the industry and obscured the contribution of women's labour. Only two women who fished professionally were interviewed, only one fisherman's wife was interviewed about her own work as a wife, and no women who worked as cooks, deckhands or as processors or retailers of the product were interviewed. Occasionally fishermen acknowledged the assistance of their wives as helpmeets or commented on the presence of women on fishing vessels.

Archival records of the industry, published and unpublished accounts of fishing communities, articles in professional fishers' journals, and government reports concentrate on the successful development of the industry, the exploits of men and boats, or the quality and quantity of the product. Broeze's suggestion that writing a history of the industry would be difficult because it has been dominated by small, often family operations which have left few formal records, not only conceals the extent to which women have participated in the development of the industry; it implied to me that feminist research would be doubly difficult.

Formulating my own research
My preliminary research, referred to earlier, led me away from a topic focussing on the history of the role, contribution or participation of women in the fishing industry and towards a consideration of contemporary issues confronting women today. In order to clarify my topic, and set the
boundaries of the research, I contacted the Fisheries Department, the
Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Maritime College of Technical and
Further Education (TAFE), the Western Australian Fishing Industry
Council (WAFIC), and owners and managers of processing companies in
1994. This research took me a thousand kilometres to the south and north
of my home in the city of Perth. Statistical evidence of women's
participation in the industry was impossible to elicit. The Fisheries
Department of Western Australia issues fishing licences to boats, not
individual people; Skippers tickets are issued by the Department of
Transport but are not separated from tickets issued to other Masters of
vessels. The ABS includes fishers in the category of Agricultural and
Forestry workers, and also advised me that their statistics on seafood
processors could not be extracted from those pertaining to all food
processors. I attempted to collect my own statistics but soon found this was
also difficult. For example, the Fisheries Department provided me with a
list of companies issued with processing licences but when I attempted to
contact them I met with resistance. Although some of the larger processing
companies, such as the Fremantle Fisherman's Co-op, Norwest Seafoods
and Vinci Seafoods were quite happy to share information with me, many
others either hung up on me or refused me an interview. It was suggested
to me, by people who had worked in the industry, that processing
companies did not always adhere to government regulations in relation to
hiring and firing casual labour and therefore feared I was making
investigations on behalf of immigration authorities or the Taxation
Department. The only general statistical information I was able to obtain
was that from the Western Australian Department of Training which
informed me that more than 65% of seafood process workers were women
from a non-English speaking background.
During my research trip in 1994 I networked my way across the various fisheries and collected the names of potential informants from all over the state but I decided to concentrate mainly on people working in fisheries operating out of a North West port, to which I have allocated the pseudonym *Shrimpton*. In *Shrimpton* permanent residents or itinerant crew are employed on prawn and scallop trawlers, and snapper boats. The town also has several processing plants including *Adamson's Ocean Products* (also a pseudonym) which I decided to use as a case study for women's experiences in prawn and scallop processing.

I returned to *Shrimpton* for further field work in 1995 and I lived in a caravan park for five weeks while I conducted most of the interviews for the study. Crew and fishers' wives were also interviewed in Fremantle, the port for the capital city of Perth, because many of the major fisheries' vessels and processing companies operate from that port. In Fremantle, and in the North West I also interviewed Fisheries Officers, process company management staff, women who manage fishing fleets, Health and Safety officers from WorkSafe (WA), trade union representatives, staff from Skillshare, a Regional Development Commission, members of the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council, the Marine and Coastal Community Network, and staff from the Technical and Further Education college.

**Methodology**

Although I have interviewed both men and women, the invisibility of women in the secondary material together with the preliminary research difficulties, resulted in the decision that my study would be primarily based on women's own work experiences. My study is also qualitative rather than quantitative and I have therefore used a combination of feminist
Experiential Analysis, “sense-making” and ethnographic methodologies\(^2\). My method is one of feminist Experiential Analysis in that I rely primarily on indepth-interviews with women, which were conducted with the assumption that “women’s experience of their social and personal worlds” is valid and valuable. I do not adhere to the “blueprint” for this method as discussed by Shields and Dervin (1993: 68) for two reasons: I do not agree that when conducting research with women “consciousness-raising” is “more important than the product(s) of the research”, or that the research should always be an act of collaboration between the subjects and the researcher. Both these approaches are based on an assumption that the informants and researcher share the same political views and goals, or that it is the role of the researcher to impose a politically “correct” approach. It may be possible for a group of women to work together in this way if they were united in an action research project aimed at solving one particular problem, however, this is not the case in my study. From the “sense-making” method of research I take the premise that all humans are different and are freely moving actors who construct their own experiences (Shields and Dervin, 1993: 73). They may respond to change, or be “constrained by hegemonic forces” but conducting the research with this premise allows the researcher to see the variety of ways in which people are “inventive” or “spontaneous” (ibid.). As Shields and Dervin state:

> The “sense-making” approach is defined as offering a methodology, by which one can systematically bring to bear multiple perspectives on a phenomena (e.g. how individuals define their freedom within situations and how they define structural constraints and hegemonic processes) (1993: 76).

The “sense-making” approach to interviewing is also in accord with my own view that I should be an attentive, non-judgemental listener, and

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control and constrain myself rather than impose my reality or rigidly control or structure the interview. According to Shields and Dervin (1993) it is important for the interviewer to place herself outside the interview as much as possible “while at the same time utilizing a qualitatively powerful, systematic, and comparable set of queries” (p.74). This provides “the interviewee the freedom and the power of self-definition and explanation” (ibid.).

**Issues of Power and Gender**

Although this “interviewee-guided” (Reinharz, 1992) approach encouraged connection and empathy in many situations, especially for me interviewing women, there were some difficulties around the issue of power. The interview method of collecting data for research is frequently regarded as one in which the researcher is assumed to have more power than those being interviewed (Reinharz, 1992, Stacey, 1982, Maynard and Purvis (Eds.), 1994) but there were times when the process was stressful for me, and I felt less powerful than those I was attempting to interview. Both men and women asserted their power by setting clear limits on the time, place and content of the interview, or refusing to be tape-recorded.

I had anticipated some resistance to me as a female academic and during the preparations for the second trip to Shrimpton, I appointed a research assistant, Thierry Barlahan, to assist with the interviewing. As a mature-age student of Women’s Studies and Sociology, Thierry had a good understanding of the impact of the sexual division of labour on women and a good rapport with women. As a young Frenchman he had also worked in the North Atlantic cod fishery, and later as a soldier in Vietnam, Africa and Australia. He therefore also had experience in working in a hyper-masculine environment and an understanding of men’s difficulties in combining their work commitments with personal interests and family
responsibilities. My decision was also based on a feeling that fishermen might be more willing to discuss their personal relationships, or attitudes towards working with women, with a man.

This strategy worked well but there were times when men clearly did not wish to be interviewed by me, there were also times when both men and women did not respond positively to a same-sex situation. Some of the younger women we met seemed wary of me as a “feminist” researcher but responded to Thierry’s charm and personality, not to mention his French accent. I suspect this resistance on the part of female crew was based on a fear that if they were seen talking to me it might be construed by their male workmates as a lack of solidarity with them. On other occasions, because I was a local and Thierry a “foreigner”, I was more readily accepted than he was. Building a rapport with men was particularly difficult for me when I was faced with men who continually referred to women as “useless cunts” and it was on these occasions that I had most difficulty remaining “outside” the interview. I also found myself engaged in a power struggle with a man who counter-presented himself as a superior. He had no interest in my project and gave me only very superficial information about how successful his business was. Other men interrupted their wives’ interviews, or restricted my access to women. As Reinharz notes, it is often the case that researchers’ “access to women is monitored by people who do not want the researcher to upset the status quo” (1992: 30). Similar fieldwork problems associated with the issues of power and gender are discussed further in the sections which deal with making contact, conducting interviews and persisting with the process (see below).

**Preparing the Questions for interviews**

The interviews were structured only to the extent that they all started with biographical or family history details and were designed to cover particular
issues. This was to allow flexibility so that the respondent could “reconstruct situations that were important” to them (Shields and Dervin, 1993: 77). Questions were open ended and designed to elicit the “how” of people’s lives as well as discussing the “what”. According to Shields and Dervin, this assists people to make connections between their “public expressions during the interview” and “the private sphere” of their lives (1993: 78). It also makes connections which assist the researcher attempting to find patterns in the recorded data (ibid.). I was aware that most people like to talk, and that if you provide a safe listening space they often take the opportunity to talk about issues that bother them, or recreate painful experiences. It was with this response in mind that I also structured the interviews so that we did not walk away leaving people feeling “down”. Thierry used the technique of asking people to tell him a funny story and consequently collected a lot about the “one that got away”. I simply asked people to tell me about something they were looking forward to, such as a holiday.

The questions were formulated with particular reference to the conditions under which women labour in each site. In the household site the questions were grouped around specific issues such as the sharing of household labour, specific difficulties associated with marriage to a fisherman, and how decisions were made about the sharing of household income. The aim was to assess the extent to which a husband’s occupation as a fisher influenced the sexual division of labour and the wife’s lifestyle. Fishermen interviewed as husbands were asked very similar questions but the focus here was more on the extent to which men balance their commitment to work with family responsibilities. This question was also asked of women in paid work.
For the factory site the main aims were to elicit the extent to which the factory floor was sex-segregated and assess the conditions under which women worked. The questions were grouped around the issues of personal history both prior to and during their time in the factory because most of the workers were from a Non-English Speaking Background. They were asked to describe women’s and men’s work; conditions of employment and family responsibilities.

Women and men working on fishing vessels were asked questions based on my assumption that fishing is regarded as a masculine occupation and that women may have very different experiences from those of men. However, men were asked very similar questions to those asked of women. They varied slightly according to which fishery they worked in, whether they were casual workers or trainee deckhands, or skipper/owner operators. The general questions were how they came to be involved in fishing; whether men and women can or do perform the same work; conditions of work and attitudes towards women on boats. They were also asked how they 'coped' with living away from the land and/or their families.

The complete lists of proposed questions appear in Appendix I, although by using prompts they were not rigidly adhered to. How they relate to key themes and issues in the thesis is discussed under Collating the Data (see below).

Making Contacts and Conducting Interviews
Making contact and confirming a willingness to be interviewed met with a varying degree of success. People living in the City who were personally introduced to me by maritime historians, friends or relatives were the most willing participants, and overall fishers' wives were the most co-operative. Although some claimed they were too busy, and this might have been a
polite way of refusing the invitation, the majority seemed pleased to talk to someone who acknowledged the value of their labour and the difficulties under which it was performed. The most difficult situation when interviewing wives was how to broach the question of how the household income was shared. This was quite a tricky question and the one most likely to be viewed as intrusive. I found the best way to approach this was to simply ask women if they had ever felt economically vulnerable. This allowed them to disclose as little, or as much information as they were willing to share and no-one answered with a simple yes or no. I made one major mistake while interviewing fishers’ wives when I interviewed a woman whom I knew had a high profile as a community activist and had full time paid work. I treated her as if she identified herself primarily as the “wife of” her husband who was well known as a “legend” in the industry. The interview was stilted and uncomfortable and the following day when I visited her I acknowledged my mistake. In the context of my research the original interview proved very valuable although she agreed with me that we would both have found the interview more rewarding if I had interviewed her about her own work.

Contacting women who fished for a living proved unexpectedly difficult, mainly because I couldn’t find them! People working in the industry frequently provided the names of female skippers but then added - “but she’s gone now”. I eventually interviewed two women who had skippered prawn trawlers, one who still owns and operates a lobster boat and one who had operated her own net-fishing boat for 25 years.

When I first started researching the sex-segregation in processing plants the company manager expressed a great deal of interest in my project and took me to the factory to meet the women. This was in 1994 and the staff on the factory floor were very wary of me, possibly because “the boss” had
introduced me and they thought I might have been part of some restructuring project or “efficiency plan”. The following year the company had a new owner and manager who wasn't at all helpful to me. This meant that the assistance I had hoped to receive wasn't available and I had to adopt a different strategy for making contact with the staff. I contacted a woman who worked on the local Fishing Industry Task Force and she introduced me to an informal network of women who had worked, or were still working at the factory. This had a “snowball” effect on my method; the women were interviewed in their own homes and direct communication with them proved very rewarding. Some of the factory workers remained cautious but my interaction with others soon reassured them that I was genuinely interested in their work, and not working for the company or some other organisation.

Fishermen, on the other hand, were both difficult to contact and unwilling to participate. First I had the problem that they work away from home and miles out to sea and I hung about wharves waiting for boats to land, but when they did come in the men were often tied up with unloading or doing repairs and maintenance on the boats. Others couldn't wait to get off the boat and go for a drink with their mates or, in the case of some trawlermen, catch the early morning flight home to the city and their families. I also met resistance as an academic researcher who, it was said to me by one man, "ask nosy questions and publish bullshit reports". When attempting some participant observation exercises in public spaces frequented by fishers my assistant and I were frequently accused of being undercover members of the Police Force Drug Squad, “spies” from the Taxation Department or “that DOHSWA mob” (WorkSafe, previously the Department of Occupational Health, Safety & Welfare, Western Australia). Single people working as casual crew were a little easier to contact and were interviewed in the hotels and hostels where they were living.
A mistake I made with some of the first interviews was to assume that I could communicate with men as husbands, in a similar way to which I communicated with their wives. I forgot that most fishermen lived to fish, rather than simply fishing for a living. I expected them to put the same priority on their familial relationships and personal lives that their wives did, and was often impatient with them wanting to tell me about the size of their boats or the catch, and show me their high-tech equipment. However, I eventually learned that if I treated them the same way that I had the women, that is by encouraging them to tell me their stories in their own way, they would not only reveal the reality of their experiences and priorities but also allow me to ask more personal questions. Some men still did not cope well with such questions - one told me that he thought Thierry asked “stupid” questions because he asked about his family and personal life rather than focussing on his pioneering experiences in fishing.

Another fisherman, whose wife suggested that I interview him, appeared reticent about speaking with a woman. When she introduced us he turned away, did not greet me or make eye contact, and only after she cajoled him did he grudgingly agree to set aside a few minutes the following day. At this point I said that I would not be available and asked him if he would speak with Thierry. The following day Thierry spent four and a half hours with him. He obtained a two hour tape-recorded interview, was shown photographs of the family and a video of the operation of the prawn trawler. He was also invited to a tour of the boat and a counter lunch at the hotel with the crew! This fisherman also spoke most frankly about how he missed his wife and family, and had to make compromises to spend time with them.
Thierry and I both experienced community resistance which was difficult to deal with, especially when introducing ourselves to people in the hotels. I had been informed that Erica, a hotel licensee, developed her business primarily around the needs of fishermen; that she “mothered all the crews” and provided them with a “home from home”. I had therefore hoped to interview her. Thierry and I visited the hotel on several occasions and made a few contacts. Initially, Erica welcomed us as she would any other new clients and Thierry actually made an appointment to interview her. However, when he went back to see her he was met by her security “bouncer”, accompanied by two dogs - a Rottweiler and a German Shepherd. He informed Thierry that Erica had changed her mind and that he was to leave the premises. As a result of Erica’s influence amongst the fishers Thierry lost four female informants who had made appointments to be interviewed, and I lost one. One of the younger fisher’s wives later informed us that the licensee had put it about town that we were not really from the University but with the drug squad. Although this might indicate that the staff at the hotel had something to hide, I would read the publican’s reaction as one aimed at protecting her “brood” and her livelihood.

Persisting with the process.

Over a period of five weeks Thierry and I had formal and informal interviews and conversations in hotels, in backpackers hostels, in government offices, parks and gardens, on boats, wharves and private homes or backyards. The conditions under which we conducted tape-recorded interviews were often frustrating. My tapes include crying children, demanding husbands, the sound of tops being ripped off beer cans, throbbing boat engines, factory machinery, ship-to-shore radios, band-saws, screeching cockatoos and jukeboxes. Thierry wound up with a recording of an entire program of Sesame Street. I don’t think I ever got to sit in a comfortable chair; I sat outdoors on park benches, stood on rocking decks, or
perched on kitchen stools while women prepared family meals. I had two children crawling over a kitchen table - and me - to press the buttons on the recorder, and I stood at a shop counter interviewing a woman who attended to customers and responded to telephone calls. I had my recorder all caught up with an electric drill being recharged off the same power point, my equipment fell off a desk which was too cluttered with files to accommodate it, and a little boy damaged my adaptor by pushing a three pin plug into it. I consoled myself with the thought that I was participating in real life situations and that some of the experiences demonstrated how a woman's need for time and space to herself is considered secondary to the needs of others.

This was reinforced by the level of “gatekeeping”, direct interference and blatant antagonism encountered from male partners of some of the women. When I interviewed Janet, a strong woman who has played a major role in the development of the industry, her husband Joe put us down by remarking that research on women's work wouldn't take long, and interrupted his wife with trivial requests and demands until I cut the interview short. Janet had indicated to me that she could not continue with him hovering about. At our first meeting, without her husband, she said that if it hadn't been for the fact that she had to put Joe first, she would have liked to have made a career for herself in the fishing industry. She was extremely enthusiastic about my project and provided me with contacts. She said, “It's a great industry, I love it, but don't let anybody fob you off just because you are researching women - bugger that!”. She initiated further contact with me so that we could continue the interview uninterrupted. I gave up trying to interview another younger woman whose husband interfered; I felt she was being badgered by both of us! I was on one side of her trying to elicit information, and her husband was on the other side trying to disrupt the interview.
The most negative experience I had with a husband occurred during the last few days I was in Shrimpton. I sought an interview with a woman to whom Janet had referred me and who I had observed working on a boat. I had been told that she did “all the work on the boat”. She agreed to be interviewed and invited me into her house, but once inside I was confronted by her husband who immediately adopted an aggressive stance toward me. He accused me of being a Taxation Department spy, claimed my university credentials were “faked”, and said he was sick of people poking their noses into his business. I was determined to allay his fears by having a simple friendly conversation and sat down at the kitchen table without opening my briefcase or attempting to set up an interview. However he dominated the conversation and his wife remained silent. When I attempted to draw her into the conversation by simply asking “Do you enjoy working on the boat?” she shook her head, and said “I have to ...”. At this point her husband interrupted again to reiterate that the young people of today won’t work, and that it was impossible to get reliable deckhands because they were all useless, dirty, drunken "dole-bludgers". After making a few more light hearted comments about how I used to live in their neighbourhood, I excused myself and wished them a good day.

Although I had anticipated some fishermen might respond more positively to a male researcher I had not expected this level of gatekeeping. However, not all husbands were unco-operative or disruptive, and the following day I interviewed a woman who was training to become a skipper. During the interview her husband came home. He unobtrusively walked around us, got his own lunch and made me a cup of coffee, and sat quietly alongside me while I finished off the interview. He was not a fisherman himself and initiated conversation about community opinion of his wife and her occupation. I then asked if he would mind if I turned the recorder on and
he became another informant with the three of us conversing about their lifestyle and the local community.

**Countering “exploitation”**.

Feminist researchers have pointed out that all research contains some element of exploitation and that where possible a researcher should try to counter this by working on a reciprocal basis with informants. This can be difficult if you are trying to balance not becoming too intertwined in personal lives, or imposing your own views, with being willing to share perceptions and knowledge (Shields and Dervin, 1993: 78). There was one occasion when I felt I was in “danger” of letting my empathy for one of the process workers lead me into taking on a care-taking role. However, in using my technique of talking about something she was looking forward to after the interview and over a cup of coffee it was clear that she could and would take care of herself. She and some of the others interviewed expressed appreciation at having had the opportunity to tell their stories and obviously felt they had gained something rather than been exploited. Younger women working as cook/deckhands were able to “sound off” about their hassles with men or proudly tell me of their exploits. Some informants actually took the initiative in finding ways for me to reciprocate. A woman from the processing plant came to Perth and I picked her up from the airport and accompanied her to an Ethnic Women’s Conference, another asked me for advice on tertiary education opportunities for her son, and for assistance in finding work for her husband when they moved to the city. One of the fisher’s wives asked to me act as guest speaker at a local history meeting she was organising. Two ex-skippers I interviewed have discussed the possibility of sharing ideas about how to encourage young women to participate in maritime training courses they now teach.
I have also offered to work in a collaborative way, with some of the women whose stories I have used, to publish a book on their experiences in the fishing industry. My decision to do this is based on the realisation that no matter how mutually enjoyable the relationship developed between informants and researcher it is one based on exploitation (Stacey, 1988:22-23). Their stories are being used by me for the purpose of developing an academic thesis. In the proposed publication women who work in processing plants, as wives, as cook/deckhands or skippers, will edit or rewrite the transcripts themselves in order to present them without any interpretation by me.

The interviewing process, while primarily beneficial to the researcher, also has the potential to benefit some of the people being interviewed. Shields and Dervin point out that although the “sense-making” method of interviewing does not overtly set out to raise the subjects’ consciousness or provide them with the “tools to overcome their oppression”, the respondents can often gain “a sense of empowerment” (1993: 77). This was evident in my experience as researcher and I was surprised by the number of people I interviewed who made decisions about changing aspects of their lives immediately after the interviews. When one couple had a “row” over how money was being spent I was a bit worried that I had acted as a catalyst, but I was reassured by their daughter in law that “trouble had been brewing for some time” and that the interviewee had “just decided to put her foot down”. Another young woman who had been living in a de facto relationship with a fisherman discussed feeling economically vulnerable while so much of her labour was incorporated into his occupation. She went straight home and asked him to clarify their relationship and follow through his commitment to her. She returned to show me the engagement ring and invite me to the wedding! A forty year old fisherman told me how he had been married three times and made a lot of mistakes by being “too
addicted to fishing”. He finished his interview by telling me of his plans to retire and write poetry. Several other such incidents occurred following the interviews and while I am not suggesting that I “made” them happen, being an attentive non-judgemental listener does seem to help people clarify problems so that they take action on issues that have been troubling them. These actions together with an interview technique which allows the interviewee the freedom to present her/his own reality demonstrates the validity of the theory behind the sense-making approach:

For sense-making the concern is to move from conceptualizing humans as static bundles of traits and states to conceptualizing them not only as active, constructing, and meaning-making but as potentially flexible over time (Dervin, 1990a in Shields and Dervin, 1993: 76).

Ethical considerations
In accordance with the ethics of the Oral History Association of Australia (W.A. Branch), and Murdoch University I drew up a form (Appendix II) for participants’ consent to my use of their tape-recorded interviews, and to inform participants of their rights; the right to confidentiality and to withdraw from the project at any time. Participants were offered copies of the transcripts and the tape-recordings. Pseudonyms have been given to all the people I interviewed, the processing company and the rural community where most informants live or work.

Collating the data
Altogether I collated material from 85 interviews and discussions with people working in the Fishing Industry (Appendix III). A total of 60 interviews were tape-recorded, fully transcribed and coded. The advantage of the method I used was that I collected rich details about people's history and everyday experiences, and unexpected rather than “pre-known or pre-defined” patterns or issues appeared in the material (Reinharz, 1992: 24,
Maynard, 1994: 11-12). The disadvantages were that it created a lot of time consuming work, and although each section is based mainly on transcriptions from approximately ten men and ten women, it is difficult to precisely or consistently use numbers to “prove” anything. There is also an overlap because fishers’ wives were also interviewed as cook/deckhands, and fishermen were also interviewed as husbands. I used field notes taken at each place I visited, and following all conversations or interaction. These notes were written up and transferred into the computer each evening as a research diary.

The material from the notes and transcripts was coded at the micro-level of experiences and opinions, and organised at a macro-level in accordance with themes of theoretical importance. The primary themes relevant to each site are the interconnections of the socially constructed “public” and “private” spheres; the social construction of masculinity and femininity, and the sexual division of labour. For the household site particular attention was paid to the ideology of marriage and family, and the extent to which fishers’ wives are “Married to the Job” (Finch, 1983). In the factory site the key theme is the intersection of class, race/ethnicity and gender in the labour process. In the section on fishing vessels as a worksite, the social construction of sexual difference is the crucial theme. In all sites the aim was to see the “immense variety in the degree to which women [associated with the fishing industry] have been able to create space, independence, and spheres of power for themselves” (Thompson, 1985: 28).

Overall, my project is ethnographic in the sense that it contains detailed descriptions of my method of collecting data; conversations, actions and interactions observed while interviewing, touring processing plants, visiting boats and wharves, hotels or hostels, and socialising with process workers and fishers’ families or crew. This combination of Experiential
Analysis, sense-making, and ethnography is in accord with the recommendations of Shields and Dervin (1993) for feminist research in social science. It is feminist in that it validates women's experiences and acknowledges that gender is learned and socially constructed. It enables self-reflexivity and sensitivity to both my perceptions and those of the interviewees, and the research has some emancipative potential.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that my ability to collect the data, and interpret it, was affected by my own interests and perceptions. Throughout the research process I also became aware of the extent to which informants subscribed to "public myths" or were willing or able to provide "private" accounts of their experiences (Samuel and Thompson, 1990). The material has also been shaped by the extent to which access to particular women was thwarted, and whether men and women willingly or reluctantly participated in the project. Despite building a rapport, having empathy, or believing in an ideal of collaboration, as Stacey acknowledges, "elements of inequality, exploitation and even betrayal are endemic to ethnography" (1988: 23). In the end the work has been subjectively narrated, and structured, and interpreted by me for my own purposes. The overall aim of the final product was to enhance understanding of the sexual division of labour in the Western Australian fishing industry.
Chapter 2

Beyond a Gentle Invasion\(^1\): the development of the sexual division of labour in Australia.

Introduction

Contemporary accounts of Australian women’s efforts to achieve social and economic equity show that women are more likely than men to work as unpaid labourers in their homes, take on part-time or lower status employment, or be dependent on social security (Saunders and Evans, 1992; Williams with Thorpe, 1992). This inequity rests on the subordination of women by men and has been sustained by the persistence of a rigid sexual division of labour in the family/household and in paid employment. It has also been a central feature of the economic development of Australia which, since the earliest days of European settlement, has had a persistent and markedly sex-segregated labour force (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 59-67). This sexual division of labour has been maintained through capitalist and patriarchal values and beliefs about the family, gender ideology and the social construction of masculinity and femininity (Baldock, 1983; Matthews, 1984; Williams with Thorpe, 1992; Baxter, 1993). Australian women’s experience of the sexual division of labour has also been determined by the intersections of class, race or ethnicity as well as gender relations (Bottomley, De Lepervanche and Martin, 1991; Saunders and Evans, 1992).

In this chapter I present a brief overview of the literature which demonstrates the historical continuities in the construction and

\(^1\) In 1919 Justice Higgins of the Australian Arbitration Court awarded women an equal basic wage and margin to men doing the same work in cutting and machining in the clothing trade. He made this decision in order to stop the normally lower paid women, whom he referred to as ‘gentle invaders’, from displacing the men (Williams with Thorpe, 1992:229). In 1975 Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon published one of the first feminist accounts of Australian women’s struggles for paid work and called it Gentle Invaders.
maintenance of the sexual division of labour in Australia. This is followed by a discussion of the contemporary issues which continue to present a challenge to women in their negotiation of gender domination.

HISTORICAL CONTINUITIES

Australia has often been portrayed as having a peculiarly masculine culture in a nation founded by “Europeans [who] prided themselves on transforming the wilderness into a ... working man’s paradise” (Bolton, 1981:4). According to Raymond Evans (1992: 205), the history of men in the colonial frontiers and global battlefields has been presented as one requiring “occasional heroism, enduring stoicism and racial and environmental conquest”. It has also created a positive image of men as competitive and dominant, independent of women but sexually exploitative of them. This “conformist mode” has been so pervasive that, until the 1970s, Australian sociologists and historians cherished male bonding, male privilege and “militarily derived notions of masculinity” which were upheld as national ethos (Evans, 1992: 203-5).

Amongst the first feminists to critique Australian history and culture was Miriam Dixson who suggested that “in the land of mateship, “the Ocker”2, keg-culture, [women] come pretty close to top rating as the “Doormats” of the Western World” (1976: 11). Using a combination of Marxist and Freudian theories of oppression, Dixson claimed that contemporary Australian women had inherited and internalised the inferior status ascribed to their colonial ancestors - convict and casual poor women. Anne Summers’ account of “Damned Whores” and “God’s Police” (1975) argued that women’s participation and contribution to Australian society had been restricted by a divide and rule strategy of colonisation aimed at controlling

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women's sexuality. Both these authors have been accused of presenting an image of Australian women as “passive victims” of history; nevertheless they challenged the masculine domination of Australian society, and stimulated further feminist research and political action.

**Convict and Colonial women.**

Michael Sturma challenged the stereotyping of convict and casual poor women as whores by suggesting that as members of the British working class they had been judged according to the values of the upper-middle class (1978: 10). In 1992 Marian Aveling took up this point and argued that convict women were not coerced into acting as “sexual commodities” (Summers’ term) but were just as likely as members of the British working class to willingly engage in free sexual relations, cohabitation or marriage (Aveling, 1992: 144-151). Aveling also argued that the women, mostly classified as domestic servants, would have accepted the role of unpaid worker within marriage because it was a better option to being assigned as convict labour. She also pointed out that there was a dearth of paid work available to these women if freed, and that the highly disproportionate number of men in the colony gave them a wide choice of a mate.

Applying the thesis developed by Carol Pateman (1988), Aveling argued that the establishment of the Australian state and society required the promotion of the ideology of marriage and the family, and was based on assumptions about an ideal gender order which had shaped the foundation of Western society and culture. Two “complementary models” of patriarchal political authority interacted and resulted in individual men having authority over their families whilst “sharing power with other men in the state” (Aveling, 1992:146). Rather than presenting women as victims, Aveling asserted that women actively made use of the state’s promotion of marriage. However, she also acknowledged that the “enduring idea of the citizen householder-
husband” caused wives to remain subordinate and apolitical (Aveling, 1992:146). Aveling was able to argue the importance of marriage to the colonial authorities’ plans for the establishment of an ideal state in Australia because Pateman had demonstrated how men’s public equality and authority was dependent on their authority in the household. Men were assumed to have a masculine sex-right over women and this was legitimated through the consummation of marriage (Pateman, 1988). Aveling concluded therefore that in Australia, by the 1840s, patriarchal public order had been established through patriarchal private order (Aveling, 1992: 156). The state, primarily motivated by the bourgeois ideal of marriage and family, was also concerned to protect sexually vulnerable women, control “uncontrollable” women and men, and reduce the costs incurred by state provision of accommodation and upkeep for convict and freed women (Aveling, 1992: 149-50). This establishment and continuing existence of the political/public masculine sphere, dependent on the control of women’s sexuality and labour in the so-called private sphere, has become a central issue for feminists concerned with women’s restricted access to economic and social equality.

“Women’s” Work

It is difficult to generalise about the experiences of colonial women because each colony was established at a different time, and they did not all start out as penal colonies. Western Australian women’s experience of the sexual division of labour in the nineteenth century is also difficult to specify because there is no definitive history of their labour. However, I agree with Summers that in all the colonies the authorities wanted women to be wives, regarded convict women as “depraved”, and called for the immigration of women of “virtue” (Summers, 1975; Grellier, 1981:497).
In one of the few feminist studies of domestic life in nineteenth century Western Australia, Grellier noted that there was a marked dissonance between the family ideology of a “ruling class” and the experiences of many of those who were ruled. Although acknowledging that categorising colonial people by class was contentious, she suggested that an “investing class” combined landownership with control of the government administration and the judiciary, and espoused a “distinct set of attitudes about the social order and sexual morality” (Grellier, 1981:495). Supported by the church and the law, those who exercised civil and judicial power promoted “bourgeois propaganda” about the ideal family which was based on a belief in the “vital socializing role of the family in building a stable, hardworking, Christian society” (Grellier, 1981: 495). She concurred with Summers, that every married woman was given the responsibility of being a “civilizer par excellence”, and that part of the aim was to “ensure docility in a notoriously independent workforce” consisting of a disproportionate number of single men; men who it was assumed were members of the “lower orders” and required “civilization”. However, while the bourgeois woman was referred to as an “Angel” with elevated status over other women, Grellier’s research revealed that the husband was a “Serene Highness” in the “kingdom of the heart”, regardless of whether the home was “palatial” or a “thatched cottage” (Grellier, 1981: 498).

Women of different classes, although not equals, worked in difficult conditions raising and bearing an average of six or eight children (Grellier, 1981). Some women were also deserted wives or widows with dependent children who lived in poverty and were forced to call on the government for assistance (Aveling (Ed.), 1979). Others were subjected to violence from their husbands. Grellier cites police records and court records to show the extent to which women presented complaints to the courts but were expected to accept subjection to the needs and wants of “lawful” husbands.
She refers to magistrates’ judgements in dealing with cases of severe abuse as being “tantamount to official recognition of a husband’s right to enforce the marriage vow of obedience with violence if necessary” (Grellier, 1981: 503).

The first convict women in New South Wales were expected to perform “women’s” work either within the penal institutions, or in households where they were assigned as domestic servants. Marriage was often an economic necessity for women but the ideal held little relevance to many, and the marriage rate in the early nineteenth century was “sluggish” due to economic and demographic factors (Alford, 1984: 30-31). Marriage was imperative for most unassisted female immigrants as well as convict or freed women but male labourers often could not afford to keep families and employers were reluctant to take on men with “encumbrances” (Alford, 1984: 27). Many women therefore sought paid work in their own right. Alford states that in Victoria during the early nineteenth century,

... a number of women were employed as wage-labourers in a variety of occupations and industries. Some women worked in skilled trades, and others were employed in managerial and professional positions, often in female institutions and organizations; for example, in the female factories. Most female wage-workers, however, were employed as domestic servants and, to a lesser extent, as housekeepers, laundresses and seamstresses (Alford, 1984: 237).

Throughout the colonies of Australia there were also a few women who worked as teachers, governesses, nurses or midwives, and others established themselves in small businesses, but Alford asserts that since this required capital and access to credit, women’s participation in entrepreneurial activities did not match economic progress (1984: 7).
The promotion of marriage in colonial Australia, from Alford’s perspective, was considered the most economically efficient and profitable way to utilise female labour. This rationalised and legitimised the sexual division of labour which required women to work as wives, mothers and domestic helpmates (Alford, 1984: 243). Domestic service remained the major form of employment until the late nineteenth century development of manufacturing, commerce and service industries.

As the colonies developed increasing numbers of Anglo-Celtic immigrant women were brought to Australia to normalise the gender imbalance, and ensure the success of the colony (Evans and Saunders, 1992: 177). By the end of the nineteenth century increasing numbers of women became wives and mothers, and made a “career” out of marriage. Domestic servants either chose marriage and/or work in factories rather than work for a “mistress”, and the “mistress” became a housewife (Kingston, 1975). Her role was to “render the home environment the very antithesis of the outside work and market place, keeping public and private worlds as distinct and complementary as masculinity and femininity were expected to be” (Evans and Saunders, 1992: 178).

The value of women’s labour
The promotion of population and motherhood ideologies - from the end of the nineteenth century into the twentieth century - indicated the worth of women’s reproductive labour as an essential component in the development of Australia (Alford, 1984; Matthews, 1984). The productive value of all the activities undertaken by women as wives and mothers, however, was officially denied (Matthews, 1984: 59). So was other productive labour which Matthews listed as being undertaken by women to support their households: providing board, bed and breakfast for lodgers, running small businesses, undertaking outwork, and performing domestic
labour for other households (1984: 170). She referred to this as work performed in the ‘local economy’; the ‘feminine sphere’, and noted that only labour performed by men in the ‘commanding economy’ was recognised by the state (1984: 48). Women, especially wives and mothers, were also called upon to perform unpaid volunteer labour, especially caring labour, which, although it was not acknowledged at the time, drew them into the “public sphere”.

The official denial of the value of this labour occurred in 1891 when a new approach to census taking used as its “basic criterion for having an occupation, ... the receipt of income for wages for work” (Matthews, 1984: 59). This change was initiated by the New South Wales government statistician, T.A. Coghlan, and was of central importance in the development of Australian state policy and the construction of the twentieth-century gender order which “denied women access to economic independence” (Deacon, 1989: 1). In her study of the influence of public servants and state policy on gender and class relations, Desley Deacon stated that:

The influence of the state has been particularly important in Australia. Not only has it been central in fostering notions of education, housekeeping and child-bearing which have been prescriptive and confining to women, but it has also given legal force to major restrictions on women’s capacities as wage earners. The state has, therefore been central in promoting an emphasis on gender differentiation which has helped to make dependency the ‘natural’ status of women (1989: 1).

Deacon claimed that Coghlan was influential in helping the government turn the “desired image” of the homemaker/breadwinner family into a reality (1989: 139). His policies promoted full employment, high wages and good conditions for white male workers, but were clearly dependent on
women remaining unpaid workers in the household (1989: 117). He attacked the family economy, and according to Deacon, argued that:

...cultures where the whole family worked together, and those where workers were extremely frugal, provided low wages and a poor standard of living. Where male workers expected and demanded high wages sufficient to keep a family, the standard of living of the whole community was highest (1989: 116).

Coghlan also argued that married women, and “partially supported single women” competed for jobs and endangered the prosperity of all (Deacon, 1989: 116). This attitude was also influenced by a desire to elevate the status of colonial wives who, as the partners of pioneering settlers and farmers, were often portrayed as overworked “slaves”, or helpmates engaging in unseemly “unsexing” work (Lake, 1985: 179). Confirming the primary role of women as wives and mothers was also motivated by racist and nationalistic responses to a falling birthrate which feminists have attributed to women’s resistance to masculine control of their reproductive labour (Howe and Swain, 1992). Aboriginal women, involved in pastoral, agricultural and fishing developments since invasion began, performed domestic labour, and outdoor work on the land not considered suitable for non-Aboriginal women. They also “played the ambiguous and often unwanted and exploited role of sexual partners to white men” (Goodall and Huggins, 1992: 406-7).

Confirming the primary role of women

In 1907 an Arbitration Court decision relating to the “family wage” confirmed the assumption that woman’s proper place was in the home, dependent on a breadwinner (Ryan and Conlon, 1975). This “Harvester Judgement” by Justice Higgins set the living wage for a man, his wife and his children, and resulted in all male workers, including the 45% who were single, being awarded the family wage. This decision not only confirmed
the notion that all working women ought to be dependent but also denied the fact that many had dependents of their own. This was a masculinist decision, as Ryan and Conlon recognised, which confirmed taken for granted assumptions about the roles of men and women and was not questioned by the “capitalist class” or trade unions (1975: 94). The state’s interest in women’s fertility justified further restrictions on their participation in paid work. Married women were banned from working in the public service and this exclusion influenced their employment in similar organisations. “Protective” legislation which declared women “unfit for heavy and dangerous work” was enacted and placed further restrictions on the employment of women (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 60).

In 1912 Justice Higgins made a further decision. A claim by women for the same rate of pay as men working in the seasonal fruit-picking industry resulted in a clear distinction being made between “men’s” work and “women’s” work. The wrapping and packing of fruit was designated women’s work and paid at a lesser rate than that allocated to men and women who picked the fruit. The aim was to reduce competition from women undertaking “men’s” work, and had the effect of setting the pattern for future court decisions concerning women’s work (Ryan and Conlon, 1975: 99). As Williams and Thorpe pointed out, the first decision of Higgins lent juridical recognition to the customary separation of home and work and women’s and men’s places in each. The second decision legitimised the gender division of work so that the work women performed, well into the twentieth century, was mostly confined to “women’s occupations” and at little more than half the rate of pay set for men (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 64).

During the two international wars there were some changes to the sexual division of labour, mostly temporary, but women continued to be primarily
responsible for homework and child care as well as taking on other work. Women demanded equality and access to positions of power during World War I but were undermined by traditional assumptions that men were “warriors and providers; women were the mothers and bearers of children” (Damousi, 1992: 351). During the 1930s depression when women were expected to “make ends meet” while mostly confined to the home, the traditional relationship between masculinity and work was reinforced and “Antifeminism was rampant ...” (1992: 371). At the same time many other women struggled to support their families but claims for their rights to employment and equal pay met with union hostility. As Damousi pointed out, by the time of the second World War women were consistently regarded as a threat to the “masculinist construction of work” (1992: 373).

The state intervened by manipulating the participation of men and women in the World War II “war effort” (Saunders and Bolton, 1992: 378). Women were called on to work as unpaid volunteers, entered the armed forces (as nurses and in other restricted and supportive roles), and were also exploited as members of the Australian Women’s Land Army (Saunders and Bolton, 1992: 381-3). In the Land Army they were often required to work away from their homes and families in unpleasant conditions and for low rates of pay. When married women were drawn into paid employment during the war an interesting debate over child-care ensued, however:

The concepts of woman as worker and as mother intersected in the consciousness of policy makers, but only briefly, and it would seem that labour needs were never so critical that the ‘private matter’ of child-care was transformed into a public issue (Davis, 1987:94, quoted in Saunders and Bolton, 1992: 390).

Feminists struggled to achieve equal pay for women in the armed forces as well as in civilian occupations, and challenged the double standards of sexual morality, however, as Saunders and Bolton conclude, the “dominant
bourgeois notions of true womanhood resisted” any change in sexual attitudes and practices. Women’s access to the public sphere remained limited (1992: 395).

Rapid industrial development after the 1939-1945 war offered employment but in 1954 the percentage of women in the workforce was still the same as in 1901 and only 10.9 per cent of Australian-born married women were in paid employment (Ballock, 1983: 26). In contrast 15.1 percent of married women from the United Kingdom and 29.2 per cent of married women from other countries were in paid employment (Ballock, 1983a: 27).

The ‘domestication’ of women
Kerreen Reiger argued in 1985 that Australian women had been “domesticated” during the first half of the twentieth century by state support for the “domestic economy” aspect of scientific and rational management. Professional experts gave women advice on how to perform traditional household labour, bear and raise children, and service their husbands. Although naturalistic assumptions about women’s capabilities were questioned, the status quo was not; demands on all women as wives and mothers increased and they were expected to become efficient household managers, educators, carers, healthcare workers and amateur psychologists (Reiger, 1985; Evans and Saunders, 1992; Baxter, 1993).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries basic improvements in technology such as plumbing and electricity eased some of the burdens of household labour but any time saved was spent providing a greater range of services to husbands and children (Baxter, 1993: 32). Despite the disjunction between the ideal and reality, every woman, regardless of class, race or ethnicity was expected to be a house-proud and scientifically efficient wife and mother “single mindedly devoted to her reduced nuclear family of “go-
getting” husband and 2.5 children” (Evans and Saunders, 1992: 191-3). As Baxter summarised this:

The transformation of housework then was the result of a combination of forces to do with the development of consumer capitalism, attempts by the new professional middle class to reform household standards of cleanliness and hygiene, and of changing ideologies of femininity and the family (1993: 33).

The aspirations Deacon ascribed to Coghlan appeared to be a reality by the 1950s and were based on a presumption of consensus in a time of full employment and a developing consumer led economy (Evans and Saunders, 1992: 191).

Having been “defined in domesticity” many women as wives and mothers found their role increasingly burdensome and unrewarding. As Jill Matthews suggested, the struggle with this socially constructed ideal of femininity drove many women “mad”. Any woman who could not, or would not conform was vulnerable to being labelled and sanctioned as a “deviant” or “neurotic” failure. Her years of productive labour went unrecognised and rarely rewarded, and in old age women were likely to live in poverty or be abandoned (Matthews, 1984: 186-97).

Although not denying the fact that women laboured in their homes, Rosemary Pringle suggested that the home gradually became a site of consumption rather than production. She demonstrated the extent to which patriarchal assumptions about women’s “natural” caring labour, together with their prescribed role in the family/household became an integral part of consumer capitalism. She stated:

The home itself was, of course, the commodity par excellence, a spur for male paid labour and the site of female unpaid labour. The wage labourer and the
housewife became the typical figures of modern capitalism (Pringle, 1983: 90).

Pringle asserted that for women of all classes the role of the housewife became increasingly sexualised and emotionalised. Performing labour associated with this role became a "defining characteristic of femininity" (1983: 91).

From the days of the first colonial settlements through to the mid-twentieth century, marriage and caring for a family became the major occupation of most Australian women. As Williams with Thorpe note, citing Edna Ryan (1984:40), they "had little status unless they were married". The demands of domestic work and child rearing also left little time for them to take up careers of their own or enter full time paid work (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 227-28).

Unions rejected women as workers, and employers and unions denied the value of the work they did so that the persistent sexual division of labour in Australia evolved from the contradictory interaction of "the continuation of a family-household structure and capitalist relations of production" (Frances, 1992: 261).

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES
Achievements and Challenges
Throughout the twentieth century women continued to struggle with unequal gender relations within the family/household; the labour market and the patriarchal and masculine state (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 227). However, they have also been engaged in close interaction with the government in order to achieve feminist goals. After the year 1970 a "new feminism",

... demanded equality and justice for women more aggressively than had its predecessors; it developed a more thorough critique of existing society and the processes of male domination, and sought to empower women by changing their assumptions about themselves and their aspirations, dreams, and abilities (Curthoys, 1992: 425).

The women who participated in these actions formed an alliance with the labour movement and Labor politicians and effectively lobbied state and federal governments. Many of the achievements in the 1970s and 1980s were not based on new goals but followed earlier initiatives by women which Curthoys acknowledged had been hidden from history (1992: 435). For example, demands for married women’s right to paid work had been made during World War II, but this was only recognised after 1966 when the ban on married female public servants was lifted; the campaign for equal pay had commenced as early as 1930 but legislation was not enacted until 1969. A few women entered parliament before the 1960s but women only really made their political presence felt through the growth of the Women’s Electoral Lobby which was established in 1972. In 1972 the notion of equal pay for equal value was applied to the national wage but it was not until 1974 that the notion of the family wage for men was challenged (Ballock, 1983a: 40).

Women also lobbied for “access to contraception, abortion and health services, maternity leave, equal pay, equal employment opportunity, and child-care, and an end to domestic violence and rape” (Curthoys, 1992: 426-7). The growing awareness of women’s “double-shift” resulted in the Labor government funding child care centres in 1974. The first of the Australian state governments’ sex equality legislation was introduced in South Australia as the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975. In 1985 the Equal Opportunity Act of Western Australia came into force and all states were bound by the federal Sex Discrimination Act, and the Affirmative Action

Women had started entering positions of management during the 1980s, but the vertical division of labour remained consistently difficult to negotiate because men resisted their incursion, and women often had restricted access to training and promotional opportunities (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 61). Women entering politics and other positions of power or authority faced hostility from the media, politically organised men, and conservative women's groups (Curthoys, 1992: 435). Since the late 1980s they have also been met with the counter resistance of the "new right" and increasingly conservative state and federal Liberal governments supporting restructuring and economic rationalism (Edwards and Magarey, 1995). Domestic violence and the incidence of rape; promotion of violent pornography, and the continuing small numbers of women in positions of high status or authority as well as the inequality in men and women's earnings still require political action.

For many women divorce is still an "economic disaster" (Neave, 1995: 227) although no fault divorce has made it easier for them to leave unsatisfactory marriages, and the 1975 Family Law Act has enabled greater consideration for women as carers. Nevertheless, the majority of divorced or separated women remain primarily responsible for parenting while dependent on state welfare (Harris, 1992, Neave, 1995). Those most likely to live in poverty as single parents are Aboriginal women. In 1992, Goodall and Huggins asserted that the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal women had caused "hidden unemployment, the insecurity of casual work and [dependence on] welfare in the capitalist economy" (1992: 406-7).

Women's efforts to attain equal status with men, opportunities in paid work and recognition of the value of their work continue to meet with resistance
not only from individual men, employers or unions, but also from a gender-blind state. Unequal gender relations have been upheld by government policy supporting the notion of separate spheres and the ideal of the family as one consisting of male breadwinner and dependent wife (Harris, 1992). This has contributed to the persistence of the sexual division of labour in the home and at work, and to the fact that those most vulnerable to poverty or welfare dependency are women and children (Matthews, 1984; Baldock and Cass, 1983; Poineer and Wills, 1991; Harris, 1992).

The assumption that men are breadwinners and women are dependents, is also supported by “tax laws, social security payments, recreational facilities, health care plans, building codes, insurance policies, superannuation packages, the accessibility of shopping and public services, and of course the operation of the labour market” (Donaldson, 1991:66). This situation perpetuates women’s subordination.

**Sexual Division of Labour in the family**

As a result of the so-called “second-wave” feminist struggles of the latter part of the twentieth century the lifestyle of many women, especially wives and mothers has changed. More women are taking up paid work outside the home and there is evidence of changing attitudes on the part of both men and women toward sharing household labour and child care (Baxter, 1993; Bittman and Pixley, 1997). Bittman and Pixley, however, found that although some women may have increased bargaining power within their households because they have increased earnings in their own right, the idea of equality within household is just that, an idea. They have found that, although many couples subscribe to the view that household labour should be shared, in reality women still do most of it. They refer to this as
the “pseudomutuality” of modern marriage, and marriage-like partnerships.

Many women continue to accept the ideology of marriage and motherhood (Wearing, 1984), and as Barrett and McIntosh (1982) suggested, this may be attributed to the fact that no better way for men and women to live together, give and receive emotional support, or bring up children has been invented. The majority of wives and mothers therefore still accept responsibility for most household labour undertaking most of the work associated with bearing and raising children; cooking, cleaning, washing and ironing; caring for and caring about everybody else in the family, and servicing the daily needs of husbands. They also do most of the shopping, manage household finances and participate in a range of other unpaid or underpaid work which helps maintain the family. Women of all classes rather than men - when they are in paid work - remain responsible for the “double shift” and struggle with restricted access to child care facilities (Baxter, 1993). Those on a higher income may be in a position to pay for help, but it is not readily available, and is still considered the responsibility of women. Men, even if their wives work, still identify more closely with their role as the family income earner, than with their roles as husbands or fathers (Baxter, 1993; Donaldson, 1991; Bittman and Pixley, 1997).

In his study of working class life, Donaldson found that women continued to be attracted to marriage as an alternative to unpleasant paid work, and that their low wages made it difficult for them to live as single independent women (1991: 38). He also suggested that an anti-school culture existed amongst working class girls and they focussed their attention on “fashion, beauty, heterosexuality, marriage and family” (1991: 33). This re-inforced the idea that a relationship with a man was more important than preparation
for a life-time’s paid work. They had few expectations in relation to paid work, regarding it mainly as a stop-gap before marriage.

Many Australian women actively choose to marry for love, affection, children, and economic security. As Connell suggested, this may make good sense to them because they are promised companionship and doing things as a family (Connell, 1987: 226), but the dream, constantly reinforced by the ideology of motherhood (Wearing, 1984), has not always matched reality. Most women juggle a heavy domestic workload with the necessity to undertake paid work, and many women and children have been subjected to violence at the hands of husbands or fathers. While some can afford home help or childcare and experience happy more equitable relationships with male partners, most are only one man away from poverty: male breadwinners can get sick, die or leave.

The marriage ideal.

As Matthews noted in 1984, the social construction of femininity has resulted in women performing unpaid and undervalued work while trying to achieve the status of an ideal woman. She described the ideal good woman as white, Anglo-Saxon preferably Protestant, “respectable” dependent married mother (1984: 7, 86-7). The imperatives for the achievement of this ideal were compulsory heterosexuality, monogamy and legal marriage (Matthews, 1984: 122). Although Australian attitudes towards de facto relationships have become less morally, and even legally judgemental, women continue to perform most of the unpaid labour in their households because of the social and cultural implications of what it means to be a wife (Wearing, 1984; Baxter, 1993). Wives are regarded as having dependent status even when earning, continue to have a marginalised place in the labour market as married women, and their
labour is assumed to be available for the benefit of their partners and/or the wider community.

In her analysis of liberal social and political theory, Carol Pateman argued that marriage, which legitimated men’s authority in the household, was a sexual contract based on the same assumption of masculine sex-right that men assumed gave them authority in the public sphere (Pateman, 1988). Marriage, and marriage like partnerships therefore rest on the assumption that heterosexuality is natural, and men “naturally” dominant. Despite the efforts of Gay liberationists, heterosexuality is also perceived as the only valid sexuality. Matthews (1984), following Adrienne Rich (1980), suggested that heterosexuality was compulsory for Australian women striving to achieve the status of a “good woman”. The belief that child bearing and raising is inevitable and necessary is due to the benefits accrued to men and the state through marriage. This justifies the promotion of heterosexuality and motherhood, as well as the sanctions levelled at “loose” women and homosexual men.

Although there have been changes in the way men and women live together since the 1960s; experiments with alternative lifestyles and the sharing of household labour by men who co-parent or “reverse roles”, the majority of married men continue to regard their primary role as that of a breadwinner and head of the household even if they are not patriarchal tyrants. Men are also advantaged through their dominance of all the major political and economic spheres of society. This is not due to any “inborn essence” but because masculinism takes for granted the idea that men are inherently dominant and entitled to be so (Connell, 1987, 1995; Brittan, 1989). A man’s status may be enhanced by being the sole breadwinner but it is masculinist ideology that naturalises male dominance in heterosexual

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3 I use the term ‘loose’ as Janice Raymond does in *A Passion for Friends* (1986). She suggests all women who are not ‘bound’ to a man are regarded by men as ‘loose’ women.
relations. This taken for granted assumption regarding the status of women is apparent in the numbers of men and women who regard men as “helping” their wives with housework and child care, and in the fact that women express concern about having to ask for assistance. As Christine Delphy pointed out, it is not the actual work or task that is the issue; from a masculine point of view providing care and service is the work of a subordinate (Delphy, 1984).

Women’s economic dependence; the social construction of femininity, and population and motherhood ideology are all predicated on the basis of what it means to be a wife: the legally sanctioned heterosexual partner of a man. It is as a wife that a woman is assumed to be “free” from paid labour and available as an unpaid worker, part-time worker or “helpmeet” assisting her husband in his occupation (Finch, 1983). Wives are also expected to be available as voluntary workers, especially carers whose interests are subsumed into those of family and community.

I therefore concur with Frances who stated that the “duties and obligations within the private sphere have remained resistant to significant change and that without their fundamental re-negotiation, women’s ability to participate fully in the public sphere will remain partial and unfulfilled” (Frances, 1992: 261-2). However, it is the interconnected gendering of the state, as well as paid work and unpaid work that reinforces and maintains the sexual division of labour within families and in paid employment.

**Women in Paid Work**

Equal employment opportunities and affirmative action have done little to reduce the gap between men’s and women’s wages, or alter the sexual division of labour or the unequal distribution of wealth. In 1987 Bob Connell estimated that “the average income of all women [was] 45 per cent of the average income of all men” (Connell, 1987:6-7). He adjusted the
figures to make allowance for women’s greater dependence on social security and part-time employment. Women’s access to paid employment remained restricted; their participation in the labour force had only increased from 36 percent in 1966 to 51 percent in 1991 (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 57-87). In 1997 only 56.2% of Western Australian women compared to 76.4% of men, participated in paid employment (ABS, 1997: 256). The Australian labour force has also remained vertically and horizontally sex-segregated; women remain under-represented in the “bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and the “new” middle class (managers, officials, supervisors) and over-represented among wage-workers and those dependent on the social wage and on the wages of others” (Donaldson, 1991: 31).

The majority of women in paid work are working class or migrant women who do work in which they have little interest and for which they receive minimal reward while juggling the demands of family life with earning a living. Many also move in and out of the labour force doing homework, piecework, part time or shift work (Donaldson, 1991: 31; De Lepervanche, 1991: 143; Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 50). They attract lower wages than men, and work under conditions not considered suitable for, or desired by men.

Donaldson found in his study that working class women became caught in “assembly, sales and clerical jobs or work as receptionists, typists and secretaries, settling for ‘semi-skilled’ jobs on minimum wages, lacking any knowledge of trades and crafts jobs” (Donaldson, 1991: 35). O’Donnell and Hall (1988) suggested that the way forward for women was to pursue “non-traditional occupations” and do work considered “men’s jobs” but many of those who have done so found they were not welcome; men fiercely resist

Donaldson also found that while working class women often accepted the ideal of marriage and family rather than considering making a career out of work, subsequent disillusion with motherhood, and dependence on a male breadwinner, led to them returning to poorly paid demanding work. The nature of the work combined with the “double shift”, he concluded, caused working class women to suffer ill health and become “old before their time” (1991: 32). These circumstances are particularly pertinent to the experiences of migrant women encouraged into low-paid work after World War II as a “new pool of labour even less likely to challenge the traditional orders of the sex-segregated labour market” (Baldock, 1983a: 39).

Australia’s promotion of population and familial ideology has contributed to migrant women’s experience of the sex-segregated labour market, and sanctioned their subordination to men (De Lepervanche, 1991: 139-144). Most were brought to Australia as wives, or prospective wives expected to adhere to bourgeois ideals of the family. Others were brought in through state arranged assisted passages to work as domestics in institutions such as hospitals, and in private employment. They were expected to adopt a conventional domestic life, and to work for wages to help provide for their families filling low status jobs Anglo-Australians were not expected to fill (De Lepervanche, 1991: 143; Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 73-75). Their contribution to the economic development of Australia has gone largely unrecognised and they have struggled in the workplace with discrimination and prejudice based on race or ethnicity as well as gender.

Historically, women have had a constant battle with masculine domination of unions. This has been due to men’s desire to protect “their” crafts, trades
and work spaces and to maintain their status as breadwinners justifying their dependence on women’s labour at home (Ryan and Conlon, 1975; Baldock and Cass, 1983; Williams with Thorpe, 1992). There are therefore many more men’s unions than women’s unions, and the majority of the biggest unions have had less than 50% female membership. Although O’Donnell and Hall (1988) have documented the increasing participation of women in union action, and recommend union membership as a major means to improve employment conditions for women, the gender specificity of occupations has also affected “women’s visibility and representation within unions” (Donaldson, 1991: 54). In undertaking research in Western Australia in the 1990s, Joan Eveline found that men in unions still tended to think that only single women could be truly active unionists because married women rather than married men were assumed to be restricted by domestic responsibilities (Eveline, 1994: 219).

Women’s participation in unions is also affected by them not being given training on union issues, rarely seeing a female organiser and being involved in shift work so that they do not see union representatives in standard working hours (Donaldson, 1991: 48). They may also work in areas with small numbers of workers, sometimes all female and not considered “worthwhile” by male unionists (1991: 52). Migrant women are especially vulnerable if English is not their first language. The current political climate also threatens to curb union activism as employees are being forced to bargain directly with their employers and may be more vulnerable to exploitation through enterprise bargaining and workplace agreements. Unions are also being directly attacked by the “new right” influenced state and federal governments of Australia. Women will be especially vulnerable under these conditions because of their primary responsibility for child care and household labour, and because men - employers and
workmates - rarely support women’s right to paid work, or share childcare or eldercare responsibilities.

The organised class struggle over skill has been undertaken by men for men, and women in Australia were not included in initial industrial awards negotiations (Ryan and Conlon, 1975). The masculine definition of skill was central to these struggles and caused women to be relegated to “women’s work”, or to subordinate positions in industries and organisations where men and women work together. This concentration of women in unskilled and low paid jobs is the result of management strategies designed to cheapen labour as well as trade union struggles to maintain wage differentials based on the notion of men’s labour as skilled (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 29).

As Game and Pringle noted in 1983 this reflects unequal gender relations in the wider society. Work has been dualistically categorised so that female/male equates with the categories clean/dirty, light/heavy, unskilled/skilled, less dangerous/dangerous, immobile/mobile, boring/interesting, non-technical/technical (Game and Pringle, 1983: 19). Women continue to be allocated jobs regarded as “feminine” and natural, and men are assigned to the category most likely to enhance their power and status - jobs which are not defined as “feminine” and are less likely to require them to take orders from women or provide services to others.

In process work in particular, even skills which are not seen as those linked to domestic labour, such as manual dexterity, hand and eye co-ordination or sustained concentration, are regarded as “natural”. The skills women develop through socialisation and managing their households continue to go unrecognised or are regarded as “natural” not skilled attributes. As Claire Williams, drawing on the work of Cynthia Cockburn reiterated, “skill is a
sex/gender weapon as well as a class political weapon” (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 31):

The notion of what is a critical competency, and thus a skill, derives from the masculine world and is bound up with technology, tools and masculinity. This is achieved not only through the design of technology by men for men, but through social processes which construct men as strong and technologically able and women as physically and technically incompetent (1992: 32).

When attempting to maintain their skills men often do so through maintaining their dominance over technology and machinery which is seen as reinforcing their masculine identity (Game and Pringle, 1983; Cockburn, 1983, 1986; Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 29). This alignment of their bodies with their labour is a way of displaying strength and “maso” behaviour both at work and when organising resistance. Game and Pringle (1983: 15-16), argued that patriarchal relations and class relations interacted to shape and re-shape each other, but also noted that “[M]en at the bottom of the male hierarchy fight to retain power over women even when it seems to contradict their economic interests” (1983: 22). Men reasserting power to maintain their superordinate status in relation to women declare particular jobs “feminine” if women are seen to be able to manage those previously allocated to men. Eveline (1989) noted that when women entering a mine site in Western Australia showed how capable they were at driving trucks, men claimed it was easy work that anybody could do; labelled the vehicles “women’s” trucks, and moved onto bigger equipment or into work where they supervised others.

The workplace is gendered and a primary site for the construction of masculinity (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 57). Women in paid employment are often restricted in organising their struggles because of a lack of opportunity for equal education and training, or perceived lack of appropriate strength or skill. Their presence in workplaces, especially those
considered more masculine, is also resisted with hostile strategies including sexual harassment (Game and Pringle, 1983; Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 31, Eveline: 1989, 1995).

Sexuality
In her study of the work experiences of secretaries, Rosemary Pringle (1988: 101) stated that sexuality was present in every workplace and in all power relations. However, sexuality presents many contradictions for women. They may be incorporated into the workplace in order to be exploited or rewarded for their sexual presence, but also face discrimination or harassment because they are "too sexy" or not "sexy" enough. They may be sexually harassed as objects of pleasure, or feared because as "The Sex" they are seen to have the potential to disrupt organisational discipline (Cockburn, 1991: 159). I agree with Cockburn that women who assert their own needs, interests or right to be "different" are resisted by men because they threaten the "natural" heterosexual gender order.

Pringle (1988: 166), advocated a recognition of the interaction, and possible reconciliation, of sex and work in the modern workplace as potentially liberating. Sexuality at work, she suggested, was pleasurable for women and men. Women should therefore use their sexual power to displace masculine sexual power or deal with sexual harassment on their own terms. However, she also recognised that the boss-secretary relationship was closely aligned with patriarchal family relations (1988: 90). Pringle’s position implies that if women recognise their own sexual power, and use it, prohibitive legislation may be unnecessary. Although acknowledging that the secretary, like a wife or mother serves the boss within the context of unequal employment relations as well as unequal gender relations, Pringle downplays the unequal power relationship between the boss and the secretary, and men and women in general. It is the awareness of individual and collective heterosexual power which enables men to engage in sexual
harassment; a “male intervention for the assertion of power”, and a
warning to a woman not to step out of place (Cockburn, 1991:142).

Pringle’s position challenges the idea that women are powerless victims in
the masculine world of work, but as Cockburn points out, “[M]en’s power in
the extra-organizational world, in the family, the state and civil society,
enters the workplace with them and gives even the most junior man a
degree of sexual authority relative to even senior women” (Cockburn,
1991:143). This makes it difficult for women to be freely assertive or sexually
playful and they become “fair game for the fraternal gang” (ibid.).

In her work on the mine site Joan Eveline (1989) noted that women were
brought into a predominantly masculine workspace under an equal
opportunity and affirmative action policy but the aim of management was
to “normalise” the workforce. The workers were working more than a
thousand kilometres away from their homes in the city, and “bussed” in by
air to do shifts of two to six weeks. In much the same way as women were
brought to colonial Australia as “civilizers par excellence” women were
expected to provide a more “natural” and balanced workforce. Those
women who were not prepared to accept the terms of incorporation into the
masculine workplace as providers of pleasure and emotional service to men
disrupted the “natural” gender order by asserting their right to equity, and
challenging sexist practices. The response of the men was extreme hostility,
especially toward women who had not engaged in heterosexual
relationships with men on the site. Eveline found that the company, which
had never genuinely intended to provide equal employment opportunities
for women, closed ranks with the male workers in order to maintain
“orderliness” in its “[man]agement” of the staff.
The domination of the workplace by masculine heterosexuality also creates difficulties for lesbians and gay men. All workplaces are sexualised but they are also “profoundly heterosexualised” (Cockburn, 1991:186). Although gay men can assert their power as men over women, outright discrimination and harassment as well as “games” are often directed against them to assert the superiority of “straight” men and women. This reinforces the culturally sanctioned gender order and can cause further disadvantage and subordination for gay men and lesbian women who feel they must stay “in the closet” (ibid.).

Nearly 30 years of feminist action; the implementation of equal opportunity legislation, campaigns for equal pay and affirmative action have done little to change the pattern of sex-segregation in paid work (Williams with Thorpe, 1992:87). The numbers of women taking up paid work have increased, but the majority take up part-time and casual work either because it is all that is available, or because it is necessary to accommodate family responsibilities (1992: 81-82). Capitalist social relations clearly intersect with sex/gender relations as well as those of race or ethnicity. Migrant women still do the worst and lowest paid jobs in the service industries or manufacturing, and Aboriginal women remain the most marginalized from paid work opportunities.

The smaller numbers of women in positions of authority, or with greater earning capacity also demonstrates the difficulties for women in entering the workplace as it is defined, structured and controlled by and for men (Game and Pringle, 1983; Pringle, 1988; Eveline, 1989, 1995). As Poiner and Wills point out, “the relations of gender, so clearly defined in the domestic setting, are central in the delineation of women’s workplace relations, which and at the same time, constitute gender relations in the family” (Poiner and Wills, 1991: 104).
A Man’s Country?

In his essay examining the links between the construction of Australian masculinity and violence, Raymond Evans (1992) citing the work of Brittan (1989), stated that,

...males are groomed to take the universe by storm, to confront the environment directly. Males learn that society’s goals are best met by aggression, by actively wrestling their accomplishments from the environment. Force, power, competition and aggression are the means ...
To be masculine requires not only self reliance and self control but control over other people and resources(Brittan, 1989: 7, in Evans, 1992: 204).

This style of masculinity in Australia has been exacerbated by a celebratory cult of bachelorhood, which valued physical and emotional absence from home and required male bonding in work and leisure sites (Allen, 1989, cited in Evans, 1992: 204). It has also been encouraged by “[E]conomic inequality and the elusiveness of material opportunity” which required itinerant labourers to be constantly on the move (Evans: 203-4). The consequence for gender relations in Australia is that a “fertile legacy of often brutal heterosexual power” has been culturally reinforced and legitimated through the media, advertising, sporting and economic competition, and violent pornography (Saunders and Evans, 1992: 101-2).

Evans, like Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1987), does not assert that masculinity is innate, and acknowledges that there may be several different masculinities present in society at the same time, or in different periods of history. However, men in Australia in the 1990s continue to be subject to a dominant and narrow masculine stereotype. Many, particularly younger men, “participate in a hypermasculinity and fear not being masculine enough” (Evans: 206). This “mode of masculinity” results in men and boys panicking at the thought of doing anything “traditionally defined as
feminine”, and expressing hostility and contempt for women and homosexuals; the “feminine” within men (Evans, 1992: 204-8).

An image of Australian masculinity which carries many of the above characteristics is that of the exaggeratedly macho hard drinking Australian “ocker”. This stereotype often acted out in public is tolerated and condoned with a “boys will be boys” attitude. Other men, as Connell (1995), and Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1987) recognised, may remove themselves from such behaviour, even protest and have different values. Sexuality, class and race or ethnicity may also construct different masculinities. However, “hegemonic masculinity” maintains masculine power, valorises the dominant cultural ideal, and operates to the advantage of even “subordinated masculinities” (Connell, 1987: 184-5).

Men often struggle to conform to the narrow stereotype and even engage in “dysfunctional” behaviour to do so. If this demands “heavy drinking, reckless driving, fist fights, intravenous drugs, or the role of the workaholic, then any or all of these activities will be pursued relentlessly” (Hafner 1986, quoted in Huggins, 1996: 11). Health studies link this hard masculine culture of Australia to violence against women, and the higher death rate amongst males. A lecturer of post-graduate students of Public Health⁴ in 1997 attributed this to an Australian society which,

...demands of its men that they are not only excellent providers but they are better providers than all the other men, and a society that demands above all else a totally coping individual with no apparent vulnerability: a person who is in control, competitive, aggressive and above all else a winner (Huggins, 1997:6).

It has often been claimed that working class masculinity aggressively directed against women is compensatory and constructed in response to “an uncompromising labour regime” (Donaldson, 1991:26), however, masculinity is also linked to the accumulation of wealth (Connell, 1995:76). Connell, acknowledging the arguments of Mies (1986) and Waring (1988), suggested this explains the connection between the ‘family wage’, the gendered accumulation of wealth and global inequality. He stated:

A capitalist economy working through a gender division of labour is, necessarily, a gendered accumulation process. So it is not a statistical accident, but a part of the social construction of masculinity, that men and not women control the major corporations and the great private fortunes. Implausible as it sounds, the accumulation of wealth has become firmly linked to the reproductive arena, through the social relations of gender (p.74).

The social relations of gender in Australia were the subject of a recent study of a rural town in Australia in which the author noted the superordinate power of men and women’s economic dependence (Dempsey, 1992). Dempsey found the persistence of unequal gender relations manifested in the marginalisation of women from paid work, sporting events and community activities. The women in the community were also expected to put the men’s interests before their own, and frequently acquiesced. The men controlled capital, dominated daily life, and transmitted an ideology which maintained unequal gender relations and the exploitation of women’s labour. He attributed his findings to the hierarchical character of gender relations in the wider Australian society, which he described as,

...a system of male superordination and female subordination and, at times, exploitation. It is a system in which men often exclude women of all ages and classes from valued activities in many areas of daily life and in which men are the major recipients of its material, social and psychological rewards. When men do admit women it is usually as supporters and facilitators of their activities. Men individually and collectively frequently appropriate
the time and skills of women without reciprocity. They, on occasions, use women to purchase their own leisure or help enhance their public status at the expense of the leisure and autonomy of the women (p. 3).

This masculinist society denies the economic value of women’s labour and masks men’s dependence on it. In 1997 CEDAW\(^5\) expressed “concern about the [Australian] Government’s apparent shift in attention and commitment to the human rights of women and the achievement of gender equality”. The committee suggested that policy changes in Australia were slowing down, or had been reversed and was impeding Australian women’s progress in achieving equality. It also “noted with concern that new legislation on industrial relations ... may have a disproportionately negative impact on women”. Concern was also expressed for women workers with family responsibilities and the Australian government was criticised for failing to submit its Fourth Periodic Report to the committee in 1996. At the July 1997 meeting the government representative simply presented a verbal statement reiterating previous reports. She also stated that the government was determined “to build on its existing achievements so as to ensure that women participated fully in all aspects of life so that their families, their communities and Australia would prosper [my emphasis]”.

The needs and rights of women as independent individuals with a right to earn their own living clearly remain secondary to the needs of the family, the community and Australia. I therefore agree with Val Plumwood, that this is indicative of what she refers to as the Master model of a Eurocentric colonial logic in which the labour of those constructed as inferior or subordinate, while instrumental and useful to the dominant group, is denied or “backgrounded”(Plumwood, 1993).

Conclusion

In Australia in the 1990s it is still women and their children, rather than men, who are the most vulnerable to poverty, and this can still be attributed to the sexual division of labour at home and at work (Neave, 1995). This inequality has “largely male-derived origins” perpetuated by the persistence of the dualistic thought of Western philosophy, and liberal social and political theory. The state has upheld the notion of separate spheres, men’s authority in the “private sphere”, and “fraternal” (Pateman 1988) control of the public and political arenas. These dualisms have also been crucial in defining femininity in opposition to masculinity; women have been regarded as subordinate, emotional, sexual, closer to nature, and unfit for public and political action (Pateman, 1988,1989; Lloyd, 1984; Plumwood, 1993). Men continue to be regarded primarily as workers/breadwinners and make most of the major decisions in the family/household while persistently failing to share the unpaid and undervalued work traditionally assigned to women.

Industries, organisations and workplaces are structured by and for men who are “freed” from the labour associated with the necessities of everyday life; caring and servicing work remains the primary responsibility of women. Women continue to struggle for acceptance in the workplace on masculine terms, while also carrying the double load of labour associated with home and family.

When comparing inequality between men and women in paid work in Sweden and Australia in the 1990s, Eveline suggested that the “nexus of work and care [could] be placed within two versions of sexual complementarity: a practical ideology of sexual mutuality in Sweden and one of sexual apartheid in Australia”. She also noted that although men in
both countries were materially advantaged by the expectation that women should care and service men, in Australia the separation of family activities from work activities was taken for granted and organised more rigidly along sexual lines (Eveline, 1994: 67-68).

Women’s experience of the sexual division of labour in twentieth century Australia has followed a remarkably similar pattern to that of colonial women (Frances, 1992: 261). However, all women, regardless of class, race or ethnicity have been actively engaged in constructing their own identities and developing their own lives. In their private lives and in the public arena they have negotiated domination, discrimination or exclusion and challenged employers and the state.

It is within this historical and social context that I approach my analysis of the sexual division of labour within three sites of the fishing industry: the fishers’ household, a processing plant, and fishing vessels.
Chapter 3

A Fax in the kitchen: the labour of fishers' wives.

Being married to a fisherman is what you do and you make the best of it ...it is his job so enjoy it. (Yvonne)

As far as the lifestyle goes it’s good and it’s bad, ...it's very hard on the married life - the women. You have got to have a very good woman behind you ...got a good woman behind you it’s well worth it... (Yvonne's husband).

This chapter considers the importance of the labour of women - as wives - to the fishing industry and the well-being of their husbands and families. It also identifies the intersection of the sexual division of labour in fishers' households with work-family relations and the extent to which women are able to develop their own lives. The chapter is based primarily on material from interviews with twelve women and ten men. There were only two married couples amongst those interviewed, but all of the women lived with fishermen as their household partners. All but one of the women were legally married and none had been married before. Six of the ten men (all of whom had been married at some time), had been divorced; three had been divorced twice, and at the time of interview five were living as single men. The youngest woman interviewed, Karen aged twenty-three, was living in a de facto relationship with an older fisher who had also been married before. Although informants stated that fishing was “hard on marriages” these statistics probably say more about my method of gathering informants than about the stability of marriages in the fishing industry. Women were referred to me as “the wife of” fishermen; men were introduced to me as fishers regardless of whether they were married or not.
Women who divorced fishermen had either left the fishing community or declined the invitation to be interviewed.

**Overseas Literature and the wives of fishers**

The work of fishers’ wives has often been obscured by the widespread mythology or “primitive” folklore based on a land/sea dichotomy which reinforces the view that the wife of a seafaring man passively “waits and weeps” at home (Barthes, 1993:95, Davis and Nadel-Klein, 1988: 7, 1992:138). This mythology, like that of the broader public/private dichotomy in Western culture denies the extent to which the labour of fishers’ wives is active and productive, involves them in the public world of work - including work at sea - and denies men’s dependency on women’s labour. It also reinforces the stereotype of a fisherman as a rugged individual who lives a life separate from the “world of women”, and is unable to do anything but fish. In reality most fishers are men frequently separated from their homes and families, but as I will show, spouses work in partnership to support their families within a context of struggle over time, space, responsibilities and money. This is not only due to the structure of the industry but other economic, social and cultural factors.

In 1985 Paul Thompson noted that the economic and social standing of fishers’ wives varied markedly. In some communities men regarded their wives as essential capital items and claimed that “a man without a wife is like a man without a good boat or a good horse...” (Farris, 1967, cited in Thompson, 1985: 19). In other communities it was possible for women to have enhanced power and status if they controlled households, operated domestic businesses from the family home and controlled property (Thompson, 1985: 18). Thompson also noted that fishermen were “peculiarly dependent on the work of women” and that in the North East of Scotland a wife was “an economic necessity; a wifeless fisherman was forced
into hiring a servant” (1985: 15). In another fishery in Scotland, Jane Nadel-Klein found that men actively sought wives from within their own communities because a “fisher laddie needs a fisher lassie”, and suggested that the work of men and women was complementary and mutually supportive (1988: 194). In this study, however, Nadel-Klein also noted that “women's ‘rule’ over men was limited” and was countered by men's superiority in other realms of “public organisation and ritual activity” (1988: 203).

Davis and Nadel-Klein acknowledged in 1992, that their earlier publication had focussed on the contribution and participation of women in fishing communities, and subsequently urged closer attention to gender analysis. The important question, they stated, was “not whether men are to the sea as women are to land”, but whether fishing forms part of the “symbolism of gender and thus informs people's decisions about who can work where, how, and when” (1992: 145). They also noted that status and power should not always be equated with control of economic resources, and suggested that “binary oppositional frames of analysis” that ignored relational components of gender construction, should be avoided.

Most of the literature from the Atlantic region has been written with the primary intention of enhancing understanding of fishing communities. This is understandable within the context of a fisheries crisis in a region where for hundreds of years men and women have been dependent on fishing. However, most of the work has focussed on the maintenance of family life, community solidarity, or the continued economic development of the region and the industry. Closer analysis of gender inequality has rarely been the primary focus.
Marilyn Porter's work entitled "Women and Old Boats": the Sexual Division of Labour in a Newfoundland Outport" (1983) suggested that capitalist transformations had undermined the status of the older generation of fishers' wives because the establishment of processing plants excluded them from direct involvement in the processing of their husbands' catch. Porter noted a rigid sexual division of labour in fishers' households but also demonstrated the power of women to make decisions within the home, and within the fishing community. However, she stated explicitly that her focus was "...labour, [her emphasis] rather than sexual divisions rooted in religion, forms of marriage or other ideological structures" (Porter, 1983: 93) and therefore did not analyse this division of labour. Binkley and Thiessen (1988) acknowledged that the structure of the offshore trawler fleet in Nova Scotia placed women in the position of "reluctant matriarchs", and created stress for both men and women. They noted that the quality of family relationships varied, and that women often faced extreme difficulties - including domestic violence - associated with their "double-load". They expressed a concern for "dysfunctional family stability" and community solidarity, acknowledged that husbands and wives had different expectations of each other and challenged the characterisation of all fishermen as belligerent and uncaring. Although noting that the structure of the industry had a negative impact on the family these authors implied that it was wives who must cope and adapt, and provide a "haven in a heartless land" for their hardworking husbands. I suggest that there is a need for a closer analysis of the unequal relations in the household and the role expected of a fisher's wife.

Thiessen, Davis and Jentoft (1992) recommended that government make greater use of women's labour as a resource in developing family fishing enterprises and local industry. Although their study is based on the "reported desire" of wives to be more fully involved in family fishing
enterprises, the authors do not question the roots of this "desire" or analyse the gender relations within the household or family. They suggest that the government should provide financial assistance in such areas as child care and business management training for women in order to facilitate further incorporation of their labour, as wives, into their husband’s occupation.

Connelly and MacDonald (1991) recognised that state policies which relate to fisheries' management, support for capitalist accumulation and unemployment insurance schemes, affect families but have a different impact on men and women within households. They also noted that opportunities for women in the region were severely limited and this was reflected in their “lower labour force participation rates and higher rates of unemployment and seasonal work” (Connelly and MacDonald, 1991: 18). In their conclusion Connolly and MacDonald stated that by “integrating the family household and its women and men members”, they had added an essential dimension to an analysis of what appears to be “non-family-relation policies” (1991: 30). This is an excellent article for considering the position of women in the fisheries within the context of the local and global political economy. The authors acknowledged that,

[B]ecause of unequal gender relations in the household, women often pay the highest price as households respond to changing conditions and policies (1991:30).

Actually analysing the unequal gender relations within the household is not the subject of Connolly and McDonald's paper, however, it is the subject of this chapter of my research and I therefore take as my starting point Janet Finch's assertion that,

...when a woman marries, she marries not only a man but also she marries his job, and from that point onwards will live out her life in the context of the job which she has married (Finch, 1983: 1).
Finch stated that the “relationship between a wife and her husband’s work is ... a two-way one: his work both structures her life and elicits her contributions to it.” This is due not only to the particular features of the man’s occupation but the “structural position and cultural meaning of being a wife”. Under the heading cultural supports, Finch lists the reinforcement of the idea that wives are non-viable primary breadwinners, as well as the assumption that women will withdraw from the labour market and be dependent upon their husbands, especially when children are born. She also points out that in some sectors of the labour market a male occupational culture serves to exclude women from key processes and further advancement (Finch, 1983: 143). Women are encouraged to believe that their “central life interest”, and their primary identity is that of a wife and mother. Men, on the other hand, are expected to treat their work as their “central life interest”. This “can become a priority not simply in terms of time and organisation, but also in terms of identity”. Even married women in paid work make some contribution to their husband’s work because, as Finch argues, most wives accommodate or work around their husbands’ occupations.

This is a very short summary of Finch’s argument but the final point I wish to draw out here is that relating to a wife’s secondary status. This, she argues, is not so much due to male domination and female subordination, but the ideology of marriage which emphasises the concept of partnership, as a “co-operative alliance of two individuals, each with distinctive and different things to offer”, engaging in a joint enterprise as a team (Finch:146-8). This supports the view that a man’s occupation comes first and his wife is a helpmeet or junior partner.

Like the wives described by Janet Finch (1983: 165), the fishers’ wives I interviewed had their lives structured by their husband’s occupations,
“made sense” of their lives as the wives of fishermen and participated in the shaping of their own lives.

**Household labour**

The sexual division of labour in fishers’ households is very conventional and given the amount of time most of the men spend at sea there seemed little point in me asking what tasks they might perform at home. The first fisher’s wife I interviewed was Yvonne; her husband Frank, and son Tim, worked a small boat from home and were not required to be away longer than a few days at a time. In fact in any one month they were likely to spend more time at home than away. Grown up children and grandchildren also visited Yvonne every day and it was clear during the month of my visit to their community that she did, and always had done, all the household labour. She stated that throughout her 39 year marriage when her husband worked mostly from home he had taken care of their four children and done a little housework “on odd occasions, very odd”. Despite the fact that her 38 year old son actually lived at another address, Yvonne also did all his washing, most of his cooking, banking, and shopping for cigarettes and beer. As Finch (1983) notes, when men work from home they often make more work for their wives than those who are away for long periods, and this seemed to be the case in Yvonne's home. Petra, a family friend acting as housemate to Tim, recalled that when Frank and Tim went away “prospecting for gold” Yvonne went to her 38 year old son's house and did his washing and cleaned out his bedroom. Petra said,

He hasn't ever had to do it for himself because if it hasn't been a wife it's been Mum doing it. She pays his bills, even his maintenance [to ex-wife and son]. She has become very strong, is the mainstay in the family and everyone tends to rely on her and lean on her ...it happens a lot [with fishermen].
June was in a similar position to Yvonne; she had brought up her two children throughout 30 years of marriage to a fisherman but her husband had often worked away for very long periods of time. Since he retired in the late 1980s he was home all the time, occasionally cooked because he enjoyed it, but otherwise just “pottered about and had coffee with his friends”. June continued to do all the household labour and run the family business. Tammy, the youngest mother I interviewed, was too distracted by the trivial demands of her husband, and the antics of her two pre-school aged children, to fully answer my questions. Her husband totally ignored his children when they cried, climbed all over their mother and interfered with my recording equipment. It was obvious that she had sole responsibility for the running of the household, regardless of whether he was at home or away operating their trawler. It was the same in the homes of Maxine, Linley, Gail, Val, Vanessa, and Angela who summed up the situation for all the women when she stated:

...it was all my responsibility to make sure the house runs smoothly so that all he had got to worry about was his fishing ...

All the women interviewed had full responsibility for household labour, only one - Vanessa - did not actually do it all herself. She was the only fishers’ wife to remain in paid employment throughout her 23 years of marriage and she employed either a live-in “Nanny” or a housekeeper. She could be described as a “supermum” because of her skilful management of his work, the family and her own paid work but this would, as Hochschild (1989:23) notes, obscure her extra work load and lack of support.

Feminist research has consistently revealed that most married men do little household labour such as cooking and cleaning except in households where women are in paid work. In these households it has been shown that gender negotiations have resulted in some men undertaking some
household labour and child care (Hochschild, 1989, Walby, 1990, Luxton, et al, 1990, Baxter, 1993, and Goodnow & Bowes, 1994, Bittman and Pixley, 1997). However, in the majority of households and regardless of the amount of time husbands spend at home or at work, the division of labour remains very conventional. It is therefore not surprising that fishermen do little housework or child care.

**Being Mum and Dad to the kids**

One of the heaviest burdens for fishers' wives is parenting alone and several women referred to this as having to be “Mum and Dad to the kids”. They had total responsibility for all labour associated with bearing, caring, rearing and socialising their children. Many of the women recalled giving birth while their husbands were at sea and Vanessa said her husband was away for the entire period of her first pregnancy. Angela’s husband left to go fishing while she was in labour and facing the possibility of a caesarean section. She said she really resented this and “never forgave him” because she believed it was not necessary for him to go to sea on that day. Angela claimed that for fishermen “their job is first and foremost, the most important thing in their lives - family comes second, oh well ...”.

Val’s husband, on the other hand, made arrangements to be present at the birth of each of their children. She said, “Even though Ron was fishing he still attended both the births and I had one in Perth and one up here [in the North West] so you know - a lot of shore people don't even get to do that.” In telling me this Val was suggesting that she was fortunate that Ron was considerate, and earned “credit” in their “marital economy of gratitude” (Hochschild, 1989: 203) but she still had to do all the labour associated with bringing up their children, and for most of the time, alone. She acknowledged that this was particularly difficult because one of her children often required hospitalisation but said,
I feel there was no way I could expect him to give up fishing, there was probably times when I thought, boy, you know [sigh], I am really sick of this - comes the end of the day and mum's had enough - but you just get over it.

All the wives looked after their small children alone and Evelyn and Angela both spoke about their children “missing out” on spending holidays with their fathers. It was not until after thirteen years that Angela’s husband was home for Christmas. She said, “...most holidays Christmas, New Year, Easter we had all on our own ...it wasn't fair that you couldn't have a Christmas like everybody else...”. She recalled,

Christmas, was really hard, I always remember going out and particularly buying a lot more things for the kids than probably what I should have and trying not to make them feel they were missing out ...for them it was just like Christmas was Mum and we'd get up in the morning and there would be a big fuss and they’d have all these presents. It was really hard it was very very hard...

As children got older and developed their own interests mothers found themselves “chauffeuring them around”, acting as “Mum's Taxi”, and one woman had a bumper sticker which read - “If woman's place is in the home, how come I am always in the car”. Gail, who married Ray a trawler skipper, was so busy we had trouble negotiating a suitable time for the interview. It was conducted over the kitchen bench after school hours, while she prepared the evening meal. Her three children, and two of their friends ran in and out asking for food or assistance with their after-school activities. Her husband was making nets in the shed. I asked Gail to describe a normal day for me, she responded with gales of laughter and said,

Normal day! Aah, what did I do today? Well we get up about seven, the kids feed their horses, have their breakfast, I make the beds, get ready -we all leave about eight-thirty - drop them off at school, and then I generally do some bookwork. Most days I find I do either bookwork, make nets or during the fishing season run around, you know, like Ray might ring up [from the boat] at eight
o'clock in the morning and say, 'I need you to do this, or such and such'. Most of the day is taken up with something like a job but it's not really a job. You don't have much time to be a normal housewife - but I might be different to other women - I mean I've known other women that are wives of skippers but [they] really don't have a lot to do with that, and they [pause] I think that's one advantage [for me] I am quite busy, I've got a lot to do and that's probably what keeps me going. I don't have time to get bored or lonely....I enjoy it...sometimes you get fed up n' y' think, oh gee, I wish I could just sit down on the couch and watch a video. But I don't think I'd be the type of person who could just sit around and be [pause], not have a lot to do. And like after school comes - the kids have got horses or extra activities - so I've got plenty to do.

Gail takes her children to the swimming club, the pony club, martial arts classes and Brownies. She also does voluntary committee work associated with the children's interests.

When Gail and Ray first married in 1983 they had already been working on boats together and they owned and operated a scallop and prawn trawler for three years. They took their first son fishing with them for one year, strapped in a car seat in the wheelhouse, while Gail worked as a cook and deckhand. When she became pregnant with the second of their three children they decided that the boat was not a good place for bringing up children and she agreed to work at home. The children are now aged three, six and eleven years. Since this decision was made, Ray has been away for as long as eight months at a time, although at the time of interview he was coming home for a few days each month during the scallop trawling season. At the end of the scallop and prawn seasons, and between trips, he worked in the shed adjacent to their home or went fishing for crabs.

Ray slightly altered his work pattern so that he could work from home and was available to relate more to his children. His eldest son was 11 years old and Gail encouraged them to spend more time together. She also referred to
Ray “missing out” on watching the children grow up, and in my presence asked him if he would keep an eye on their three year old daughter while she finished some bookwork. This is probably all that Ray does in terms of child care. He told my research assistant that he was enjoying spending more time at home, although it had been “good to get away from all the crying and that” when the children were younger, but was still too busy to spend much time with them. He could only watch them from the shed. Hochschild points out that most men, regardless of class or occupation work “too hard” and neglect their children (1989:p. xi). Ray appeared to be more interested in keeping in touch than other men I met, and said mobile phones were a great help for maintaining contact. For Gail the advantages of the mobile phone were dubious because it facilitated greater demands on her time, both as negotiator of the family’s relationships, and as a facilitator in the incorporation of her labour into the running of the fishing enterprise.

Other wives also spoke about their husbands trying to spend more time at home as their children got older, especially sons, but as Evelyn said, for men who “had never had to do it”, trying to work on a relationship with children who were either totally dependent on their mothers by the age of six, or had developed independent interests of their own by the age of ten or thirteen, it was a “bit too late”. The children had also got used to “mum being it”, and Yvonne, Linley and Angela all pointed out that even as young adults their children still tended to come to them for everything.

In some of the fishers’ households there had been attempts to renegotiate the responsibilities for parenting. Val said that when her second child was born Ron gave up fishing for 12 months because, according to her, he had missed out on the “little things like their first step and talking and everything”. They moved inland where Ron worked as a mechanic but, she said, “it gets in their blood and I really believe that”, so he returned to
fishing. Several wives referred to their husband’s “missing out” on watching their children grow up. Watching is the operative word, however, and there was no evidence in the interviews that any of the men did any real hands-on labour associated with their children. Vanessa said Russ took a shore skipper’s job for twelve months to spend more time with the children as they got older but said, “he nearly drove me insane so I sent him back”. She elaborated,

I felt like he was invading my personal space that I had accumulated over the years and the contribution towards the discipline and the upbringing of the children was a little bit stronger[when he was home]. That was interfering with our routine that we’d established.

Although Vanessa says she sent Russ back to sea, she added that “he missed it too”. She said she sometimes felt overwhelmed with all the responsibilities of bringing up six children alone but pointed out that she could not expect him to change because she knew he was a fisherman when she married him and he “had salt water in his veins”.

Most of the women interviewed, when referring to having full responsibility for parenting and having to “do everything yourself” complained, to varying degrees, about the extent to which their husbands interfered with their discipline of the children, and their household routines when they came ashore. Binkley and Thiessen (1988) noted that the structure of the industry created stress and conflict for both men and women who had trouble adapting to what they referred to as coming together and separating. Thompson (1985: 23), however, recognised that such conflict over time and space was related to the unequal power between the sexes and not just the “nature of men's work”. Drawing on 1977 research by Margaret Muir he noted that the assertion of control over the household space, labour and child care was “essentially a form of defence” on the part of women(p.18).
Maxine found it hard to adapt to her husband being at home during the off season when Peter was “in her pocket 24 hours a day” or when he came in for a day or two and everything was “chaotic”. She said, “I am so routined [sic] with the things I do and then he’ll come in and things just seem to be thrown up in the air and you think, Oh, God! You are just sort of all over the joint…” She added,

...the first couple of weeks it is fine after that we nearly kill one another and by the end of the time we’re nearly in the divorce courts [laughs] ...mind you by the time March comes around [after the Christmas break] he is itching to go back to sea too - he doesn’t like being on land - not working or being at sea, it’s in his blood. He has tried coming off the ocean and it just doesn’t work - just sitting at home all the time. Even if we go away and relax it is not the same - like he tends to want to drag you fishing somewhere and you think, oh my God! You’ve had that!

Maxine also had conflict over the discipline of the children aged three and six. She said Peter tended to spoil them so that she had to say, “look you know, don’t fight me on what decision I make with them otherwise they are just gonna run to dad and have what they like”. Maxine claimed that Peter was a “family man”, not the “type to go drinking with his mates”, and that when on shore he took her and the children on special outings, read to the children at bedtime and played with them. However, she claimed that this upset their routine and discipline and she often had to “pick up the scraps” and cope with them missing him when he returned to sea. Sometimes they didn’t see their father for months. Because she had full responsibility for long periods of time Maxine asserted her right to maintain a routine and told Peter that he had to learn to fit in with her. Angela also found that when her husband came home she resented his attempts to “automatically” take over the discipline of the children. Like Vanessa and Evelyn she found that this caused conflict because the children were used to her way of doing things and took no notice of their father. She said she told him that “his
way” wasn’t what they liked and that since she had to do it when he was away she thought she should do it when he was at home.

Angela acknowledged that Nick’s acquiescence to her demands led to her taking on more and more responsibility. She also found herself in a no win situation because when things went wrong he would say, “oh well, that’s because of the way you bring them up”. Acting as mediator between her husband and her son was also difficult under these circumstances. For years Angela took their son to his soccer matches but she tried to encourage her husband to take more interest when he was home. She claimed her efforts backfired because he didn’t really want to do it. She said when he took the boy to soccer he acted “just as an observer, looking on - not like he was part of it” and instead of praising him for doing “twenty things right - he’d pick on him for doing one thing wrong”. When Angela suggested that her husband spend more time with his son, even taking him fishing, he would say he couldn’t because of his job. As the boy got older conflict between father and son increased, and Angela claimed they both complained to her about the other and accused her of “taking sides”. She said that “in the end I found it was really awful - I was losing the relationship with both of them, both getting angry - I tried to stay out of it - sometimes I gotta bite my tongue, it’s a bit hard...”. Angela stated that the conflict was often over her son’s attitude towards work but she was pleased that as he grew up he knew there was more to life than work, and was less obsessive about it than his father. She also informed me, with great delight, that her son accompanied his wife at the birth of their child.

As with other wives and mothers, fishers’ wives initiated negotiations and asked their husband’s to spend more time with the children ostensibly for the benefit of the children, rather than asking for help with relational, physical or emotional labour. They also seemed to think they could not be
both 'mum and dad' to their sons, but perhaps this is also a matter of expediency - or as Hochschild (1989) suggests, it is a gender ideology strategy: they can appeal to their husbands for help on the grounds that their sons need them and that father-son relationships are important; this presents an image of the family as sharing the parenting. Vanessa who had three sons still living at home said “Children I think have gone off the tracks much more rapidly than children with Dads at home all the time, I think that is a pretty well known statistic”. As Bittman and Pixley (1997) note, this is a common but false assumption.

The responsibilities that women take on as wives and mothers, and the type of conflict that can arise can occur in any household but the expectations about parenting and being a wife combined with the demands of the fishers' occupation can heighten the stress for fishers' wives. Fishermen resist adapting to what they regard as being the women's lifestyle by claiming they can't cope with being on the land as well as passively resisting having their labour incorporated into her work. They not only assert their authority as father or head of the household, they get in the way so they can go back to sea. Seven wives justified their husband's inability to adapt or cope by stating that fishing was “in his blood” or he had “salt water in his veins” despite the fact that only one of them came from a fishing family. His wife, who also came from a fishing family, was the only woman who did not engage in this essentialism. She suggested that it was her husband's notion of appropriate masculine behaviour that led him to be obsessive about work and separate himself from the “world of women”.

Despite all the work involved in running a household and bringing up children neither the men or the women seem to be able to share those responsibilities when they are together. When there is conflict over time, space and discipline of the children they both accept the fact that she has the
full responsibility. To the men it is probably a minor price to pay - a bargain is struck which fits gender ideology and avoids more serious conflict (Hochschild, 1989: 57); however, it also maintains the idea that home work is not real work or men's work but the responsibility of women. In claiming they can not expect their husband’s to change their occupations, or do anything to alleviate the hardships experienced by their wives, the women indicate an acceptance of masculine superiority, and the unequal division of labour. Although this reinforces the unequal gender relations many women acquiesce if they feel they gain some compensatory independence, autonomy or power from the impact of the structure of his career (Mederer and Weinstein, 1992: 346).

“Would you put up with it?”
Although fishers’ wives seemed to accept the responsibilities and demands imposed by the fisher’s lifestyle there was also some evidence that younger women would not take on the role expected of them. Several women referred to the “younger ones” not being prepared to “put up with it”, and the divorced men although tending to blame women for not adapting, also demonstrated that resistance to demand for adaptation resulted in divorce.

Tim’s housemate Petra stated that she could never consider marrying a fisherman because they “have a very casual outlook on life, and are hard living, hard drinking”. She claimed that the first place fishermen go when they come in is the hotel to see “how pissed they can get” and think there is something wrong with a man if he doesn't spend 200 dollars getting drunk. She said, “I wouldn’t put up with it, would you? That’s not my idea of fun and games, thank you very much!”. She added that amongst her fishing friends the pattern was that the wives stayed in the city with the children while the men were “free, can basically do what they like - live two lives - married to the sea and married to a wife”. Petra, whose family are not
fishers, grew up in the fishing community and suggested that although fishers might “see the dollar at the end of the day that isn't really the deciding factor, it becomes the second deciding factor, it is the lifestyle, it’s the freedom and I think for a lot of men - not all of them, but most - it’s a way out, they like not being connected”. Here Petra identifies the major characteristics of many fishers; their identity as independent, hard living men. This may be a cultural stereotype in many ways especially given that the women interviewed regarded their own husbands as ‘family men’. But some wives, such as Maxine, Val, Angela and Gail expressed an envy of their husband’s lifestyle and its features of freedom and independence. These features and the identity of the man as a fisherman are also used to justify the separation of his working life from his home life or family responsibilities. Such an occupational identity also has an impact on the sexual division of labour which is more likely to be conventional regardless of whether the man is working from home all the time or away at sea.

When Linley introduced me to June, who had been her friend since childhood, she told me she was worried about her because she worked too hard. “He’ll be the death of her, I am really worried”, she said, and implied that June’s husband was lazy. Several people associated with fishing when referring to wives who worked on fishing boats and/or managed the business added, “he works her to death”, or “he’ll kill her”. At first I thought they were acknowledging the woman’s ability to perform heavier labour traditionally regarded as masculine work, and the extent to which their labour might be exploited, but the negative comment that followed was aimed at the husband and implied that it was “unmanly” for a man to “allow” his wife to do the work that he should be doing. Rather ironically, it is often husbands who work themselves to death while proving how manly they are. The husbands of June, Angela and Linley all suffered “heart trouble” while in their fifties. It was interesting to note the different
ways they dealt with it. June's husband passively resisted hard work by pulling out of the fishing enterprise and leaving all the work to June. Angela's husband changed jobs so that instead of being away from home at sea, he worked on the land for a fishing company. Linley's husband, an ambitious entrepreneurial fisher, threw himself back into work as soon as he had recovered and she continued to worry about him.

"I wish I had a man around the house"

If men do anything around the house it is most likely to be tasks traditionally considered men's work - such as putting out the garbage and doing light maintenance or alterations to the house, but from what I saw in the ten fishers' houses I entered, only two fishermen showed any interest in such things. The potential for this to increase the wives' responsibilities led Linley to declare:

What I have always said is, in my next life I want a man who is a handyman, and if he has got anything to do with seafood, I am off!

Most of the women interviewed performed these traditionally masculine tasks although there were some things they simply could not do themselves and others they resisted. Evelyn and Vanessa both tried resisting doing all the gardening and maintenance. Although Evelyn said, "I am quite capable but well that's his job", she found that she either couldn't wait for her husband Ralph to return, or when he did return she took pity on him because he was too tired to "mow the lawns". Fortunately for Evelyn she enjoyed gardening. Vanessa on the other hand had no interest and told me the flower bed I admired was "Russ's baby". She said she "flatly refused to chop wood or mow lawns or weed the garden". When I interviewed her, Vanessa's husband was making alterations but because of his work commitments her dining room had a gaping hole in the wall for months. Val's husband was working in his shed when I interviewed her,
but Yvonne’s husband and son kept procrastinating over home maintenance work and she usually went out and hired someone to do it.

These “men’s” tasks can be used by some women to assert a more equal division of labour but others like June and Evelyn, took pride in their ability to repair things, and Gail said she found she became so independent and capable she forgot to ask for help when her husband was home. However, most of the women stated that they had to ask for help even for traditionally masculine tasks, and not just the work usually considered women’s work. These tasks, which men generally are more willing to take on, can be used to sustain gender ideology and present an image of equity within the household (Hochschild, 1989:13-14, 57). Whether fishermen do this work or not it is their wives who organise it, worry about it or do it themselves. This is because in fishers’ households it is all shore work and the actual tasks, regardless of what they entail, remain the responsibility of a wife as the manager of the household. However, Evelyn, Vanessa, Linley and Angela also complained that their husbands were never home when they were “needed”. As Linley said, “they are not here, you have to fix things, you have to do things that you sometimes think, gosh I wish I had a man to help me…”.

“He never even wrote a cheque for himself”

The financial management of the household was also something for which fishers’ wives took full responsibility. Thompson suggested that this could give women a “clear practical basis for power” but he also noted that “[N]either the mere absence of men nor a vital economic role necessarily brings women increased independence or standing” (1985: 18). Binkley and Thiessen (1988:24) noted that the wives of trawlermen were “reluctant matriarchs” and thus confirmed the point made by Hochschild (1989: 24) that married women often have no choice but to take charge of the
household responsibilities. Bittman and Pixley suggested in 1997 that the majority of married Australian women continued to take on this responsibility as part of their role as wife and/or mother.

The experiences of the women I interviewed support these findings and rather than regarding themselves as having enhanced status or power, they readily admitted that they had been expected to take on responsibilities that were often "too much" for them. They spoke about running around town paying bills, employing and paying repair men, doing the banking and deciding how much money to allow the children, but were otherwise reluctant to spend money on themselves and frequently referred to the household income as not being their own money. As Edwards (1981) found, this is a common attitude in Australian households. Gail said she took money for "housekeeping", Yvonne said "we all get wages" but made it clear that she had little money for herself. Angela, who still assisted her widowed step-mother with the financial management of her household, as well as attending to that of her own, said that her husband Nick "left all that" to her, and showed so little interest that she could have been "robbing him left right and centre and he wouldn't know". She claimed he didn't have a "clue" how much money they had, never wrote a cheque for himself and had to ask her for money. But she said,

I often thought, gee, I wish I could have somebody just to manage things financially, or to say, "oh you take over, or you pay a bill".

After thirty-two years of marriage Nick once helped Angela because she had an accident and was on crutches. They drove into town and she had to point out where and how to pay household accounts. Angela said "I did resent the fact that it was too much - I thought his job was just going out and earning the money but my job was everything else".
I asked some of the women what they thought their husbands would do without them. Gail said, “he wouldn’t know what to do, would he?” Yvonne rather stoically replied, “wouldn’t have a clue”, and Maxine laughed and said her husband would “give the kids to mum ... or my sister, and keep fishing”. None of the men or women suggested that the structure of the industry could be altered to suit the family or that the men might make more effort to adapt to the needs of their wives and children. Some did refer to bringing up children on boats but Gail and Tammy (and three of their friends who I did not formally interview), stated that having their children on the boat was not fair on the men, not safe for the children, and not conducive to a good education or appropriate socialisation: an example of the “order of priorities” described by Finch (1983: 134).

“I never worried about him, he is a very competent fisherman”
Like most wives and mothers, fishers’ wives perform directly caring labour for their husbands and children, but they also perform emotional labour through adapting and coping with his lifestyle. This includes worrying about fishers working at sea. In 1988 Davis suggested that worrying, rather than being merely a passive reaction to their role as wives, was an “expressive role”, and “one of the jobs a fisherman leaves to his wife”. She suggested that wives had a “deeply felt spiritual empathy” that sustained the fishermen, and that worrying was a “status enhancing moral duty of women” in fishing communities (Davis, 1988).

The status of a fishers' wife is enhanced by her being seen to be worrying about her husband’s wellbeing, but following Hochschild (1983) I argue that this emotional labour also enhances the status of the fisherman. Hochschild defines this kind of emotional labour as “managing feelings” in order to present oneself as in control, and in order to calm the feelings of others. According to Hochschild, women perform this kind of labour in
the paid workplace in such jobs as airhostessing, but also in their everyday lives as wives or mothers. This emotional labour was very evident in my interviews with fishers’ wives but they demonstrated rather contradictory attitudes towards their role as “worriers”. They clearly had been anxious at times but they all either denied it or rationalised it away by claiming that their husbands were competent skippers. Gail admitted that a spate of recent fatal accidents had been a “bit frightening” and had “brought it home” to her, but she said she was “not worried - I mean I know Ray’s very competent at his job, he is not a fool. You know, I don’t think I worry about him at all really”. Tammy said “You get used to it...I know what he’s doing. Basically I know he’s not out there doing anything wrong”. Maxine said “I don’t worry, [although] when it gets really really windy some nights it worries me a bit, but they’ve got common sense ...and he’s good at his job so I know they’re alright...”. And Linley too said, “No, I never [worry about him] he is a very competent fisherman...”. Val denied suffering any anxiety at all.

Although worrying - along with adapting and coping - might be a status enhancing role of fishers' wives, denying anxiety is to a certain extent a characteristic of an Australian cultural stereotype: the pioneer woman of the frontier valorised in stories like Henry Lawson’s, The Drover’s Wife (Dixson, 1976: 190-193). In these Australian legends the wife of the pioneer faces danger, isolation and loneliness with stoicism - a myth which not only denies the harsh reality of her lifestyle but the dependency of her husband on her labour. In 1994, in the midst of a period marked by several fatal accidents in the North West fisheries, I was carrying out preliminary research in Shark Bay and went into a cafe on the eve of an unseasonal storm. I overheard an anxious conversation between fishers and the proprietor of the cafe about a boat that had been missing for a day or two. The following day, when the storm washed me out of my tent, I returned
to the cafe for breakfast and the men were again discussing the missing vessel. The man behind the counter said - “Oh, it was a false alarm. Bloody women, they cause more trouble than they are worth. His missus came up from town and when he didn’t turn up when she expected him to she raised the alarm - bloody women, getting everybody stirred up...”.

When fishers’ wives admit feelings of worry or anxiety, or express concern about safety it is regarded by the men as interfering in their autonomy and undermining their competence. It is also seen as a failure to support their husbands in their work, or a failure on the part of the wife to adapt or cope with her role as a fisher’s wife. Any overt display of anxiety, or action taken as a result of worry can also lead to denigration by fishermen as unnecessary and a “feminine” characteristic. This also enhances the masculine status of the risk taker himself if he can fob off any expression of concern as merely that of “silly women”. When I interviewed Yvonne and asked her if she ever worried about Frank and her son Tim, she said, “No, it’s never worried me very much...that part never worries me”. Their friend Petra told me that she noticed that the women in this household “didn’t seem to worry very much” but that she had observed “a bit of a panic one day” when the men, who were supposed to come in at six pm. didn’t turn up until the next morning. She said they had hooked a game fish and decided to “play” it all night but didn’t bother to tell anyone or expect anyone to express anxiety about them. They dismissed the women’s concerns when they got home and nothing more was said about it.

Hochschild argues that “emotion work”, caring about people and working at adapting and coping with difficulties, is regarded as women’s work and they are socialised to manage their emotional feelings (1983:165-172). Amongst my informants denial of danger on the part of men enhanced their status as men; this status was enhanced by having women worry
about them but the status of the women themselves was judged according to how well they demonstrated their ability to manage their own feelings.

"It's a very lonely life"

Like the legendary Australian wife of the bush pioneer, fishers' wives are also expected to cope with isolation and loneliness as well as the danger associated with their husband’s work. June’s initial response to my questions about being married to a fisherman for over thirty years was that, “It’s a rotten life, it’s a very lonely life ...”. Angela and Linley also referred to being lonely and actually afraid of being alone in their homes “without a man”. Angela recalled being so afraid as a newly wed that she locked herself in at four or five o’clock in the evening, went to spend the evening with her sister, or called on her brother-in-law to make sure there were no intruders in the house. She attributed her fears to the fact that she was only seventeen when she married, came from a large Italian family, had never been alone at night and as a single woman had been discouraged from socialising at night. Angela recalled how the women and children would gather at the wharf to farewell the men:

... the first trip [starting in November] was always the longest, they wouldn't be back until after the New Year, about six or seven weeks. I remember we would always go down to the boats, down to the wharf to see them off, and we’d sort of be waving to them until we couldn’t see them any more and then we would rush up to the monument [hill overlooking the port] and watch the boats. We were all miserable and then we'd start saying “oh well, we'll go home now and start to do our spring cleaning and then, you know, a couple of weeks to do that, then there's Christmas and then New Year, and before you know it ...”, we’d say - they’d only just left and the next thing we’d say, “oh they’ll be home soon”. But you know, it was awful ...

Other women also referred to managing their feelings and adapting and coping with loneliness living in remote areas and away from their own
friends and family. Recalling her loneliness at Christmas time, Angela said:

One year I was feeling particularly sorry for myself because I had nowhere to go and I’d think I’ll just go down to the fish markets and buy fish and chips and everything was closed ... I’m going from place to place and you know, yeah, so that was really hard...

Yvonne, Evelyn, Gail and Maxine all claimed that for any marriage to survive in the industry a woman just had to get used to it. Although two women admitted that they had forgotten what it was like when they first married, they tended to be judgemental about younger wives who “crumbled over it”, “got a bit sappy”, or “couldn’t handle it”. Yvonne, Gail and Maxine attributed divorce amongst fishers to the inability of the women to adapt to anxiety and loneliness. Maxine said:

A lot of people [women] say yeah, yeah it’d be great with a fisherman but they’ve gotta know what they are going into otherwise it just won’t last if they think they can just ring them up and say oh look I am lonely come home. It doesn’t work like that, so they’ve gotta sort of stick with it ...they don’t seem to understand what’s involved. They see the dollar signs but they don’t really realise [what it is like]. If they can’t handle being away from the other partner for any length of time it’s no good for them, they’ll never survive it. You do get lonely but my kids keep me going, they are the ones that fill in my gap.

Maxine acknowledged that it was hard for some of the “young birds” who “cry every time the boat goes out” especially when they have no family, hardly know anyone in town and live in a little caravan. Three times during the interview she referred to marriages “going wrong” because young women couldn’t cope, “handle it” or were likely to issue him with “an ultimatum”. She said she tried to help, as the skipper’s wife, by telling them they would get used to it, but added that they should know what they are getting themselves into because it is not fair to complain after you have agreed to marry a fisherman. Gail expressed herself in a similar way and said:
I have forgotten what I used to be like, I mean you see some of these wives come along and their husbands have to get off the boat because their wives are pregnant and they’ve gotta go to the doctor or something. I think anyone that’s gonna survive in a marriage in the industry has gotta become fairly independent and there is no point crumbling over it.

Yvonne, older than Gail and Maxine, said she couldn’t understand any woman not standing by her man and implied that marriages didn’t last because divorce was “too easy these days”. Evelyn was less judgemental but said:

[a fisherman’s wife] has to really be prepared to spend a lot of time - well not on your own - but, like without your partner. But some are not prepared to do it on their own.

The fishermen’s wives accept the domestic work load and child care responsibilities but this burden is exacerbated by having to cope alone for long periods with such things as pregnancy, child birth, sickness and even the death of close relatives. Evelyn’s unhappiest moments were when her mother died as a result of an accident and she couldn’t contact her husband. She said,

...we never had boat radios or mobile telephones then [1970s], but I was lucky we never had a major crisis like sick children.

Linley also said she was “very fortunate” that none of her children were ever seriously ill or had an accident while their father was at sea. Most of the women regard not having to cope alone with terribly traumatic incidents as “lucky”, not that having to cope with them alone was unfair. Vanessa, who had to cope with the accidental death of her son did admit that she “couldn’t say it was always fair and equitable” and acknowledged that marriage to a fisherman was “horrific at times”. She added,
...if anything happened with the children or anything went wrong they were always out in the boat, it was never while they were home. Sick children, just coping with all the traumas of teenagers and a death in the family - they are just not home. Yeah, very difficult.

While fishers' wives provide nurturance and emotional support to everyone in the family the behaviour of many of the men appeared to verge on emotional neglect. As an outsider I am aware that I can not take my observations for granted. People rarely speak about what goes on between them at an intimate level, and men may speak more freely with their wives about such things as affectionate feelings, anxiety or loneliness when they are alone together. But the majority of women clearly resented their men “never being there” when they were needed, and they were not simply referring to practical considerations. Frank, despite appearing self-centred and taking his wife's labour for granted did admit that the lifestyle was “very hard on the women”. He also referred to sexual relations and stated that,

...we enjoy our booze ..., but that’s just as bad on the women too, because [...] we used to go out 10 days at a time and you come home and you are only in for 3 days and you are catching up on the beer and trying to catch up on a bit of bed - sex if you like - and they don't mix and so that doesn't make it easy for the women either.

Angela and Linley both made explicit references to feeling neglected emotionally. Angela also recalled eagerly awaiting her husband's return, even buying a new dress but then not have the opportunity to wear it. She said there was so much work to do in sorting out the “split up”, and other paper work during the break, that she “never even got to go out anywhere”. Her husband, on the other hand, tended to tease her and skite about his social life while away fishing. She said “my sister pointed out that he was only egging me on, but it wasn't fair, I couldn't even bring myself to go to a wedding without my husband”.


Both women and men interviewed stressed the necessity for wives to adapt to and cope with the fisher's lifestyle. Coping, or adapting is also emotion work which Hochschild quoting Ivan Illich, states is “shadow labour” (1983: 167, 170); work performed by women in deference to their husbands - the work of the “good woman behind” him. Several informants, however, made references to women they had known who “couldn't hack it” and left.

Yvonne, Frank and Tim talked about Tim's ex-wives “playing up” because they were lonely and “got toey”. They considered that he had yet to meet a suitable woman, thought divorce was “too easy”, and worried about losing money in property settlements. Tim told me all three of the women he had related to left him even though he had “placed no restrictions on her, at least only one - no playing up”. When I asked him if he had any trouble meeting his own emotional needs, such as relating to his wife and child, my question appeared to be beyond his comprehension. He simply reiterated his statement that his partners had been unfaithful.

Jim, another divorced fisher interviewed, told my research assistant that both his wives left him and stated, “it wasn’t my fault”. He then went on to tell how he slept in a separate bunk to his wife because he was too tired for sex, that his first wife left him because of his dedication to his professional fishing, and the second wife because he spent weekends away sport fishing with his mates. None of these people considered that the structure of the industry, the lifestyle or the men’s attitudes and behaviour created problems for the wives or families; they blamed women for failing to adapt. Although Jim did acknowledge that he had difficulty keeping good crew, he said this was because when “they fall in love ...their girlfriends can’t hack it with them being away so long, or they come home and their wives are in the bunk with someone else”.

Ray, in a stable relationship with Gail for twelve years, admitted that he missed his wife and children but also said that he found phoning them on the mobile phone in the evening was sometimes a bit “unsettling”. Two other skippers said it was “best not to think” about family and relationships because it interfered with their ability to fish! One skipper I interviewed, Lester, was in his third marital relationship and admitted that fishing was addictive. He said, “I know skippers who go fishing in their time off - how stupid is that!?”.  

Another man I interviewed, Chris, demonstrated that being obsessed with fishing, claiming to have “salt water in your veins” merely justified men’s unwillingness to change or adapt to the needs of wives and families. He told me he had always had an affinity for the sea and had commenced work as a fisherman working his way up to qualify as a skipper. But, he said, as far as he was concerned his married crew mates did not have a marriage because of the lifestyle. He agreed with his wife that he should look for other work, and said, “I could see no point in marrying her just to leave her”. He is now in a land based job that also requires him to drive a boat. He would never consider being a house-husband but during the interview he did acknowledge his dependence on his wife’s labour and the difficulties facing fishers’ wives. In contrast to this Frank simply says he was “lucky” because the kids, the grandchildren and the demands of the family business “keep her busy” and within the context of the conversation implied that this prevented his wife from “getting toey”. Unlike Chris and Lester, the other men could not see that fishers’ wives who do not “cope” or “adapt” leave them because the men have already left them.  

Hochschild argues that men and women do different types of emotion work and value it differently. She stated that women, because they are economically dependant and in a position of lower status to men, regard
their emotions and feelings as a valuable resource which can be used in exchange for material benefits provided by their husbands. Men, she argues, take this kind of labour for granted (1983: 163-174). Angela's recall of her husband acting as though he didn't care about her by going fishing when she was in labour demonstrates this. Angela suggested that her husband, Nick, acted the way he did, and left all the emotional and relationship work to her "because men aren't as sensitive as women". She said that although she "always felt let down" in regard to her emotional needs she "just had to accept the good with the bad" because her husband was "a good provider" and had assured her that he would always "look after" his family. Looking after the family, to Nick, means that Angela has to rely on him for her material well being and in return she should do all the emotion work including coping with being alone.

Bittman and Pixley (1997: 181-185), citing England and Kilbourne, 1990, argue that all this unpaid, frequently hidden or denied labour of women within families contributes to women's inequality because it is not given any economic value and cannot be exchanged in the market place. Men, as the breadwinners, perform labour which has a market value and this increases their power within the marital relationship. They can afford to take risks within the relationship - such as taking their wives' labour for granted, refusing to perform housework or engaging in behaviour which might result in conflict - because they have less to lose in the event of divorce. Men may well be aware that being the earner of the family income enhances their status and power but I would argue that taking their wives' labour for granted is more closely allied to their status as superordinate in "normal" heterosexual relationships.

Amongst all the informants there was a strong belief that a fisherman's wife had to be a particular sort of woman, one who would adapt to the lifestyle.
When referring to her fisher son's divorces Yvonne suggested that he hadn't met "the right kind of woman yet". I asked her to explain what she meant and she said,

Somebody who has got some patience and doesn't mind their husband being away...it's alright if you don't mind that sort of thing. ...but they get lonely ... [and] it's too easy to get divorced ...it takes two to work at it ... if she loves him she'll stick by him - some can, some can't...

As Hochschild points out, this emotion work is also undertaken by subordinates and although undertaken actively, rather than passively, it enhances the status and well-being of others (1983: 163-168). The lower status of the wives is understood as a "fact of life" and they accommodate the needs of their husbands and present an image of a good wife which, it is assumed, requires no real effort. The women I interviewed justified this situation by stating that it was his job when they married him, he was a good provider, or that he had fishing "in his blood". They also accepted the view that their husbands were first and foremost fishermen who should be the primary breadwinners in their households. They all held the view that the primary role of a fisher's wife was that of a "good woman": a loyal wife, a mother and a helpmeet willing to adapt to her husband's occupation.

Working at home; doing housework, caring for children and performing emotional and relational labour; fishers' wives adapt to these situations as an essential part of their role as wives and if they are not in paid employment themselves they are readily available for further incorporation into his work when required. According to Finch (1983: 3), this is the other side of a wife's "incorporated labour"; the labour that is more directly associated with the husband's occupation.
Directly Incorporated Labour

All the fishermen's partners had provided labour directly associated with their husband's work at some time during their marriages. I met no woman who refused to take on work associated with fishing and found, like Finch (1983: 97), that to resist incorporation when a business is run from the home is virtually impossible. At the time of interview Vanessa, Val, Maxine, Evelyn, Angela, and Karen were doing very little in the way of incorporated labour, apart from answering the telephone and taking messages occasionally. At that time their husbands were employed as company skippers and the associated administrative work did not spill over into the household. Linley, whose husband owns several large companies, also had little contact with crew and no role in boat management although she was still frequently drawn into her husband's work even though he did not work from home. Yvonne, Gail, and June were doing the most incorporated labour as they managed family fishing enterprises from their homes.

At my first meeting with Yvonne she was sitting in an old wooden “Captain's” chair which enabled her to swivel from between the kitchen table and the telephone-fax machine on the desk. She attended to the organisation and management of the family fishing business and balanced this with spending time with her grandchildren and married daughter Tracey. Despite living several blocks away from each other they spent most of every day together attending to shopping, looking after the children, or doing errands associated with the management of their households or the business. Frank, and Yvonne's eldest son Tim, did the fishing; two other sons were partners in the business but had other occupations. Yvonne, I was told by other members of the fishing community, was “the brains behind the business” and that without her the whole family would be lost. She told me that she 'didn't really do much', but agreed to be interviewed
while Frank and Tim were away. They had gone “prospecting in the bush” for a few weeks but since they had taken several cartons of beer with them the women considered the trip was a “joke” and merely an excuse for a holiday.

Yvonne had lived all her life in the North West and after marrying Frank she said they had “done everything” which included working with Frank as a policeman, an earth moving contractor and a vegetable farmer. The family had no involvement in the fishing industry until the early 1970s when they purchased a fishing boat and licence because Tim, who was then only seventeen, wanted to go fishing. Yvonne claimed that he had always been a “born and bred fisherman”. Tim and Frank both subsequently qualified as skippers, often employed one or two deckhands, and operated a wet-liner fishing mainly for snapper. Yvonne tended to down play her role in the family business and said being married to a fisherman was “what you do and you make the best of it...it is his job so enjoy it”. The work she does that is directly related to the fishing venture included negotiating mortgages and other financial matters with the bank, keeping the books, filling out Fisheries Department reports and deckhands taxation forms, organising the consignment of cartons of product for export, purchasing spare parts for the boat, cooking and freezing meals for the men to take out fishing, and occasionally helping to unload the catch. The fax machine is also used to receive daily weather reports.

Yvonne used to spend more time working on the boat and although apparently pleased to be relieved of her early morning chore of filleting and weighing the fish, she stated, “they don't like me lifting, they just don't like it, [they say] women shouldn't lift”, and laughed. This change in her work pattern had also come about because of a change in the marketing of the
product. The men have recently started using the sashimi method of killing the fish at sea and bringing them in whole for export to the Japanese market.

When I interviewed Yvonne’s husband he said, “you need a good woman behind you” and added,

...we are a bit lucky, ah, my wife, she does all the bookwork, ...if we need an axle or something she knows what she's looking for...a hydraulic winch, ...she will stir, she gets on the phone and she'll stir the whole country up...she'll ring everywhere in Australia...but that keeps her busy, and in her aspect she’s got about 8 grandchildren - a heap of grandchildren, and a few more adopted ones - so between them and [the rest of the family that drops in] that keeps her busy, plus we got dirty washing to do and food to cook, she cooks the food and freezes it for us so we take it out on the boat and don’t waste time cooking food...

I spent four hours with Frank and during that time he did not refer to Yvonne by name. He spoke in a way which enhanced his own status as a fisher with a “good woman” behind him and took her labour for granted. Towards the end of the interview he claimed that women had a lot more stamina than men; they could keep going and “with a little bit of love and affection you will get more work out of them than you’ll ever get out of men…”.

Yvonne is the manager of this family business and she stated that “they all come to me when they want something...and I see if it can be done”. Although her home may be considered matrifocal, she is certainly no matriarch and the men expected her to accommodate their wishes despite giving her the responsibility of managing their finances. While I was visiting they were pressuring her to purchase a new truck which she said they couldn’t afford because the men had been holidaying and spending money on alcohol rather than catching fish. She responded with quiet resignation to the interview questions and said she had not actively sought
involvement in the management of the business, “it just fell in me lap”. At the time of the interview she had been working on a submission to the government on behalf of the snapper fishers concerned about changes in the industry that could threaten the future of small family operators. Her husband had called the fishers together for a meeting in the living room and she was typing up their response on an old typewriter. She turned to me and said “they [her husband and son] want to get me a computer but I won't have one!” She was aware that the men would use it to increase their demands on her time.

Gail, who is seventeen years younger than Yvonne and a “whizz” on the computer, made a partially constrained but active decision to be involved in the management of her husband’s fishing venture. She had worked with him on the boats both prior to and after her marriage but after the birth of their second child she agreed to work from home. Shortly afterwards they got into financial difficulties as owner operators and sold their boat, making an agreement with the company that purchased their trawler, to continue operating it. Ray skippers the boat, and Gail manages the company they have formed and attends to all the administrative work associated with hiring twelve crew. She also manages their two other businesses: a crab fishery for operation between trawling seasons, and a net making business. Gail described the work that she does that is directly related to managing the fishing ventures:

I get the stores for them[skipper and crew], look after all the boys[crew] when they come to town [laughs], play mum to them all, do all the paper work related to the running of the boat, just go down the boat every time it comes to town, um count the boxes [of product] when they unload, make sure they’ve got everything that they need, run around town for them, get whatever they need, and just take all the messages that they send in - for anything that needs to be done. We also make the nets ourselves for quite a number of the boats here...
The bookwork that she did was much the same as that undertaken by Yvonne but on a much larger scale. Although she suggested that it all “sounds simple”, Gail’s work load had increased every year as a result of government regulations relating to employment contracts, taxation requirements and fishing regulations, and she added that “…the bigger you get the more time consuming” the work became for her. Gail, who claimed she “would probably be hopeless doing anything else”, stated that she could do anything associated with boats, but that “Ray doesn’t do the books because he wouldn’t be any good at it…he is first and foremost a fisherman - he is not that way inclined”.

This implied that Gail was “that way inclined”; and this was, as Finch (1983: 153-4) suggests, another way in which women “make sense” of their unpaid labour and their role as a husband’s unpaid business partner. It also justifies the conventional division of labour and the role of a wife on the basis that she has “special” talents which complement her husband’s (Bittman and Pixley, 1997).

In regard to financial decisions Gail stated that she took “a set amount” out of the profits for her “groceries and things like that” and said that if a major decision had to be made she usually “just did it” - although if it was something directly related to the fishing vessel Ray usually made the final decision. Decisions regarding the household and the running of the business he left to her. When I asked her how Ray would cope without her, she said,

He wouldn’t know what to do would he?...Don’t worry I’ve gone on strike a few times...on the boat when I used to go on strike he used to say - ‘well have your cup of coffee and hurry up and get back on the deck’. And here, well I mean if I go on strike today it’ll still be there tomorrow so ...[laughs]
Angela, whose father, brothers and husband have all been lobster fishers, found herself drawn into doing the books and working on the split-ups when she was a young girl still at school. Her father was an Italian born fisherman who could neither read nor write in English so he also used her to translate government regulations. Her husband, also Italian born, and a friend of her brother, saw the potential for Angela to make a good wife for him as a fisherman. Throughout her marriage, depending on the type of contract under which he was employed as a skipper, she did the book keeping and all the financial management of his earnings, the family's investments and the household management. She also described making curtains for the boat, putting new sheets on her husband's bunk at the beginning of each season and preparing food and clothing for his trips away. She stated that although her husband was “very good with figures” he told her she “could do all that”. Angela sometimes felt “pushed” by her husband to do more than she really wanted to, and they sometimes argued over how things should be done, but she said,

...slowly slowly he stopped doing these jobs because he could see that I could do them. He'd put more and more jobs onto me [laughs] so each year you'd sort of find you were doing more and more ...all the paying of the crew, all the paying of the bills, working out the shares....

Linley met her Italian husband Tony when she was a teenager 'hanging around' the fishing boat harbour. Her father was a waterfront worker and his father was an Italian lobster fisher. Tony, born in 1937, had worked as a barefoot primary school boy selling newspapers on the street corner and left school in his early teens with little formal education. His mother had struggled to keep the family together during World War II when his father was interned as an “alien”. Prior to their marriage Linley said Tony would write letters from the fishing grounds further north, but rather than being “romantic letters”, they were instructions - “Linley would you get this or do that for me”. Her labour was incorporated into his work even when she
was a teenage “sweetheart”. Her husband is now a millionaire entrepreneur who owns several companies and has staff to attend to the management of the businesses but Linley is an “on paper” director of one of the companies. Although he may only telephone her occasionally he insists that she be at home by noon every day in case he needs her. While I was interviewing her he sent a fax from overseas (the fax machine is on the kitchen bench), and she attended to it immediately. Even though he has staff to attend to most of his administrative work his work still structures her lifestyle. Linley expressed resentment about these demands made by her husband, especially given that he is still “never home”. He was away managing his trawling fleet in a “Third World” country at the time of interview.

I interviewed June in Linley’s kitchen and when Linley attended to her husband’s fax she said, “I’ve got one of those - most of us have”. She is married to Gus who, as a Yugoslav migrant, had worked as an itinerant labourer doing such heavy work that he earned himself the nickname of “Horse”. She said, although he was now just “pottering around”, she “couldn’t say he was a bludger because he has worked terribly hard”. He crewed on various lobster boats until he qualified as a skipper, and could afford to purchase a boat of his own. At one stage they owned and operated three lobster boats and June has run the financial side of the family business for over thirty years. She got a great deal of satisfaction out of being the “brains behind the business” but she spoke as if she had to prove her worth because her skill and labour was rarely acknowledged. She said,

For 32, 34 years I have managed it[the business], I have done marvellous things, I’ve been happy to do it to help my husband, fibre glassed the boat, I’ve painted the boat, I have put the names on the boat, I have made craypots, I have welded the balast in the pots, ...painted lots of floats.

Although she told me she preferred “artistic and creative” pursuits she had taken Technical and Further Education courses to learn such skills as welding and carpentry, and the week I interviewed her she had just finished
making alterations to the boat so that a new engine, which she had “to ring all round Australia” for, could be fitted properly. She proudly described her negotiations with engineering companies and boat builders and the mechanical details; the horsepower, the circumference of the pipes, the pitting of the engine block and where to buy marine filters for zinc blocks. She is no longer working as an assistant, or in the background just to “help” her husband but when I asked her if she had been trained for business management she said: “No, all that has come to me, that’s come to me, been pushed onto me, not something I wanted to do.” She said she “had a feeling” she would be required to take on the work when she married because her husband did not come from an English speaking background. While this adds another dimension to the work of wives of some of the fishermen it is of course not the primary reason why they are drawn into their husband’s work.

When I interviewed June it was apparent that she compensated for the difficulties of adapting to the lifestyle of a fisher by throwing herself into the demands of his occupation. Although she was frazzled by the amount of work she was doing and complained about the difficulties associated with it, she, like Gail and Yvonne, had made “his project hers”, enjoyed being busy and in charge, and worked primarily for the future benefit of her family. She also referred to being part of the team as important to her and part of her adaptation to both being restricted in other creative ways and being incorporated into the fishing. Being part of the “team” obviously wears thin at times but she makes it enjoyable for herself (Finch, 1983: 152).

Although no longer required to do directly incorporated labour, Angela said she missed being involved because that she had enjoyed the work and “liked at least being a part of it with him, [feeling] that I could help in some way because we were in a partnership and I felt I was contributing” but as
the earlier part of this paper shows her work load as a fisher's wife has never been that of an equal. She has **assisted** with the fishing enterprise as well as having full responsibility for all household labour, home management and child care. Even though this labour of Angela's was vital to the success of the business she, like most wives, also received no direct financial reward (Finch, 1983: 103).

Gail made sense of her work load by referring to what she did as “being something like a job but not really a job”. She was not simply denying that childcare and housework are work, but acknowledging that working on the business is satisfying to her and preferable to going out to a nine to five job - his project has become hers in much the same way as it had for June and Yvonne.

Finch argues that although women often have little choice about the extent to which their labour is drawn in to their husband's work they “actively co-operate” and creatively “make sense” of their position within the socially and culturally sanctioned order of priorities: his work, the family and her interests (1983: 122). The wives of fishermen also “make sense” of this inequitable division of labour in their households by making reference to essentialist characteristics of fishermen, their primary role as breadwinners and “good providers”, or by stating that “family comes first”. They also claim that they work in a “team” or a partnership, and make a vicarious career out of his project. This results in them making “ongoing investments” in the venture because of future benefits to themselves and their families. However, Finch notes it can be difficult for wives to withdraw their labour from such investments. This was most apparent in the households of Yvonne and June.
“A boat is just a hole in the water you chuck money into”

Yvonne’s husband Frank, aged sixty-three, had developed an illness which made it difficult for him to cope with being cold. He often stayed home and left the fishing to his son who then employed a deckhand. He stated that it was time he retired. However, he was waiting for Yvonne to retire too. She couldn’t retire unless Tim found the “right kind of woman” prepared to take on her work as manager of the family business. Yvonne, as well as the men, were quite happy to employ a deckhand but not a business manager, book-keeper or secretary. They clearly regarded this work as part of the role of a wife and helpmeet.

June was in a similar position. She stated that she had told her son (who was training to be a skipper) to hurry up and find a wife so that she could retire, but he told her “they don’t make them like you anymore, mum”. This is further evidence that younger women are resisting the role of helpmeet and “wife of”. Jim, when discussing his failed marriages, failed to acknowledge the efforts of the women whose labour was valuable to him but acknowledged that when his last wife had left him he had been forced to employ “a girl in the office”. Jim was also one of the men accused by others of having worked his wife “to death”.

Being unable to withdraw her labour is only one difficulty for such women; they can also be in danger of inheriting “sexually transmitted debts” when their labour is essential to keeping the business afloat. Yvonne, June, Gail and Angela all avoided this problem because they were able to make decisions about the family’s financial investments.

When I asked Yvonne if she had ever felt economically vulnerable she said “you get your tight spots...but usually it [the business] just runs”. Yvonne quietly worked behind the scenes to ensure the future of the business and
her family and often made the major financial decisions. She told me that she invested an inheritance from her mother in property rather than in the fishing enterprise because “a boat is just a hole in the water you chuck money into”. The family now owns several houses which her children live in and are “renting” until they are paid off or they inherit them. When cash flow problems arose because the boat was out of action, or the men had taken time off, Yvonne would “just shuffle things around to make ends meet”. She said,

..Normally we don’t do too bad, we’re not rich but I mean it is keeping two families virtually, so we’re not doing too bad...Tim gets wages and we [Frank and Yvonne] get wages type of thing, not wages, but we live on it...we take out X amount each fortnight...Tim gets so much, Frank gets so much and I get so much...

This arrangement was not made to ensure that Yvonne was paid for her labour, but because she and her husband had provided the initial capital to enable her son to enter the fishing industry.

Like Yvonne, June also managed to ensure her own economic security. She recalled that in the earlier days of her marriage she had to undertake fairly menial work between seasons or when the business got into financial difficulties but by 1995 she claimed her assets were solid. When I asked her if she felt she had an equal share of the rewards for her labour, she said she was economically secure and that this was due to her own “cleverness”. She had made a habit of putting money aside in a separate bank account so that the men couldn’t spend it; “money...which I put by for maybe tax, or something went wrong with my husband - because he hadn’t been well - I thought I’d have money there to lean on, while I myself might look for a job or something...”. The most drastic thing that June could think of that would cause her problems was if she lost her skipper but she said she’d just get another one. These strategies were to protect her ongoing investment in the business but she also added that if she got really fed up with it all she’d
sell "the whole ruddy lot and stick it somewhere where I can get some good interest". I asked if she would be the one making that decision and she responded,

Oh, I think so, my husband said to me this morning, "well, I think next year we might sell the boat". And I said, "oh, yeah?" And he said, "well "- before I even answered - "well, if you don't [sell], I am going to sell my so and so half and you can ruddy well so and so keep yours!" So [laughs] - so he's not sure of me!

June is not playing second fiddle to her husband who is now retired, and although he and her son benefit from her unpaid labour she is not working merely as an assistant or in the background. She is aware that she has some power in keeping her husband unsure of her plans.

Yvonne, June, Gail and Angela, to a lesser extent, have played an active role in the incorporation of their labour into their husband's work. They have been motivated by the satisfaction they get from being involved and by the benefits and rewards for themselves and their children. However, investing in the fishing industry can be a risky business because a boat and a licence can cost a million dollars. Fishers and their wives therefore often have to carry high mortgage costs and make ongoing capital investments¹.

When I asked Gail if she had ever felt economically vulnerable she revealed that she and her husband got into difficulties trying to operate their own trawler, and had to sell it to become sub-contractors working for the new owner. This seems to have been a sensible compromise for them and she now regards their position as being much more secure. She suggested that should anything happen to her husband she would be able to sell the assets

¹ Since the 1970s development of the W.A. fisheries some wives have undertaken paid labour outside the home to keep the business afloat. Bernard Clarkson admitted in his oral history interview that he had "lived off" his wife, who was a school teacher, in order to survive off-season and repay debts incurred through the purchase of a lobster boat, pots and license (PRO OH2266).
they have and bring up the children within a reasonably comfortable lifestyle.

Frank and Tim are quite happy with their old but efficient boat which other fishers laughed at by referring to it as an “old stink boat”, and Angela’s husband resisted the temptation to own and operate his own vessel because he was content to earn good money as a highly regarded skipper. However, other fishers continually increased their debts by upgrading into bigger and better boats, and their wives worked, both paid and unpaid, to help cover the costs. One woman, who was not actually interviewed, worked night shifts as a nursing sister and was upset about her husband mortgaging their home without her permission in order to upgrade his vessel. The boat cost over $500,000 but was burnt out by a fire which occurred inside it before it was even launched (West Australian, May 29, 1995, p. 3).

Linley’s husband Tony was a wealthy man; however, she was the one wife who spoke most openly about being economically vulnerable. Unlike some of the other women, she knew very little about her husband’s finances and had been threatened by the bankruptcy of one of her husband’s company’s. She was very distressed, at the time of interview, about having had her home mortgaged for his latest venture; “a woman's home is very important to her”, she said. The family solicitor warned Linley of further danger when she went to sign the home mortgage papers, but she said to me “you can't go against your husband's wishes, can you?” She justified this view by acknowledging that he was a “good provider”, and that he had “done a lot for Australia” and the fishing industry.

Tony had a similar outlook to Jim in that they both owned several companies and fleets of boats. Both were ambitious, hardworking entrepreneurs who exercised authority at work and at home. Their wives
had little input in decision making, or access to the “family” money. Research on financial arrangements within Australian families shows that husbands in the “upper income level” are less inclined to pool their income due to their desire to maintain separate fortunes (Edwards: 1981: 1-12). Such men also tend to play a greater role in decision making.

The extent to which the wife of a fisherman has her labour drawn into his work varies according to whether the fisher owns a large company employing administrative staff, is employed away from home by a company which attends to the management of the boat and crew, operates the boat from home each day, and whether the couple own and manage their own boat and/or family business. I concur with Finch that the primary factor that “draws her in” is the marriage partnership ideal; her availability is also influenced by the lack of “viable alternatives” for her. However, within the marital relationship there are also other factors; the personalities of each individual and the fisherman’s willingness to accept, relinquish or share responsibility for the business management and financial decisions.

**Negotiating a “little bit of a life of your own”**.

The fishermen’s wives made continual reference to adapting, coping or surviving the fishers’ lifestyle. Their choices were constrained not only but the structure of the industry and the cultural meaning of being a “wife of” but also by their limited access to paid work outside their homes. The necessity for them to take on the role of “both mum and dad”, manage the household alone and run the business gave them some power and authority in controlling and managing their own time and space, however, the extent to which they were able to do this varied enormously. In this section I reveal the strategies and counter strategies used by fishers’ wives as they “make sense” of their position, and as Evelyn said, try to “make a little bit of a life” of their own.
Prior to their marriages the fishermen's wives worked intermittently as counter hands, shop assistants, seafood processors, domestics, barmaids, clerical workers and cook/deckhands. After marriage, with the exception of Vanessa, they all worked primarily as wives and mothers. Val returned to work after 20 years to work as a deckhand on the company trawler her husband skippered. June, occasionally undertook part time work to “keep the business afloat” but Yvonne and Evelyn, aged 55 and 46 respectively, expressed a lack of interest in undertaking paid work outside the home. Yvonne who had been in paid work for a short period as a country store bookkeeper during the 1950s, claimed that if she ever “had to” she “would just get a job”. Evelyn, who lived in the same town and had been married for twenty-five years, was more realistic about her position. She had worked as a counter-hand prior to her marriage, and as a processor prior to the birth of her children in the 1970s. During the 1990s she had reluctantly taken up part-time paid work at a child care centre. At the time of interview the centre was facing funding cuts and Evelyn stated that she lay awake in bed at night and “thought of every shop up and down the street where I could perhaps go and get work and there was just nowhere”.

Evelyn likes being a mother and homemaker and stated that she had “never wanted to [work] before” or “thought of anything she would really love to do”. She works because she needs the money to send her children a thousand kilometres away for tertiary education and said she “might as well” work in childcare because she “loves kids”. Her experience of twenty-years parenting was not recognised as providing her with appropriate skills however, and she was being pressured to undertake tertiary studies herself. She said she would just have to “get through” this problem but would “prefer it - if we could afford it - to just stay home because there is stacks to do and I wouldn't get bored”.

Neither Angela nor Linley took up any paid work after marriage and Angela said,

...my husband was a real chauvinist, an Italian man, and he didn’t approve of me working after we were married...in those days there was no need to financially...he was quite able to support us ...so I never ever worked after that much to my disappointment.

Linley, who married Angela’s brother, expressed a similar view to her situation and when I asked her if she had ever thought of undertaking a career for herself she responded softly and sadly,

Oh, yeah, oh no, don’t talk about that, no. Um, [pause] as I got older I got very interested in a lot of things and the situation arose that I went and learnt massage because my father was a football trainer so I always saw people coming and my father taught me you know ...then I went and had lessons ...then the opportunity came for me to teach it and it was just one morning a week, you know, oh I was so excited - told my husband and he went off his head, absolutely - I had no idea he would be so mad.

Linley also taught yoga classes to children but when it came to taking adult classes her husband was particularly strong in expressing his disapproval. Knowing he was unhappy Linley told the organisers she could not continue. She said,

...I couldn't do it, he does not like me to work, and I made a decision - what was important to me? And I thought, his health, and him happy was the most important thing to me. So then after that I just adjusted to that, but I was a bit resentful .... I just had to get my priorities right in my head. Those things would have been fun for me and certainly an advantage to my self esteem because they were areas I really loved [but] he was more important...

Linley suggested that coming from an older generation of Italian men her husband, born in 1937, thought that when wives took on paid work it “implied that they [husbands] weren't good enough to earn enough money to
support their wives and family”. She also said he was not happy about her having contact with strangers because Italian men “love to have control”. But her reference to having her priorities “right” is, as Finch points out, the consequence of being married, and the wider socially and culturally sanctioned “order of priorities”; his work comes first, the family second, and the work or other interests of his wife come last.

Linley’s husband, as an individual, also places restrictions on how she spends her time and exerts power in their relationship. She spoke about “incurring” the “disappointment and the anger” of her husband and said:

I mean this man has worked all his life and achieved great things and given you absolutely everything you could ever wish for and if you went against his wishes in any way well that would be the end of the marriage I would think...

Linley has accommodated her husband’s wishes in order to maintain her relationship with him but acknowledges her economic dependency and the fear of the consequences of divorce. This was something to which other women made oblique reference when emphasising the importance of adapting to their husbands’ lifestyles, and telling what Hochschild refers to as “cautionary tales” about other couples’ difficulties. Whether they were directly involved in a fishing enterprise or not, all of them, apart from Vanessa, were totally dependent on the success of their marital relationship for economic survival. Although they all maintained that they were economically secure their position could be fragile and this reflects the general position of all dependent wives who may be said to be only one man away from poverty.

Maxine was the only woman who admitted having thought about what she would do should she and her husband “split up”. She was also the most emphatic in stressing the necessity for wives to adapt to their husband’s
lifestyle. She had been married for five years and she had part-time casual work with the trawling company that employed her husband as a skipper. Due to a friendship between her, her husband and the fleet manager she made herself available to “fill in” as a boat and office cleaner. She stated that if she were left on her own she would “pack up the kids and work her way around Australia” because she is “not a nine to five person” and likes travelling. She claimed that she has never had any trouble getting temporary casual work, and since she had no interest in following a career of her own she would simply “find another fisherman ... or a truckie”.

Vanessa, also a wife of the company employing the husbands of Maxine, Val and Evelyn, was an exception amongst the wives I interviewed. She did not have a “vicarious career” (Finch, 1983: 152-158) and identity associated with the work of her husband. She left school at the age of thirteen and worked her way around Australia until she married and followed her husband to the prawn trawling area. She had, as noted above, been in full time paid work throughout her married life and worked in several different occupations. She has also worked in a voluntary capacity networking with various women’s groups and community projects. In her spare time she engages in creative writing and art work.

Vanessa has educated and trained herself for work in business management, employment training or policy making areas but she also said she thought that being in paid work throughout her marriage was “what saved it”. Despite being a strong and capable woman with an identity separate from her husband’s occupation, she still gives priority to “saving the marriage” and fitting her life and work around her husband’s occupation. The difference between her and the other women interviewed can therefore only be due to individual personality differences. Although his occupation still structures hers to a certain extent, there was no indication in this household that
Vanessa’s husband would undercut any decision she made for herself. She does have the power and authority to run the household as she wishes, follow her own interests or take up a career. I was unable to meet her husband but from the interview, and my visits to their household, it seemed that although the sexual division of labour was fairly conventional he had also adapted to her working life. Although Vanessa is doing three jobs she makes the best of the space she has between his job, their family and her own projects (Finch, 1983: 149-165) and in comparison to other wives she is more in charge of her own life.

When being interviewed several women referred to a struggle in the ordering of the “hierarchy of priorities” by stating that they did not agree that their husband’s work should always come before the needs or interests of the family. However, most were not explicit in acknowledging that their own interests came third in this hierarchy, and often conflated their interests with those of the family. Yvonne’s role as wife, mother and grandmother combined with her astute business management skills did, as Thompson (1985) points out, give her the potential to exercise power and authority in her household but she said, “the family is sort of my life” and when I asked her if there was anything she would like to have been doing for herself she said, “Never think about it ’cause I don’t usually get to do it anyway”. When the tape was turned off and she was making me a cup of tea she turned and said, “Wouldn’t mind having a look at the Greek Isles one day - but it’ll never happen”. And then she added, “I go to bingo once a fortnight, that’s me one night out - no-one is going to take that away from me [besides] ...he gets his beer money and that ...”. Her own interests came well behind those of the men, the business and the family.

Evelyn, like Yvonne and June, declared that to her “family always comes first” but in shaping her own life she also drew on the company of other
women as she developed interests of her own. As a teenage newly wed she had worked in the processing plant and got used to being married to a fisherman. She said, “I just sort of grew into it. I had some friends out there who you know, I’d sort of go over [to their accommodation] and bring their mail up after work and have tea with them or that - before I went home to the caravan”. Later on in her marriage she and her husband bought their own home in the town and she built up a network of women friends from amongst factory workers, fishers’ wives and other residents of the town. She spoke about getting together with women to take their children out on picnics, have evening meals together, and organise other women’s activities. This was done as part of coping with husbands being away; child care responsibilities, and the isolation of living away from their own friends and families.

Evelyn also referred to missing some of the women who had “moved off” to other areas, or left because, “a lot of marriages fail”. Marriages failed, she suggested, because the men were away a lot and “the wife was not prepared to ...sit at home and wait...not prepared to do it on their own”. She was quick to add that “you don’t have to sit at home and wait” and it was obvious that she had not done this, but like five of the other women interviewed she referred to conflict occurring when her husband came home. She said, “a lot of the times you found a lot of conflict because you had made a bit of your own life while they are out at sea but when they come in you are expected to drop everything and just do what they want. I used to say oh, it’s garden club, I have to go, and he’d say oh, ra, ra, ra, [put her down and complain].”

Evelyn certainly put “family first” and her involvement in women’s networks may, as Betsy Wearing (1984) suggests, reinforce the ideology of family and motherhood. However, she was also aware that her daughters
should have tertiary education opportunities and was most supportive of other women who had career interests. Her involvement in women’s networks also resulted in her being part of the group that founded the child care centre during the 1970s. Vanessa, who was the most independent of fishers’ wives I interviewed, has also been involved in these networks. Evelyn is less interested in a professional career than Vanessa but she has undertaken part-time employment in child care, and further education opportunities. When she said she wouldn’t have time to get bored if she “just stayed home”, this was because of her involvement in many creative projects, and her enjoyment of other women’s company, not only her work as a wife and mother. One of these projects is genealogy and family history and she invited me to speak to her local group about some of my Western Australian historical research. The genealogy fits in with her putting creative energy into family matters; in her living room there hung a plaque which she had embroidered, it read: Time will come and time will go but families remain forever.

Maxine, who declared her love of the lifestyle of being married to a fisherman also stated that it was “the kids that keep me going”. However unlike Evelyn she declared herself a bit of a loner and filled in her time bootscooting, playing squash or studying Japanese. Because Maxine insisted that she liked the fishers’ lifestyle and would like to have been working on a boat with her husband, I suggested she might get her own ticket but she reminded me that her husband was thirteen years older than she was and would want to retire by the time when, as she said, “the kids are off my hands”. Five other women I met, three of whom were interviewed, also said they “couldn’t wait” for the kids to grow up so that they could go to sea, but they also added that their husbands would want to retire by then. None of them would really consider doing it alone, the inference was that they would fit in with their husbands’ plans for the future. Although this
demonstrates how the husband's occupational life continues to structure the
women's lifestyle - even if he is not actually working - it also demonstrates
how women look forward to a more companionable life with their husbands.

This companionable element of marriage, which as Finch demonstrated was
often used to justify "drawing her in" to her husband's work, was also
something many fishers' wives missed. Evelyn, Angela and Linley, unlike
Val and Maxine, made no reference to spending companionable time with
their husbands and were also the women who made most of having to drop
their own interests to fit in with their husband's demands when they came
home. Linley found it most difficult and suggested that the older Italian
women "knew the rules"; the men ruled the waves, and the women ruled
the house, and it didn't seem to bother them. She is an Anglo-Australian
married to an Italian and her friends are Anglo-Australian childhood or
family friends who don't understand her situation. She said,

...while the husband is away the woman adjusts herself to
life without them. And then when they come home they
have to adjust themselves to a different life. Friendships...you can't have friendships very easily
because when they are away you are free, you can go and
have coffee or lunch with your girlfriends or whatever, but
when the men are home you have got to stay home and
look after the men. And so you have these part-time
friends and you say well look, I can go out with you today
and then when your husband is home you say, well I don't
need you now - my husband is home. It has caused
problems.

Angela, on the other hand, described how much time she spent with other
Italian fishermen's families when the men were away. Since her children
have grown up and her husband has stopped going to sea she has, with the
encouragement of her daughters, started to take up other interests. Her
adolescent daughters and nieces, she said, can't understand why she did not
have a career or outside interests of her own and suggested that she “should do something now”; join the amateur theatre group, or attend adult education classes. She explained to the younger women that “we never really thought about a career, we just thought our aim in life was to find a good man, get married and have children...”. Angela and Linley also spoke about clock watching, and calendar watching as an old habit that still preoccupies them. Angela says although her husband is no longer fishing she still finds herself looking at the calendar and reminding herself that she has to get things ready for her husband to go to sea. Linley’s husband still demands that she rush home from coffee or shopping with friends to “be there for him” at noon.

Angela’s supportive network of other fishers’ wives also led her into being involved in a lobster fishers protest march on parliament house. However, when she expressed an interest in being more involved in this her husband didn’t want her to; he expected her to be home “...there for him not out helping other people”. She said she got upset about this “...because you know, it is your industry”. Some of Angela’s friends and family have also been involved in the annual Blessing of the Fleet festivities. She explained to me that apart from the spiritual significance of the Blessing of the Fleet, activities were also undertaken to raise money for families of fishers in the event of a poor season or even the death of the breadwinning fisherman. She claimed this was no longer necessary in her community, but stated that she tried “to keep it alive with my kids because it is something that is actually from my home town, my dad and mum’s home town” in Italy.

Angela has only recently been able to take up interests of her own but June undertook adult classes at the Technical and Further Education centre throughout her married life as a strategy for survival. She said,
I really love TAFE and that really has kept me together while my husband has been away...he used to go away seven months of the year and to pay off the house he'd be working the other 5 months as well...the seasons were very long. I went to TAFE 21 years... learnt to do welding, woodcarving, soapstone, bronze, aluminium, sculpture, ceramics, oil painting, gauche, watercolour, acrylic, hairdressing, silk screening, embroidery, dying cloths, batik, drawing classes, history...

Although June has used some of the skills she learnt, such as welding and carpentry in the maintenance of the boat, she claimed she was really "more artistically inclined" and would "if she had the time" prefer to be working in such an area. Her commitment to her family business, however, drives her to continue with the management of the boat, and she has, as Finch suggests, created a "creature" she has to control (1983:168). This has also led her to participate in political action with other fishers' wives even though her husband has retired because she is in effect the family breadwinner.

June became involved in the same political action group as Angela and explained to me how Portuguese, Italian, Anglo-Australian and Yugoslav wives of fishers formed an association to lobby the Minister of Fisheries on issues relating to proposed changes to the lobster fishing industry. The women formed an association but the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council (WAFIC), which June referred to as "the men's association", would not recognise it as having equal status with the professional fishermen's associations who could elect representatives to the council. The women were regarded as associate members and told they could not be full members because they were not "actively involved" in fishing. Associate members have no voting rights. The women pointed out that most of them "do everything but fish" and some of the male representatives are not fishers but owners of processing companies or boats. The women invited women fishers to join them and also sought assistance with lobbying skills from the then president of the state government's Women's Advisory Council. Women from other professional women's groups and a female academic also assisted
them to improve their lobbying skills. The result was that the women got support from the Minister of Fisheries and WAFIC was pressured to accept the women's association as having equal right to representation on the Council.

The issue that triggered this joint action amongst fishers' wives was a proposed new “home porting rule” which they claimed would limit the areas in which the lobster fishers could fish, waste fuel and increase the time and distance between fishers and their families. June and the other women are also concerned about changes to licences and lobster pot allowances because they believed it would drive family businesses out of the industry, and encourage investors. The secretary of the group also informed me that the women wanted to lobby the government to improve road access to particular fishing areas to facilitate access for women and children travelling hundreds of miles visiting their husbands. These women have become politically active because they are managing the family businesses on land and their husbands are often at sea when decisions have to be made or meetings take place, but they are primarily motivated to protect the family business and family relationships.

**Conclusions**

To use Finch's words, women “make sense” of their lives and make “ongoing investments” in their husband’s work but their choices are constrained by the structure of the fishing industry, their unequal access to paid employment and the ideology of family and marriage. The absence of men at sea results in them having even greater responsibility for household labour and parenting than other women, such as farmers’ wives, who also adhere to a conventional sexual division of labour (Poiner, 1990).
Some of the wives made sense of their position by claiming that to them “the family is everything” and were only able to make a “little bit of a life” for themselves outside their homes. Some “made his project hers” and gained satisfaction and increased status out of having a “vicarious career” (Finch, 1983). My interviews with fishers’ wives also showed, as Janet Finch found in her research, that they allowed incorporation of their labour into his occupation because they considered that once they married they should be “married to the job”. They also made “ongoing investments” in the family enterprise because, as dependents, it was in their interests to do so (Finch, 1983). Others, epitomised by Maxine’s story, enjoyed the increased freedom and control her husband’s absence at sea allowed her. Although upholding the belief that a wife should adapt and cope, and not neglect the needs of her husband and children, Vanessa - the most independent and self-aware wife interviewed - organised her life in such a way that she had more time for herself and her own career.

In making a “little bit of a life” for themselves, some of the fishers’ wives had used networks for support as wives and mothers and this reinforced their conventional roles. However, they also used them to broaden their social and political outlook, work as volunteers and move into paid work. As Walby points out, women’s networking is often a response to public patriarchy (1990: 200), but it is also enmeshed with private patriarchy. In the northern fishing community the women established a child care centre which enabled other women as well as themselves to undertake adult education or paid work.

All the women referred to the necessity to adapt, cope and survive and these are the actions of those with less power in a relationship (Finch, 1983; Hochschild, 1983; Poiner, 1990). However, male absence and the involvement of women in the family business can give women “somewhat
more control of their own lives” (Finch, 1983: 69-70). They can exclude their husbands from decision making in the household, especially in relation to parenting while he is at sea. When he returns conflict often arises and women may acquiesce to their husband’s authority. Husband’s have authority in their households because as husbands and breadwinners they are regarded as having greater responsibilities, and hence the “right” to be in control (Poiner, 1990: 189). Their decisions in relation to the family business can also be undermined in this way, and although their labour is used to build up the family business they rarely receive equal economic reward because the enterprise is passed on to sons. The stories women told about how essential it was for a woman to adapt and cope with the lifestyle are an acknowledgment of their subordinate and dependent status, and the necessity for them to place priority on their husband’s occupation or family enterprise.

Included in the expectation that fishers’ wives should “cope” is the “moral obligation” to worry in a manner considered appropriate in their community (Finch, 1989: 207-208). This is also an expectation imposed on those in a subordinate position (Hochschild, 1983; Finch, 1983; Poiner, 1990). As wives, the fishers’ wives have a duty to worry, but they must not show their feelings or make demands associated with their fear of being alone or their concern for their husband’s safety.

As Finch (1983:70) suggests in relation to some other occupations, fishing creates what is culturally considered an “abnormal” family situation and this causes men and women to suggest that fishing is “hard on family life”. However, while nearly all men and women interviewed said this, or something like it, with the exception of Frank they rarely acknowledged that it was actually hard on women. From my interviews family life and the family enterprise seemed all to be doing quite well; it was women who were
having a hard time. Never-the-less, some women clearly found marriage to a man of the sea gave them some freedom and control of their time and space. Maxine said, “I think it is great!” and had a clear preference for marriage to a man who was often absent from home. A few, like Gail and June relished doing work which was not that of conventional wives and mothers. These women have the potential to make decisions and control their own futures.

Others have less influence in decisions regarding their husband’s work and their own futures. Their lives have been structured by their husband’s occupation, but their husbands appear to have exerted more control over how their wives live their lives. In comparison to other fishers’ wives Linley and Angela, for example, lived lives more separate from the working lives of their husbands. This is due to the different circumstances of their husbands’ involvement in fishing, and the personalities of these two men who exercise greater power and authority in their households than some of the other fishers. This has curtailed the women’s direct incorporation into the business, their ability to “make his project theirs” and their efforts to “make a life of their own”. Linley and Angela were also the only women to make direct reference to feelings of emotional neglect and from this I would assert that their relationships with their husbands are less companionable than those of women like Val, Gail and Vanessa.

Val and Gail share their husbands’ passion for fishing as a way of life and although influenced by their husbands’ greater earning capacity as qualified skippers, they actively chose to extend their involvement in fishing through marriage to fishers. In these households the women did not feel alienation from their husbands’ work and the sexual division of labour, although not equal, was negotiated within a relationship based on mutual respect and affection.
The fax in the kitchen is symbolic of the intersection between work and family. It is also indicative of the extent to which capital relations of production and patriarchal relations of production impact on the lives of fishers’ wives. In their kitchens they may order spare parts for the boat, obtain information relating to marketing the catch, act on instructions from their husbands, and information from government bodies relating to fisheries regulations and employment of crew. The fax machine can also be used to challenge government policy and the attitudes of the men representing the professional associations. Although this political action was primarily motivated by their interests in the family business in which they had vested interests, it was also used to challenge the domination of the fishing by processors, entrepreneurial fishers and policy makers who treated women and their families as “invisible” and non-active members of the community.

The demands of the fishing industry require some men to be away for long periods of time but gender ideology demands that whether he is home or away she should be a “good wife” and “good mother”, and accept the greater responsibility for household labour as well as incorporation into his occupation (Finch, 1983). His job should come before the family’s needs, and both should come before her needs. Any involvement in her own leisure pursuits, voluntary or paid labour, must come third in this hierarchy. As the primary breadwinner and fisher adopting the identity of the independent rugged man with “salt water in his veins” a fisherman can escape the “world of women”, and deny his dependence on her labour. There is some evidence of token recognition, by husbands, of the value of their wives’ household and incorporated labour, but it is usually only as the “brains behind the business”, and more frequently simply taken for granted. Most men only acknowledged their dependence on women obliquely; when they came home and made
demand on her time and energy, asserted their parental authority or challenged their wife's right to a life of her own.

The fisherman’s wife may be a “reluctant matriarch” (Binkley and Thiessen, 1988), and she does have some autonomy, but this entails full responsibility for child care and household management which restricts her freedom and independence. When the husbands are persistently unavailable because they put fishing first their wives justify it on the grounds that “it is in his blood”, or “he is a good provider”. This reinforces her role as a full time wife and mother whether he is at home or not, and regardless of whether she is in paid work outside the home. The denial of her household labour as “real” work together with the undervaluing of nurturant labour contributes to men’s unwillingness to share such work more equitably. The dependence of fishers, and the industry, on the labour of women is influenced by the view that as a wife and helpmeet a man has a right to his wife’s labour, and she is only passively drawn into the fishery. It is also influenced by the view that fishing is a peculiarly masculine lifestyle - a lifestyle marked by homo sociability and a perceived freedom from land based responsibilities. This reinforces the importance of his role as a breadwinner and “head” of the household, but denies any necessity for him to labour within that household or play an emotional role in his family.

The land/sea dichotomy is not clear cut, and is not what determines the sexual division of labour, but the cultural mythology of “seafaring man” together with the reality of men being away from home encourages a conventional sexual division of labour that is, as Vanessa put it, “not always fair and equitable”.
Chapter 4

"You should talk to Annie": working in a seafood factory.

In this chapter I examine the labour process in a major seafood processing company in Western Australia, and explore the intersection of the categories of gender, class and ethnicity/race. These major categories are inextricably linked to issues such as the sexual division of labour, occupational health and safety, and industrial relations. Analysing the sexual division of labour in this context enables me to go beyond the assumption that "man is to the sea, as woman is to the land".

In many fishing communities it has been customary for men to fish at sea while women attend to shore work including processing and marketing the catch (Thompson, 1985; Davis and Nadel-Klein, 1988; Ram, 1991). In the 1980s anthropologists and historians acknowledged the dependence of fishing communities on the active and sometimes powerful participation of women labouring in processing plants but did not question the land/sea, man/woman dichotomy. As Davis and Nadel-Klein (1992) pointed out, this was inadequate for understanding fishing communities, and comparable to accepting the public/private dichotomy in Western cultures.

More recent literature, especially that coming from the North Atlantic region, has engaged in closer analysis of gender issues and the sexual division of labour in processing plants (Connolly and MacDonald, 1991; Porter, 1993; McGrath, Neis and Porter, 1995; Messing, Neis and Dumais, 1995). As noted in previous chapters, most of this literature has concentrated on fishing communities which relied, for hundreds of years, on the labour of the female kin of fishermen for processing seafood. In these communities handling the product had been the intergenerational
role of women, and essential to the well being of their own families and the wider fishing community. As people “living the fishing” (Thompson, Wailey and Lummis, 1983), this “women’s work” has also been crucial to the economic and social survival of fishing cultures. The women have participated in the production of seafood with pride and satisfaction in a space traditionally allocated to them and enabling them some control over their own labour (Thompson, 1985; Porter, 1993; Ram, 1991).

In the 1990s, feminist researchers including Neis, and Connolly and McDonald, have demonstrated how changes in the political economy, and the development of increasingly capital-intensive and technologically driven fisheries impact differently on men and women. Of particular interest is the conclusion of Barbara Neis (in Messing et al., 1995), that since the fishery crisis in Newfoundland processing work has “become more sex-segregated as jobs formerly dominated by women have been taken over by men displaced from the fishery” (Neis, 1995:19). In the factory studied by Neis, this has resulted in the remaining women being concentrated in the lowest paid and most hazardous area of the plant where there are still no men.

Although women in these communities clearly experience the sexual division of labour in similar ways to women in other Western cultures, the context of their work and struggles is also different from that of women employed in Western Australian processing plants. Historically there have been some small family processing companies in Western Australia but the majority of people employed in processing in the major commercial fisheries in the 1990s have never had any relationship to a fishing community. Processing fish and other seafood is regarded, even by most fishermen’s wives, as work of last resort, especially since the “boom” years of the 1960s and 1970s. In the decades immediately following World War II
women, especially those in the families of Portuguese, Italian and Yugoslav fishers, often assisted their husbands with processing the catch, and some still sell it from their homes, but by the 1980s, the pioneering families that remained in the major commercial fisheries were either wealthy enough to support their wives as unpaid wives and mothers, or were married to women who had employment in less labour intensive, or more professional occupations\(^1\). As Connelly and MacDonald asserted, the “boom and bust cycles” of developing fisheries affect different groups of women in different ways: during “boom” periods when “fishing husbands” incomes increased, women left work at the fishplant”, but wages remained low because other women who were in need of paid work were readily available (1983, cited in Davis and Nadel-Klein, 1992:140).

The majority of female seafood processors working in Western Australia in the 1990s are working class women who have a marginalised position in the labour market. Most are married migrant women from non-English speaking backgrounds who have a limited choice in where they can work. As noted in my introduction and methodology, there have been no published accounts of seafood processing or women’s work in Western Australian fisheries. The only Australian study of which I am aware is an unpublished Honours thesis; “A Study of Chinese Timorese women in the Prawning Industry in Darwin” (Berger, 1983). In this ethnographic study Berger examined the relationship between ethnicity and work. She found that a company, operating prawn trawlers on a Japanese-Australian joint venture basis, had established a prawn processing plant in Darwin in 1970 and was the largest employer of “unskilled” female labour in the region. In 1975 the company complained of a labour problem; a problem of “high

\(^1\) This is a generalised statement based on my own observations, and requiring further research. June, interviewed for the previous chapter, referred to helping out ‘on weekends and at night’ with processing lobsters in the 1960s. In the 1980s she worked processing prawns to ‘make ends meet’ but said she found the work too heavy and decided to ‘leave it ... to the big Croatian or Slav workers, ...heavy solid women [who] made me look like a little mouse...’.
“turnover” amongst women employed as processors. Each season approximately one hundred women were required to process prawns but over a period of three months, in 1975, three hundred women had been employed but only for short periods. The manager of the company claimed that Anglo-Australian women, whom he described as lazy and unreliable, would “shoot through after only half an hour some times” (Berger, 1983: 26). The company approached the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs for assistance. According to Berger, this resulted in Chinese Timorese women being employed in the Darwin factory. She suggested that because the women were employed within days of arrival in Australia, and following the company’s request to the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, they were coerced into taking the work in order to acquire residential status. She therefore claims that it would be more accurate to describe the status of the women as “refugees” rather than voluntary migrants.

By 1980, at the peak of the season, 90% of the 120 process workers were Chinese Timorese women whom the company claimed were “very loyal” and “quiet”. Some of the women had remained with the company since 1975. Berger noted the contradiction in the management’s claim that although Australian women were described as lazy and unreliable, “Pulling heads off prawns is probably the worst job you could ever have” (company manager, quoted in Berger, 1983: 28). In 1982, most of the women had been dismissed or were employed on a casual part time basis. The company claimed it had run into financial difficulties and a “core group” of only 30 workers were retained. The researcher’s informants suggested the Japanese investors in the company wanted to process the prawns in Japan because it was “too expensive” to process in Australia.
Berger noted that the migrant women employed in Darwin were women who would have been unlikely to take up paid work in a factory in their home country, but undertook lower status, lower paid seasonal work in Australia because they had little choice. Of the 16 women remaining in the core group - and interviewed for the study - all but one were married with children. The fact that they came from a non-English speaking background, had only minimal formal education and did not have a union representative acting on their behalf, contributed to their exploitation as “quiet”, “reliable” workers (Berger, 1983: 86). They were also particularly vulnerable as “refugees”, and were abandoned when the company no longer required their labour.

*Adamson’s Ocean Products*

In 1994, when I commenced my research into the sexual division of labour in seafood processing plants, I was informed by the Western Australian Department of Employment and Training, that recently arrived migrant women from non-English speaking backgrounds accounted for approximately 65% of seafood processors. I was unaware of this when, a few months earlier I had first approached the management of *Adamson’s Ocean Products* located in Shrimpton, an isolated town on the north coast of Western Australia. At that time *Adamson’s* was one of the biggest seafood plants in Australia. A prawn trawling fleet and a processing factory had been operating from the site since 1962 and since 1993 the company has been widely advertised as the largest employer of labour in the region. Since its establishment as the state’s first commercial prawning venture the company has had three different owners, including a multi-national organisation, but in December 1993 it was purchased by a Western Australian entrepreneur with maritime interests in other regional centres. The company now also processes scallops and owns and operates one of the largest fleet of trawlers in Western Australia catching and processing approximately three tonnes of
seafood each season. The whole of the company's facilities operated from the beach site until 1990, but when better harbour facilities became available within the parameters of the town, the company moved its landing site, administration centre and maintenance staff to a site adjacent to the new wharf. The plant, or factory site as it is more commonly referred to, remained situated in sand dunes by the sea approximately seven kilometres away from the town and harbour where the main office is situated.

The majority of process workers have always been women, and by the 1990s a core-group, mainly local married migrant women, were being used each year. This confirms the 1994 W.A. Department of Training suggestion that 60-70% of factory workers are migrants from non-English speaking countries. At the peak of each season, however, additional workers, travellers or itinerant workers, are employed to “top up” this core-group2. In the past, wives of fishers had sometimes been employed by the company but at the time that I carried out my research none of the processors was related to fishers.

Women with few recognised skills for paid employment will do their utmost to find other work if they possibly can. This resistance to working in the factory, amongst permanent local residents, was emphasised by a thirty-eight year old woman, born and raised in the town as the daughter of post World War II migrants (one English and the other German). Her best friend and her younger brother had both worked in the factory during the late 1970s and early 1980s, but she preferred to find work as a shop assistant or in a hotel bar. She said, “it is an arsehole of a place, you wouldn’t get me working there”. Over the last ten or twenty years the majority of process

2 According to the founder of the company, the processors in the 1960s were local Aboriginal women (Oral History transcript, PRO, 1979, B/Moo). During the 1970s and 1980s seasonal workers were bussed into the town from the city, and accommodated by the company in a village adjacent to the factory. This practice has ceased although the company still advertises for itinerant workers for the peak of the season.
workers appear to have been women from non-English speaking backgrounds who were living in the town because their husbands had gone to the area to seek employment.

When I introduced myself to Reg, the company manager in 1994, he offered his co-operation with my research. He had been with the company for nearly ten years, and informed me that there were two major difficulties; competing for the export market with companies using cheaper labour overseas, and finding local people to process the product. He claimed that the itinerant workers and travellers were essential to the production process, and that there was a high rate of absenteeism because the local women were “unreliable” due to their family commitments. He also stated that women processing prawns cost the company $A13.00 an hour but in Thailand prawns could be processed at a cost of $US4 a day. Due to the high turnover of staff, Reg suggested that “tens of thousands of women” had been employed at the factory since it started processing, and that “every nationality” had been represented. As an active member of the local community he expressed concern about a high level of unemployment, and stated that he had tried to encourage local youths to work at the factory by offering adult wages. However, he added that young men were resistant on the grounds that it was “women's work”.

At this interview Reg informed me that during the next year new technology was likely to be brought in to “cut down” the numbers of processors required. During the peak of the 1992 season, 200 people had been required to process the product in two shifts each day - working until 2 am - but in 1994 only about eighty people had been required, and the company’s aim was to cut this number to about thirty.
Reg offered me the opportunity to carry out some preliminary interviews with factory staff for the purpose of obtaining a general profile of the workers as a group. I asked people how long they had worked in the factory, what their nationality or ethnicity was, whether they had health and safety concerns, and what they liked and disliked about their work. I then asked each individual whether she/he would be willing to participate in a more indepth interview at a later stage. As I was leaving the factory Reg informed me that he might not be available when I returned the following season because the new owner might want to “restructure” the company and not retain him as manager.

In 1995, when I had decided that this particular site would be suitable for my study, I revisited the company and found that Reg had been replaced and that the new owner was indeed "restructuring". A new “million dollar” automated computerised laser grader from Iceland had been installed and the core-group of process workers had been cut back to about thirty local residents. Some senior staff were expressing concern that they might lose their jobs, and during the next twelve months of my research a fleet manager and the factory manager, both with 20 to 30 years service were sacked. Two women who worked as clerks, and both female factory floor supervisors had also been dismissed or felt pressured to resign.

Although the new manager, Bob, agreed to meet with me he showed no interest in the project and simply gave me a hurried and superficial public relations “spiel” about the company’s achievements and future plans. He admitted that he had been “waiting in the wings” to replace Reg because he knew it would “only be a matter of time” before Reg left. The new owner was a “mate” of Bob’s and they had worked together previously. When I asked him questions about the workforce he told me that the company preferred to employ “boys”, rather than women, because they could be
trained to be managers; that on the factory floor when “standing down”\(^3\) staff was necessary the first to go were women - “those second income earners”, and that the majority of process workers were Vietnamese whom he suggested, were “taking over the community”. In fact his company employed no Vietnamese people, and in the local community of approximately 7,000 people there were only 17 from Vietnam working as agricultural labourers. Bob re-iterated Reg’s concern about obtaining processing staff, and said that in order to increase efficiency and productivity he would do “anything, even pinch trained staff from elsewhere” if he had to. He appeared to be paranoid about industrial “spies” and refused me permission to take photographs.

Bob said he had “no problem” with my interviewing company employees but, as it was apparent he was not going to assist me in the same way that Reg had indicated he would, I interviewed people independently and outside the factory complex. I also undertook a tourist bus visit to the factory so that I could see the technological changes that had taken place, and introduced myself to a woman with connections to a local fishing industry task force. She introduced me to other women who had worked, or were still working in the factory and they were subsequently interviewed in their own homes or in my caravan. Marianne, originally a “backpacker” (traveller) from the Netherlands, who had worked at the factory during the 1970s and again after separation from her husband in 1989, introduced me to her Filipino friend, Nancy, who was still working at the factory. Nancy subsequently introduced me to her Yugoslav friend, Ines, and I conducted a round-table interview with them and two of their friends from Rumania and Hungary. After they got to know me and understood the purpose of the project they suggested that I should talk to Annie. Annie, an Australian

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\(^3\) I use the term “standing down” as Bob did because the women are employed on a casual basis and were in the process of gradually being stood down, as the catch declined, during my 1995 visit. They may be re-employed whenever there is a demand for more processors.
born woman aged 34 and younger than most of the other women, was their
supervisor whom they said they “loved” but who was having a “very hard
time”. I had spoken with Annie the previous year and intended doing a
follow-up interview with her, but she had told me she was too busy.
However, the other women persuaded her to speak with me after I had
interviewed them. We conducted a long interview over several cups of
coffee in my caravan, and she invited me back to the factory for a closer look
at the technological changes, and to meet other staff.

As a result of this “snowballing” technique I interviewed twelve people
while they were still employed at the factory, and six others who had been
employed there. These interviews were supplemented with notes made
during conversations with eight other members of the company’s
workforce, and while making observations at the factory. I have had no
access to company records, but some archival research and interviews with
officers of the Fisheries Department, WorkSafe and the Food Preservers
Union have been used to clarify historical details or industrial relations
issues.

**Seasonal/Casual Work**
The prawn and scallop season runs from March until November but the
factory often operates until mid-December. The product is partially
processed at sea but processed again to ensure “100%” quality for the export
market. The labour force fluctuates according to the amount of product
brought in, and most of the processing staff, employed on a hourly rate
according to the Lobster Processors’ Award ($10.30), and on a casual basis,
find their hours are suddenly cut back or they are stood down with only an
hour’s notice. Most of the male employees are given the opportunity to
work on the maintenance site between seasons, and this can result in them
being “promoted” to permanent employment on that site.
**Staff at the Harbour Site**

Excluding over a hundred fishermen, and the owner/managing Director, there were 44 people, including maintenance workers, employed on the harbour site of *Adamson’s* in August 1995. Only four were women employed as clerk/typists. The male employees in the main office consisted of the company manager, an accountant, a chief engineer, a store manager and two stores assistants. The other employees at the harbour site were all men and included two qualified trawler skippers working as land-based fleet Masters; net makers, machinists, fitters, boilermakers, refrigeration mechanics, a carpenter, labourers and trade assistants. All had full time permanent employment although three young men had apprenticeships. Two of the labourers were Aboriginal men, a father and son, and the rest of the employees were Anglo-Australians.

**Staff at Factory Site**

At the factory site in August 1995 there were twenty women and thirteen men. Amongst them was a Factory Floor Manager, who had joined the company thirty years previously as a process worker, and he was supervised by the management staff at the administration site. He was assisted by a male plant operator who supervised the men working at the plant, and two female processors, Annie and Margot, who supervised the mainly female process workers on the production line. Apart from the processors there was also an older woman working as a part-time “tea-lady” who cleaned the employees’ facilities including the toilets, and if this work was finished she then assisted with making up the cartons. When I first visited the factory in 1994 there was also a young woman working as a factory clerk but she had been replaced by a man, brought in by the new management, when I returned in 1995. Two of the men in the factory were English migrants, one was Aboriginal and the rest were Anglo-Australian. Five of the men, including two over the age of fifty, were married and the rest of the men
were single; aged in their twenties and thirties. None was from a non-
English speaking background.

The core-group of women were in the process of being “stood down” when
I met them in August 1995 but of those still in employment twelve of the
twenty were from non-English speaking backgrounds: Filipino(3), Italian(1),
German(1), Portuguese(4), Chinese(1), Indonesian(1), and Yugoslav(1). They
had worked at the factory for periods ranging from two years to eighteen
years, the average length of service was seven years. Eleven of these women
were married and one was separated from her husband. All but one had
dependent children, and four had unemployed husbands. Although
difficult to research in any detail because of the personal nature of the issue,
five of the women appeared to have come to Australia to marry European
men. As one of the Filipino women who married a Yugoslav man
cautiously told me, “we were pen-pals”. Clarifying the identity of
Australian born women was also difficult because one of them told me that
feared of prejudice and discrimination, both within the company and in the
wider community, made her reluctant to disclose her Aboriginality.
Although the exact date of birth for all the women was not obtained, their
average age was about thirty-five years; the oldest was in her fifties and the
youngest was twenty. Of the eight Australian born women (none of whom
had parents from non-English speaking backgrounds) three were young
single women in their twenties, two were single parents, and one woman in
her fifties had children and a husband who was permanently disabled. The
two other women had children and, like the women from non-English
speaking backgrounds, were married to men who were in low paid work.
The majority of the husbands were labourers or taxi drivers; two were
clerical workers.
At the peak of the season when extra labour is needed to “top-up” the core-group, travellers, both Australian and overseas people, are encouraged to consider taking the work by those involved in the tourism industry. In 1994 and 1995 the numbers were topped up to about 80, although as these workers come and go it is hard to know just how many are employed in a season without detailed study of company records. Other itinerant workers, and local unemployed people were referred by the Commonwealth Employment Service, or approached the factory asking for work. Amongst the process workers there was evidence of intra-familial, and ethnic networking in seeking work; there were two married couples; two of the single women and two of the single men were children of older processors; and Filipino and Portuguese sisters were employed.

Factors influencing employment in the factory.

The majority of women employed in the processing plant had become residents of the area because either they, or their husbands, had moved North seeking employment. One woman from Yugoslavia had a degree in Economics which she had accredited by the University of Western Australia and she spoke four different languages. She had been employed in her home country as an accountant with a gold mining company but after her arrival in Western Australia had been unable to find employment appropriate to her qualifications. She had been employed at the factory for fifteen years. She was the only informant with tertiary qualifications; the others had left school before or during high school. Their previous employment included work as a telephonist, a hospital domestic, sewing in a clothing factory, picking or packing fruit and vegetables. There appeared to be a link between the factory workers and the agricultural industry. Historically Yugoslav and Portuguese people have owned, operated and laboured on the vegetable farms and plantations in the area, and they are regarded as places which provide work for people from non-English
speaking backgrounds. They also enable migrant workers to network amongst themselves when looking for other work. The seasonal nature of the agricultural work also fits in with the fishing season. Several of the women, including Ines and Nancy, referred to taking work “on the vegies” between seasons.

The reasons for the women taking work in Adamson’s factory varied although there were common factors. Narelle, a migrant from England, had worked in a clothing factory in Perth as a fourteen year-old, but said she started in the processing plant at fifteen when she and her mother came North from the capital city looking for work in 1986. She worked there for five seasons and when I interviewed her she was at home with her children but planning re-entry into the workforce when she could arrange suitable child care. She said she would have to go back to the factory rather than work “at Woolies or something like that” because she didn't have the confidence to handle money. Her only other choice would be to pack fruit. She expressed a desire to improve her education and seek more rewarding work but added,

...not having the education because I left school - didn't do the exams, didn't do year 10 - so to try and get back, try and go back to school to get my year 10 certificate, and then to get all your other certificates you'd have to get, or go back to TAFE - just to do anything - it's too hard you know?

I have quoted Narelle, who was born in England, but she sums up the situation for most of the women; she has to work around her child care responsibilities; has little formal education or training, and as Ines said, “it's a small town, there's nowhere else”. For Ines, and the other women from a non-English speaking background there is also the experience of having been discriminated against on the grounds of ethnicity or race, and not being fluent in written or spoken English. Annie, although born in Australia,
also complained that there was nowhere else to go for work. She was the one interviewee who felt she had “got somewhere” in the processing company but since she could go no further than a leading hand she expressed an interest in other career possibilities. Her previous employment included working as a nursing assistant and as a temporary clerk with the Aboriginal Legal Service but her preferred option was to undertake teacher training which could not be done in Shrimpton where her husband had his employment as a carpenter.

Child-care was a major problem for most of the women. Some had waited until their children started school before working in the factory, others used friends or relatives to assist, and some of the workers referred to colleagues having to give up their work because they “had little babies”, or children who got sick and they couldn’t take time off to care for them. Nancy had her sister visiting from the Philippines looking after her children when I visited her, but she had in the past “adopted” an older Filipino woman whom she referred to as her “Nanna, but not really my Nanna” to help her. Nancy had four children aged between one and eight and they were born during the nine years she had been employed at Adamson’s. She had also worked picking and packing fruit and vegetables. She took work in the factory because the plantation work had required her to work from six p.m. to four a.m. She said,

I couldn’t handle that [and thought] maybe I’ll find another job. I tried for the factory and I like it, oh, well ...it doesn’t matter what it looks like, you know, I don’t care [it’s a job]. And now I like it, have fun and lots of friends...I have a baby and I stop, and then I’m back again.

For these women the factory work although hard, and as implied by Nancy regarded as degrading, is essential for them to survive. It also has to fit around their family responsibilities and is therefore preferable to some other work. As Annie stated:
[At the factory] I don’t have to work all year, if I went to work at the hospital or in a shop I’d get four to six weeks off a year maybe, but then I’d have to take them when I was told to....In the factory I get three to four months off at Christmas time and that’s when the kids have their big holidays and my husband [a trades assistant] gets time off at that time as well. I do what I want to do around the house, you know, the spring cleaning finally gets done, and gardening and other things that I want to do...

The majority of women in this plant, although their choices are restricted and constrained, actively seek work in the factory in order to assist in the financial support of their families, because they get some benefit from the companionship and women’s network, and because it can be fitted in with their family responsibilities.

**The factory floor**

The factory workers stand on their feet, in rubber boots, all day on a concrete floor which is constantly covered with running water. Some of the women have to stand on upturned milk-crates to reach the sorting tables. The strongest impression of the old factory, on each of my four visits, was that it was oppressive. It smelled of chemicals (chlorine and ammonia), the machinery was very noisy and there was a feeling of tension or pressure in the air. It was also cold and draughty; had an ice-tower for making its own ice; four large freezer rooms and “tunnel blast” freezer areas. There was also loud music playing.

These workers must all be at the site ready to take their place in the production process as the machines are started at 8 a.m. They wear their own clothes but add waterproof aprons, Wellington boots, gloves, and

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4 Some ex-employees of the factory claimed the music was a management strategy designed to keep the women working faster. However, Marianne informed me that she had initiated the provision of music for the benefit of the women and that it had only been installed after a long struggle on her part.
hairnets supplied by the Company. The freezer workers also wear warm coats and balaclavas. No allowance is made in this labour process for anyone who might be late for work. They have an eight minute morning tea break and a half an hour lunch break taken in a small, sparsely furnished room within the factory. There was no afternoon break and this is maintained as an incentive to finish processing before five pm. The actual processing is finished earlier but then the staff attend to “the hygiene”; cleaning every surface and piece of equipment so that it is perfectly clean for the next day’s processing. This meant that they often worked until ten minutes to five.

The product is frozen and graded on the boats but is “spot” checked for quality and weight on arrival at the factory. The best quality is stored ready for direct export while the rest is stored in the freezer rooms until needed for further processing when it is thawed in large stainless steel “hoppers” of water. It is then processed and refrozen, wrapped and packed, and “strapped” into cartons. The product is then either loaded into freezer trucks for export or re-stored in the freezer until needed to meet an order.

Scallops, after thawing, are dumped onto a long conveyor belt where women are lined up on each side picking out those spoilt by nematodes (parasitic worms which leave a brown stain), and then they are graded by size. The best quality are further graded for export quality, leaving the “seconds” for the local market. They are then moved onto the freezing process.

The export quality prawns are fed into the new computerised laser grader after passing along a table where the women pick out the “soft and broken” or black spot marked prawns. Sometimes the prawns are also headed by the women before going through the machine. The machine can process tails or whole prawns and sometimes both at once. It covers about twenty square
meters of floor space, in some places it is two and a half meters tall, and is roughly the shape of an upturned “U”. The first day in 1995 when I visited the supervisors, Annie and Margot, stood at the top of the first leg of the machine re-checking the quality of the prawns, and ensuring that they moved along to the next corner through the laser grader and weigher. From this point the machine has ten gates with plastic bags, attached to cardboard packs, and the correct weight of prawns falls into them. Women stand along here and collect the boxes and check the weight. These packs then go onto a conveyor, past a sensor and are watered. The water is already monitored and set at 500 mls. or 1 litre, depending on what the order is, and then the product goes into trays for freezing.

The “reject” prawns go into an adjoining room where there is a peeling machine. The prawns are fed into this machine by a young man who has to make sure it keeps running smoothly, and the shells are peeled off. As they come out the other end they fall into baskets that he then passes up to the women to put through a grader which consists of two steel rollers that allow larger prawns to be separated from smaller ones. This is considered, unofficially, one of the most difficult and skilled areas of work and is done by three women who sort them into five different grades, weigh and pack the “meat”. Another man comes from the freezer area and takes the packed trays of product to add water and freeze it. After freezing, the product is “knocked out” of the steel trays manually by men who, lifting them with arms raised and with a slight twisting movement, bang them on a bench. The frozen blocks are then packed into small boxes, packed into cartons made up by men or women, and strapped by a man using a machine.

The work process can vary according to the amount of product available, or in demand. The computerised laser grader has speeded up the processing, reduced the number of women required to process and is supposed to be
more accurate in weighing and packing the product. It has replaced three less automated grader machines similar to the one described above and still used for the peeled prawns. However, the women still stand and work in a similar way to that described by Annie when she first worked in the factory in 1986:

...there were three graders, and they were about 80% correct so underneath the graders you had girls actually hand grading into bowls, sorting them into sizes, that sort of thing, but you sort of used to do two types of prawns, tiger prawns and king prawns. The tiger was processed as wholes, so all you did then was thaw and then cull out the rejects that wasn't export quality and broken, things like that, then grade it, weigh it, pack it. The king prawns were processed as tails so there was heading, you know culling and heading and grading weighing and packing.

Heading is still done for special orders and Jennifer described this:

... you stand in lines, and you got a great big long table and they just dumped the prawns on the great big long table and you'd stand there, all day, except for lunchtime, you'd stand there ripping off the heads of prawns and popping the prawns up above you. Its like a PVC pipe [cut in half] half filled with water and the water is travelling down to your right and you are throwing the prawns up above you and below you, below the tray part, was the rubbish bins and you threw ... you know, your heads and stuff, and scraped them into, down into the rubbish bins [under the table]. So you could say the prawns were on a conveyor belt but it wasn't really, but an assembly line type of thing, and then across from there was the graders and the packers [people at other tables].

When the women do heading now they stand at a conveyor belt that is part of the computerised laser grader. The packers Jennifer refers to are women who put the unfrozen product into the freezer trays.

"Boys' jobs" and "Girls' jobs"

The production of the seafood is highly sex segregated. However, when I first spoke to the process workers most of them denied any sexual division
of labour by stating, “there are no boys’ jobs and girls’ jobs here”, “we are all the same”, or, “we do the same”. The sex-segregation was regarded as a “natural” division so that they didn’t notice it until asked to described the details of their work. The women do all the hands-on manual processing. The men unload and reload the trucks, move the product out of the freezers using forklifts; put the frozen product into the “hoppers” and add the water for thawing it. Men also “infeed” and “keep an eye on” the machines, add the water for refreezing the product, carry the steel trays to the freezer, “knock” the frozen product out of the steel trays, and place the one or two kilo packs in cartons which are strapped.

Annie, who described what happened when the company tried to employ more men on the production line, was more aware of the sexual division of labour, and the fact that there was nothing inherently masculine or feminine about the tasks that were being carried out. She said, “A man is just another worker isn’t he?”, but went on to describe how the men resisted “women’s work”. Some who were asked to pack the unfrozen product walked out saying “that’s women’s work and I’m not doin’ it”; others, “wouldn’t even try, ... wouldn’t pick up the prawn and put it in that tray”. These men, and others who didn’t like taking orders, or even requests from a female team leader, left the factory of their own accord if they couldn’t persuade management to give them “men’s work”. On the other hand, she said, women can and will do anything. She confirmed this by stating,

...anyone can infeed, anyone can head and cull, anyone can pack, ...we’ve had girls filling the hoppers, we’ve had them doing knock outs, actually doing the strenuous work, we’ve had girls doing the watering, running the Laitrim [peeling machine] and they can do it ... all they need is to be strong enough to lift the cartons and I don’t see why they can’t do it. I have never heard a woman turn around and say, oh, I can’t do that, that’s man’s work, never, nup.
Ines confirmed this when stating that she had done a wide variety of different tasks in the factory because, “if you want the money you just do it”. The actual seafood processing work was done by women, as Annie suggested, mainly because men won’t directly handle the product, not simply because they regard it as “fiddly” or “boring” women’s work, but because they have an aversion to handling the raw product. She said, “they won’t touch the stuff in there” [her emphasis]. This seems to be an inversion of the claim that only men can do butchering with knives and working with red meat (Pringle & Collings, 1993). But it also suggests that men fear slimy viscosity which is often associated with the “feminine”, and make it taboo (Collins and Pierce, 1976: 112-125).

Some men may feel abhorrence at handling the seafood, after it is peeled or shelled and before it is frozen, but “women’s work” is usually work considered to be that of subordinates, especially when it involves food preparation equated with the role of wives or mothers (Delphy, 1984:90, Pringle,1988, Phillips & Taylor, 1980:85). Eva Munk-Madsen (1991) found that as a result of equal employment ideology Norwegian factory ships had to develop mixed crews but this was rationalised because the tasks allocated to women were “supposed to require female skills”. Although there was no longer any ideological support for sexual inequality on the grounds that women were inferior or subordinate to men, Munk-Madsen found an “assumed gender dichotomy in work” was still used to “secure men’s privileges”. The new ideology was that gender differences were based on a “distribution of positive human abilities” and femininity was said to “determine women for their tasks”. However inequality was maintained in the workplace, and when young men were required to work on processing alongside women it was seen as degrading (Munk-Madson, 1991: 7-11)\(^5\).

\(^5\) In a recently televised serial set in a Scottish fish processing plant in the 1980s (ABC April 1997) a young man who committed a misdemeanour while working on an aquaculture pen was punished by being sent into the factory to fillet fish with the women.
This “new” idea based on valorising feminine skills is no different from the old belief that women have “more nimble fingers” and are naturally suited to boring repetitive work of a subordinate nature.

There is no doubt that the women at Adamson’s are “better” than men at the hands-on processing. This is because they have to do it, men do not. Their limited opportunities force the women to keep processing and developing skills which are based on those most women learn in their own homes. If they haven’t learnt them in their homes they soon develop the skills “on the job” and through the unofficial training provided by other women. Many of the core-group of women take great pride in their skills and even participate in competitions to see who is the “best in the West”. They are also highly critical of younger women, especially itinerant workers whom they described as being “no good” at it. The women are clearly more skilled than the men infeeding or passing the baskets and trays of product across the floor, and they know they are “skilled” even if this is not officially recognised. Their labour is crucial to production. Their work is also central to the process and the men’s work is peripheral. From my observations of the factory floor the men appeared to be “serving” the women - they passed the product to them to perform the most important part of the process, and collected it from them afterwards. As Ines put it, “we do all the work, the men are just waiting to just put it in the freezer”. Since this contradicts the dualisms reflecting domination and subordination; master/servant, and male/female, this may be why there is a tendency to exaggerate “inherent” masculinity in the tasks that men do, and re-inforce the low status assigned - by Western masculinity - to the “natural” work of women (Plumwood, 1993:65).

The sexual division of labour in the processing of seafood is also maintained by so-called “protective legislation” restricting the weight than women can
lift to 16 kilos. In this factory some of the men are required to lift eight, ten or twelve kilos of product in trays or boxes but many of the women in the plant are just as capable of lifting this amount; they work between seasons as agricultural labourers, and fruit and vegetable pickers or packers. However, as O’Donnell and Hall (1988:85) note, modern technology should enable workplaces to function without any worker, male or female, having to lift beyond their capacity. Protective legislation has never protected men, or women from workplace injuries but has excluded women from non-traditional areas of work.

Sex-segregation is also maintained by the employment of men for the performance of work associated with machinery (Cockburn, 1983, 1986; Game and Pringle, 1983). In this factory they drive forklifts, push large steel vats and trolleys around, handle trays on an overhead monorail and oversee machines. As Game and Pringle (1983:32-36) and Cynthia Cockburn (1983; 1986) have noted, machinery is equated with masculinity. The men also pour water into tanks or trays. These are all jobs that don’t necessarily require exceptional skill or the manual lifting of heavy weights, but they are reserved for men because they will do them. They are considered less tedious or boring than those on the assembly line, and allow more freedom of movement around the factory floor.

Although there have always been more women than men working in this processing plant the ratio of men to women is slowly increasing. This is not only due to the management’s endeavours to encourage the employment and retention of male workers, or because women resist the workplace of “last resort”; it is also due to the introduction of new technology. As one of the men in the factory, Mal, recalled,

When the old graders were there [up to 1994-5] there were more women there because they used to feeder pack the prawns into the blocks, and they were more nimble and
quicker at it ... were more adept to this grading... most men that came in weren't interested or couldn't be bothered.

The introduction of new technology enabled the company to cut back on the numbers of women who were “more nimble and quicker at it”. The numbers of men required to load and unload etc. remains stable or actually increases with the amount of product coming in rather than decreasing. The new technology may also enable the management to employ more men to operate the automated machinery, the justification for this, as Game and Pringle also note, is usually based on a masculine view that women “don't understand them or are afraid of them” (1983: 36).

When I interviewed Bob, in 1995, he had just come back to his office from the factory where the new computerised laser grader was causing problems. During the few weeks that I was visiting word got out into the local community that “this new thing wasn't what it was cracked up to be”. It had become a bit of a joke because it was continually “breaking down” or not running properly. It can best be described as an automated processor but when it was installed no-one in the company had the slightest idea how to operate it. According to the management, it is one of only three such machines in Australia, has to be operated by a computer program and the grades and weights have to be set before each “run”. No one in the company had any expertise in computer programming. When I asked Bob why they were having so much trouble with the machine he said “the girls can't handle it ... they have to stop it so they can catch up”. When he spoke of being prepared to “pinch” trained staff from elsewhere he implied that they would be men who could operate the machine.

I interviewed Annie a few days later. She had an enormous work load just running the factory floor and admitted being “a bit down on management”
because they had added responsibility for operating the new machine to her work load. She explained the situation,

...this year they brought in the computerised grader from Iceland, so that became my job as well - the computers and me - well I don't have any experience on them at all, except for two weeks I think last year it was, when the factory clerk went on holidays for two weeks and I did her job. So I had to learn the computer program for the grader, I have had to learn how to operate the grader and that sort of thing.

Annie also took over the running of the machine because the factory floor manager, Murray, whom she thought ought to have been the one responsible for it, was resistant to the idea. The management gave Annie a $50 a week bonus for taking on the operation of the new machine as well as carrying out her usual duties, but she had got to the point where she felt like “throwing it back at them”. She would have been much happier, she said,

...if someone had just said “Gee, Annie, you've done really well today”. But there is not a lot of that going around, and not just for me, not for anybody.

Annie was outraged at the suggestion that the women couldn't handle the machine, was very protective of her teams of women and insisted that she should bear the blame for any problem. I asked for her side of the story:

Annie: We have been having some problems with the new grader, only in the operating, that comes back on me. That does not come back on the people working it, no way.
LS: Does it really come back on you, or is it the machine?
Annie: Well, it is the machine and it is, whatever [pause], but I have to operate it, I have to get it up and running, so it is up to me to get it up and running and we are having problems with it. [pause] when it runs well it’s brilliant, it’s brilliant, when it doesn't run well it’s ok, and then sometimes it can be an absolute bastard.

Annie was in the midst of drawing a floor plan of the factory for me when she was explaining this. She had also drawn a diagram of the machine and
went on to explain that there had been a problem with what she referred to as the vision grader section:

Annie: We were having problems in there [pointing], at one stage it wasn't operating very well at all, the grades were out, the weights were out, and so on. I can operate it in that if I get the grades correct, don't worry about the weights because we can fix the weights here [at the end] because they are check weighed, ok? But at one stage we couldn't even get it to correspond, we just couldn't get it, and it was all in here [points again], so we had to change the belt and we were in touch [by FAX and telephone] with Iceland all the time, and we have actually got a visitor [from Iceland] coming out to help us, he'll help us sort it all out. But, that's the only problems we are having with it.

L.S: So it's not a problem with the women not being able to handle it?

Annie: [forcefully] No way! How dare they say it's a problem with the girls not keeping up with the grader, I am bitterly disappointed with that comment, mmm, I am, yep. I think I've got a good bunch of girls working there, they can only operate as well as I operate the grader and I can only operate the grader as well [as I can] with the knowledge that I have and if that's not good enough well, it shouldn't reflect on the girls, nup, nup.

Annie apologised for being “dark on management” and said she was being made to feel “oh, you've got it wrong again, what's wrong with you”. She said when the machine was playing up it could take a long time to get anything done about it. She recalled how at one time it had sent prawns flying into the faces of the women, but eventually “we invented little guards to go on them”. She also said:

They [management staff] look at you as if you are stupid because you're a girl and you're not an engineer, so how would you know? But when you are running the machine you know, you do know the machine. You know when something is not quite right. You know, like with your car, if you're driving a car and have driven it for years you know the minute something is not right. ...but you know, you know your machine.
Annie took pride in the thought that she was probably one of only three people in Australia who could operate a computerised laser grader and said she would never consider going to any other seafood company to work.

The company had brought in this technology to lower production costs; improve the accuracy in grading and weighing the product and reduce, by about 50%, the number of women required to process. However, it totally denied its reliance on the skill of the women with "nimble fingers", and their ability to endure hard repetitive labour. It also denied the commitment of women like Annie who were prepared to do anything in the interests of the company and her work colleagues. These women were scapegoated as a result of management's failure to either recognise the need for specialised expertise, or employ additional appropriately trained staff, to "run in" the new equipment.

The "best in the West".
A practice which highlights the level of skill amongst the women processing, and the crucial role they play in the production of the seafood, is that of offering the workers a "contract". One day when I visited the factory there was an air of excitement in some sections of the floor. Nancy looked out of a doorway, gave me a cheeky wave behind her boss's back and later sidled up to say, "We are going on contract tomorrow". I said, "Is that good?" and she said, delightedly, "Yes, I get to work with Ines and I get more money". This "contract" arrangement is a bonus system: if processors normally processed a certain number of kilos of product in eight hours, the company offered each individual an extra amount of money for each kilo produced beyond that amount. The workers allocated a "contract" are broken up into teams and they work as fast as they can to get the most

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6 A bonus system is defined as a productivity-linked wage system - 'setting a base rate for achievement of a certain output, and then paying bonus rates for output in excess of the standard' in Mathews, 1985.
money out of the company. The company seems to make this offer either when there is a particularly big order to be filled in a short time, or towards the end of the season when they have already cut back the women's week to four days. It creates a competitive atmosphere and produces more product in less time, but it also creates conflict amongst the workers. Some claim favouritism results in people with relationships to senior staff being offered the work, others say it is only the most skilled who are given the opportunity. Ines is the "best in the West" having been timed against processors in other parts of the State, and can process more product than anyone else in the factory. She has set records for heading and peeling prawns by hand, grading or culling scallops, or grading and packing the peeled prawns.

At the time of his interview, Mal was particularly upset about not being offered the opportunity to work "on contract". He had worked, on and off, over a period of seven years at the factory and said he had "done everything"; although he has never actually had to "pull heads off prawns". His complaint was that he had become "stuck" in "strapping" where he was paid only the basic hourly award rate plus the slight increase as a leading hand. Strapping is part of the "knock out" process and involves binding the cartons with blue plastic straps. He explained this to me:

LS: And you have a machine to tighten it up...?
Mal: Yeah, yeah, that's all in the one machine, when I say strapping, the job over all is well, it consists of making sure the right cartons, the right grades in each carton, the right amount of blocks in each carton, making sure there are not too many rips and tears in the cartons, serialising the cartons with the serial numbers, marking the carton, the correct mark and grade. Then you have to keep a tally as you are going along, you have to take the butts, [ticket ends] that show what is left of each day's production in the boxes - there might be 3 blocks of 16 or 20, 4 blocks of 21-25, and write those on the sheet so when it goes to the office they can work out exactly how much was produced for the day...the staff sales too, they go in the carton room, you make the cartons, and do things like that.
Mal was not simply upset with management for blatantly telling him, as he put it, “no, you can’t have any other job you must do as we want you to do”, he was envious of the fact that some workers, particularly the women, had been offered “contract” work which enabled them to earn more than he did.

It is not only the skilful women who have the opportunity, however, because they work in teams and the teams include the men who infeed, pass the product to the women and “keep an eye” on the machine. This is what Mal would be doing if he went on “contract”. Mal was told he was the only one who could do the strapping, and stated that the other men offered “contract” were doing “jobs that anyone can do...putting the trays on the belt and knock out”. Although he had some pride in his work, he acknowledged that anyone could do his job “if they put their brain to it” and really resented being “stuck on an hourly rate while everyone else is earning goodness knows how much”. He stated that management had promised that all the workers would be rotated and given a turn at working on contract but this wasn’t happening. He also said that despite management’s assurance that all the factory would eventually go on contract many workers still remained on the basic award rate. Other workers were also told they could not go on contract because they were in jobs “no-one else could do”.

Annie and Margot, the supervisors were not allowed to go on contract. This may be due to the fact that they were already paid more than the other workers, but it was also because they were needed on their own production line and factory floor supervisory roles.

Mal’s solution to his problem, as a breadwinner and family man, was to suggest sending his wife in to work in the factory while he stayed home as a house-husband. Although he was clearly envious of the women “on scallops” when I interviewed him, he did have a genuine interest in being
at home with his children and discussed it in the presence of his wife, myself and his children. His wife, Narelle, had a very restricted choice in what work she could get in the town, had worked in the factory before her marriage and was looking forward to getting out of the house. The decision was, however, being made primarily in the hope that they could increase their household income at the same time as they were caring for their children; an increase of possibly $100 a week. His attitude towards his wife having the right, or the need to be in paid work however, was contradictory to his attitude towards his work colleagues. He stated that he couldn't "just leave" the factory because it would be 12 weeks before he could get the dole and he and his wife wouldn't survive. He claimed that "a lot of the women could leave ... and a lot do because they have earned enough, their husbands are working, or they just get sick of it so they leave ... they have the leverage to do something about it, but I can't leave unless I had another job".

Mal's suggestion that his wife should work in the factory again was made because he believed that as a woman she would have a greater chance to earn more by going on contract. There would be no guarantee of this because the decision is made partly according to the experience and skill of the women processors and there is fierce competition amongst them. Narelle might find herself "stuck" on the basic hourly rate earning less than Mal did with his leading hand status. She might also be less likely than Mal to have the assurance that she would be employed for the maximum number of hours throughout the season, or be offered work on the maintenance site. The fact that they hadn't acted on this option twelve months later may indicate that they realised this.

The competition amongst the women is because they look forward to having the opportunity to earn a bit extra on contract. When working on
the hourly award rate they earn about $360 a week. On contract they could take home about $400 or even $500 a week. Ines, who left the factory at the end of 1995, travelled all the way back (1,000 kms) from the metropolitan area in 1996 and 1997 to take advantage of “contract” work. This was primarily because her unemployed husband and nineteen year old son were dependent on her earnings. She had difficulty finding employment in the city because she had spent 15 years in the factory and her higher education qualifications had not been put to good use. Her limited spoken and written English skills also hampered her ability to find alternative work. As a married woman, supposedly dependent on her husband, her ineligibility for unemployment benefits in her own right forced her to return to the only work she could get. She described being on contract from her perspective:

...I don't think it is a very good sort of thing to do because you see you can't do it by yourself, you can't do anything by yourself. You are working as a team you see - in small groups - like four people doing this thing, 10 people doing this thing, and one of them does this other thing, alright? But you see it is not correct [fair] because whenever you are working say four of us, OK four women and one - the boy - is feeding the machine, we split the money in five. So five of us have to work perfectly to get that money but there is always someone benefiting from someone else's work.

She went on to explain how when a test had been run she had, in an hour, processed three baskets containing thirty to forty kilos of prawns to every one processed by another woman in the team. She said,

So even on contract ...it is not fair. You want the money, that's fair enough, you know, when you get 500 dollars eh, golly that's money! But you work most hard for that and the other girls they don't work so hard but they still get the same money as you.

This explains why Nancy was so delighted about going on contract with Ines; the more she grades the more the others earn; they benefit from Ines’s
skill. Mal's interview was particularly interesting because he acknowledged that 'anyone can do' the jobs the men do, and when he told me why he thought he'd "got stuck" on "strapping" his response was one which could just as easily be a justification for why women process the product. He said,

Because I can do it, because I am conscientious enough to make sure it is done properly - most people won't put on the strapping ...basically most of them don't care enough to make sure they do it properly, or get it right and if they have to put someone else on the strapping they make too many mistakes you see so they take them off... they just don't want to do it.

If he goes on to contract he will be doing one of the "men's jobs" as part of the team and he will benefit from the processing skills of the women who "make sure it is done properly".

When it is all worked out contract simply means earning $14 or $15 an hour instead of $10.30 on the award rate for the same eight hour day. It applies only to some teams of workers for part of a day or for part of a week, and only at specific times during the season when management offers it in order to increase productivity. Since it occurs mostly towards the end of the season it also enables the company to close down the factory earlier than would otherwise be possible.

**Leading Hands**

Another management strategy that creates tension between the workers and reflects the arbitrary way in which men are encouraged to work in the factory is the designation of some workers as leading hands. Annie told me, with her tongue firmly in her cheek, that "because we are all supposed to work as a team" the company's preferred term was team leaders. The company manager informed me that men were often made leading hands because "you have to give them a little bit of an incentive" to work in the factory. Freezer allowances are also paid to men in the factory. Women are
“promoted” to leading hand status to make them responsible for the efficiency of their teams. It is a strategy of divide and rule amongst the women, however, because it results in them being required to manage those they work alongside. They are then vulnerable to criticism for being on the side of management or becoming “too bossy”. Ines has refused to be “promoted” to a team leader; she doesn’t want to be aligned with the interests of management, or seen as “too bossy”. She is in fact an unofficial team leader because of her skill, years of experience and her knowledge of industrial relations issues. However, she stated that she could see no point in being designated a leading hand and having to take on responsibility for other people’s “mistakes” in return for only a few extra dollars.

Leading hands are categorised according to the numbers of workers being supervised. Although Annie and Margot are generally referred to as “supervisors” they are only leading hands/team leaders being paid at one of the higher rates. Annie had been the sole supervisor until 1992 when the necessity to work two shifts required a second supervisor. Margot took on the night shift and after that they shared the supervision work. Margot, with experience in other factory work, had been with the company for two years and was regarded by the other workers as a good worker and loyal to management. This was acknowledged by Reg, the manager in 1994. Her strong point was “control” of the workers but she was also regarded as a bit “bossy” and in contrast to Annie, not “good with people”. Annie, who had been with the company for eight years and was about ten years younger than Margot, was admired for her “understanding”, her skills in administration, and knowledge of processing. Their different personalities and different skills were complementary although Annie seemed to have the bigger work load associated with administrative work. As leading hands they were expected to supervise the production lines, maintain worker productivity and quality control, do the paper work associated with staff wages and
banking, and carry out inductions and safety training. The female team leaders amongst the other processors, who are supervised by Annie and Margot, receive a smaller allowance and supervise four, ten or fifteen processors. Some of the men supervise only one or two people and in some cases, as Mal admitted, they “don’t have to tell anybody what to do”.

**Multi skilling and Training**

According to the supervisors, everybody on the factory floor is supposed to be multi skilled and able to do any job. However, the sexual division of labour is rarely crossed. Men won’t do “women’s work”. Annie also stated that some jobs cannot be done by short women, such as “infeeding” machines, although she pointed out that stands were made for short women to reach the culling benches. Multi skilling in practice only enables the processors, especially the women, to be moved from one area of production to another and has no effect on their status or opportunity for promotion other than that of leading hand.

Being offered training for taking on the role of a Leading Hand also appears to have been the only training offered to the women on the production line(apart from First Aid and safety training). Ines recalled asking for training to improve her English language skills and possibly allow her to move across to the administration site and use her accounting skills, but said the response was, “What would you want training for?”. New staff are given an hour or two’s induction when they start, and this includes a tour of the factory and watching videos on taking personal responsibility for health and safety.

**Occupational Health Hazards**

Claire Williams and Bill Thorpe (1992:138) assert that workers who become injured or sick as a result of workplace-based events often become part of
one of the most subordinated and marginalised groups in society. They state:

Professionals, in particular, conspire to reconstruct the individual socially and in this process remove all indications from the person that the work event or exposure to hazardous substances or repetitious movement happened as a result of anything to do with them going to work. Instead they are socially reconstructed, not as a worker, but as an isolated individual with defective bodily parts who is the repository of certain medical conditions (1992:138.)

Williams and Thorpe note that such workers usually come from already lower income or marginalised groups, and the way in which they are dealt with “raises profound class, ethnic and gender questions...”. They state that attitudes towards occupational health and safety are influenced by a “blame the victim” ideology which, although being challenged in some State legislation, “is still widely evident in workplaces” (1992:138)).

There is evidence in the experiences of those interviewed for this project to support the above views. My transcripts reveal that the employees of Adamson’s considered themselves responsible for their own health and safety and either blamed themselves for injuries or kept quiet about ill-health in case they lost their jobs. Accidents and injuries referred to by workers included people hurting their backs lifting heavy baskets, a person putting his hand into a machine which jammed with prawns, someone slipping while climbing onto a hopper, a forklift falling onto someone’s leg and breaking it, a pallet dropping onto someone’s foot, and people slipping and falling on the wet floor7. Every person who made reference to these incidents followed their statement by saying “he shouldn't have done that”, “he was where he shouldn't have been”, or even “it was my fault, I shouldn't have done that”.

7 This is a list of incidents referred to but not necessarily occurring in any one season.
During my visit to the factory in 1995, I noted that the women standing on milk crates had long electrical extension cords hanging above their heads. If any of them slipped it would be highly dangerous because their instinct would cause them to grab at the cord as they fell. The cords would then pull apart and the women would be in water with a live electrical cord. Annie as the Health and Safety Officer acknowledged the potential for accidents and stated:

...there are a lot of accidents that could happen, I mean the floors are..., you know, it is always wet. We do watch the floors a lot to keep the product off the floor, especially with scallops, you get a lot of build up of slime and it makes it very slippery. But they [the production line workers] are pretty good, they keep the place clean. And, well with forklifts running around everywhere there are accidents that could happen but for the most part everyone is pretty careful and they have training on safety and hygiene [which] really work into each other, especially in a place like this factory.

Annie took pride in telling me that “fortunately we have not had any major accidents this season” and this was surprising considering the conditions but mainly due to the workers’ vigilance. When new workers are inducted they attend a two or three hour training session watching videos, being given pamphlets and touring the factory with a supervisor who tells them what they should and should not do, emphasising personal responsibility and pointing out the consequences of not doing what they are told.

In the event of an accident the supervisors take the initial report and assist the workers in completing compensation forms before they are sent to the harbour site to be processed by the administration staff. None of the women I interviewed had ever made a compensation claim. They mainly referred to men having accidents going on “compo”, and women having been sick or injured leaving the factory. Although a small sample, the research demonstrates the effect of the “healthy worker factor” (Neis:1995:5). All the
women made statements similar to that of Nancy who said, “some people just work one week or two weeks because they can't handle it, because they have to stand up all the time and get a sore back. They just leave”. The women in the core-group of workers were therefore either the most stoic or most healthy people who had remained in the company’s employment. As Messing (1995:194) noted, endurance may be the primary criterion for employment in such work, but the problem for women from a non-English speaking background is that this criterion is often regarded by anglo-Australians as an inherent quality peculiar to migrant labourers (Alcorso & Harrison, 1993:64-67).

Apart from accidents, which mostly occur to men, informants referred to headaches, backaches, irritation from chlorine or ammonia gas leaks, infections from being pricked by prawns, asthma, repetitive strain injuries, dermatitis from handling the seafood, and stress. All these problems were referred to by women and experienced by women. This breakdown of accidents and ill health reflect the sexual division of labour. Men can be expected to take risks such as in the lifting of heavy weights, or in operating machinery; women are expected to work on production lines doing stressful repetitive work which requires fast, dexterous handling of a product while standing in the one place all day. Both are caught in the conflict of interests between getting the product out, and maintaining their own health and safety. The pressure to keep the machine going, despite warnings that he shouldn’t do it, caused the young man to reach in and try to unjam it instead of turning it off. He cut his hand and had to take two days off “on compo”. Ines, who didn’t claim compensation, recalled a similar situation:

You see I was doing the cooking, at the end of the year, you know, the prawns that are ...[rejects] and they stay there until the end of the season. There were baskets, they are heavy you know, but you are working by yourself [the core group had fallen to 10] and a boy
is putting them in the bin, some sort of basket like 20 kilos, and you measure that up and put it in a box and strap it ... So the boy had gone somewhere and I couldn't wait. You know me, I'm mad, I couldn't wait, and I just picked up the basket and it was so heavy I couldn't put it on the table, and my back hurt from then on. A week later it was the end of the season and so I didn't tell anybody because that was my fault, I shouldn't do that. And I go to the hospital for that, it was so sore, my back, [but] that's it, it was my fault, no-one else, I should have waited.

Part of the reason for Ines blaming herself, and not claiming compensation, was that she had crossed the sexual division of labour which is often justified on the grounds that protective legislation regarding heavy lifting, protects women from injury. However, when she and the other women do "women's work" they are just as likely to suffer injury and ill health. The pressure on them to work harder and faster and keep the production line going causes them injury, such as infection from prawn pricks or long term slow onset ill-health such as Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) or dermatitis. Ines said, "it is a hard job you know, really tiring standing on your feet all day", but when I asked her how her body was responding to that, and the wet and the cold, she said "Yeah, that's ok. I am used to it, it's just old age now darling.". She was 38 years old.

The presence of a well worker factor was confirmed by reports of allergies to prawns or the sea water which caused rashes; "like my friend Dagma, she got those rashes everywhere, that's no good, she just quit, she wouldn't tell anybody in there". There was reference to women with RSI but "because they can't work they just quit". Women were referred to as having had asthma and getting "the flu" all the time but this was dismissed as a personal problem by the statement that the worker "had it before". Respiratory problems including occupational asthma have resulted in research where it is linked to particular seafoods and the use of chlorine and ammonia gas in the factories (Neis, 1995). However, the workers at
Adamson’s internalised the view that if they could not work it was their problem.

The men, who had more obvious accidents, although also being subject to the belief that they should be responsible for their own safety, were more likely to claim compensation. But the women, who acknowledged that some accidents could not be avoided, and that they could be paid compensation if they followed the correct procedures, added that when it was time to return to work they might easily find the company no longer needed them. They were also aware that they could be regarded as “whingers”, and made common complaints that “no-one listens”, “you can do nothing”, or “it takes too long to do anything in there”. This confirms the findings that factory workers, especially older ethnic women, are resigned to endure pain and poor working conditions, while wearing the label of the stereotypical “malingering” (Williams with Thorpe, 1992: 138 & 147). Occasionally, as Ines recalled, workers responded to the unpleasant work conditions by making false accident reports:

...when you do it on purpose it is not the factory's responsibility, like I saw what some people did. There are piles of trays, where they’re supposed to stay, because there’s people coming around and you know - water everywhere. But these people pushed over those trays so they could fall ... Gee, that’s smart! Can get money for nothing ...I want money too, but not that way, that’s not fair.

Ines reported these two people, who were travellers not local migrant women, and ended her story by re-iterating that accidents shouldn’t happen because “you know how to work in that factory”, and it’s your own responsibility.

The pressure to take responsibility for yourself results in surveillance of each other; the workers resent it when others are not careful enough and
they act as a pressure group on each other. This probably assists in keeping the safety statistics low, but while it makes profits for the company the workers often suffer in silence. This is relevant to many of the women with allergies or slow onset pain and strains but also apparent in problems such as stress or mental health.

When Annie told me how exhausted and "disgruntled" she was she explained how she was made to feel a fool, and how, because of the pressure on her to run the new machine as well as attending to her other work, management complained that she didn't have the training manuals up to date. She said, "how are we s'posed to keep up with paper work with all that going on. They won't let us off the floor to do it, and they won't pay us an extra day to do it.". On the weekends management also came looking for Annie because they wanted to do a "test run" or "play" with the machine. She said she deliberately didn't have the telephone connected to her home, but the men still tracked her down one Saturday when she was all packed up to go camping with her family. She had to go back to work to help the men get the machine started, and then they told her she'd have to come in on Sunday as well. She said, "they expect you to give, give, give", she often worked a 58 hour week and the pressure was getting her down. She explained:

There is no time to fix one thing, or deal with one thing, or get one thing up and running, you've gotta do everything at once and sometimes its a little bit hard to have your mind going off in five different directions, you know? You tend to go blank and not do anything, don't you? Well, I do...mm, or I stand there and cry and say I am going, and the one day I did that I had a bloody flat tyre and I couldn't leave anyway...I was most upset, I felt trapped really I felt trapped. [...] if I was a drinkin' woman I'd be alcoholic!

The stress for Annie was so great that by the time I interviewed her the anxiety about her work was keeping her awake at night. She said,
I tend to worry a lot about things so I go home and worry. Sometimes I operate on 3 hours sleep a night, which isn’t good. My husband hates me working at Adamson’s, just absolutely hates it ...because it upsets me, I do get upset about things - management, disgruntlement - I do. I do worry about things mmmm...

Annie was also performing emotional labour as the most approachable supervisor on the floor with an empathy for the processors, especially the women. They went to her “for everything” and she was a buffer between them and management. She told me she would “stand up for any of my ladies if I think they are being shat on”, and although her “ladies” cared about her there was no-one who could stand up for her. I found myself wondering how long it would be before management brought in a man from “elsewhere”, who was trained to operate the machine.

Annie’s story demonstrates the contradictory aspects of the public/private, work/home division. All the women in the factory have trouble juggling their family commitments with their work and are actively discouraged from bringing personal problems into their workspace. But the company management had no compunction about intruding into their private lives, and workplace worries affected their personal lives.

Ines was also suffering from stress. When I asked her if she had ever been sick as a result of working in the factory she said, “Yeah, you get mental ...you get mad”. She laughed as she said this, not because it was funny, but because she was both exasperated and embarrassed. She said, “it’s the attitude - everyone’s. It starts with the bosses [and spreads] to the workers, it is no good if the bosses are not good to you...and because of the monotony of the work, the same work, everyday the same thing...it is a hard job, really tiring...”. She told me how she had a “fight” with Murray about the
unfairness of putting a less experienced young man on “contract” instead of Mal (see above) and said,

[Eventually] they let him go on scallops just for one week, just to shut him up and then they sent him back on strapping...I was furious, when I get mad, I get mad, and I yell at everybody there, I yelled at Murray, at everybody there. Nobody takes me seriously, they think I am joking and they ignore me. But then I yelled at Murray and said, it is not fair - I am working, everyone comes here to work, I don't like the job - I told him that - I don't like it, I don't want to see the prawns any more! I don't like them but I need the money, so when I need the money I go to work for them ...those people who work out there should get more money, you shouldn't do it on a personal thing [play favourites]. That's what I said to him. Maybe because there is nowhere else you can find a job you just have to shrug it off, you must work, that's it. That's what I don't like, bah! ... it was like that for 15 years so I can't change it.

This incident which started out as one where Ines felt compelled to stand up for Mal flared up into one where she expressed her anger and frustration about her own experiences. She attributed her feelings of stress to the attitude of management, conflict amongst workers from “too many different” backgrounds, really tiring work, being dismissed as unimportant when she asked for training, and conflict resulting from the employment of a “top-up” group of workers.

Although some seasonal workers are, according to Annie, good workers and may return regularly like the itinerant fishing crews, their presence often caused conflict and resentment amongst the core group. This was especially likely if they were put on “contract” culling scallops because it is the easiest work to learn quickly. Ines explained the conflict:

... most of them are single people you see and they say well I will work Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and then Friday they don't want to come to work! One time 16 people didn't come to work... I said why didn't you come to work? We had so much work to do we couldn't do it
and didn’t get as much money, then they started fighting[arguing]. All those new people are the ones, they are troublemakers because they don’t want to work, and you see Friday is pay day and they say why should we ... [come in to work].

Resentment towards the “top-up” group was because they are mostly travellers regarded as people who have to work only to get enough money to move on; they get paid the same rate as the regular workers, have no experience and can leave after a week or two. I interviewed one young woman from England who admitted working only to get her fare home and although she had no factory work experience she was well aware of the difficulties facing the workers. She told me that she thought they ought to have a union because there was no one to “back them up”, that the workers should have greater opportunity for rotation of tasks, that the “authority side of it could be nicer”, and that she did not like the work because “you work like a robot, it is boring, you’ve got no sense of responsibility, and they [management] treat you like a little kid”. They are obviously not all thoughtless “troublemakers”, but they are used by management as part of its flexible labour force policy. Management informed me that the company couldn’t survive without them but made no such claim about the core group of predominantly married migrant women workers.

Sexuality in the workplace

In the course of this research I uncovered no evidence of sexual harassment, on the factory floor. This is due to several factors; firstly the limitation of my research; I was unable to interview all the workers, or those who might have left the site because of sexual harassment. Another major reason is that the majority of women on the floor are assertive middle aged married women from non-English speaking backgrounds. The majority of men are slightly younger and from an English speaking background. In a small community like that in which they live and work, I consider it unlikely that
the men would harass the wives of men from non-English speaking backgrounds who are their neighbours. The women would be unlikely to allow it, and their husbands would soon learn of it. Of the four younger women in their twenties also employed at the site, two were working with their mothers and one was living as the partner of one of the factory workers.

Sexuality was present in this workplace and sexual attraction had resulted in marriage or marriage like partnerships between some of the workers. There was also evidence in my interviews that light sexual banter was a pleasurable activity for some workers. Nancy, who initiated some of the social events such as attending the “Raunchy Boys” performances was told, in my presence, to “shut up and stop talking about sex all the time”. She said, “it’s alright, I don’t really get up to any monkey business ... I just have fun”. As a self-confessed “cheeky bugger” she said she liked to tease Mal by referring to him as her “boyfriend”. However, she knew he was a gentle and serious young man and devoted to his wife and children. She simply liked to see him smile. Some of the other women considered Nancy “a flirt” and did not approve. They had a very strong moral attitude towards sexuality and fidelity in marriage.

When I telephoned one of the women for an interview she mistook my voice for that of a man so that when I arrived at her house (her husband being away) she had protected herself by calling in a married couple to act as chaperones. She was not simply afraid of being alone with a man, but was making sure no one could suggest to her husband that she had behaved inappropriately by entertaining a male stranger.

Apart from my suggestion that these local conditions might restrain any overt sexual harassment, sexual harassment is usually more prevalent in
sites regarded as a masculine sphere and where the women employed are expected to be “sexy”, (Pringle, 1988), or where they pose a threat to the men's control of their jobs and workspace (Cockburn, 1983,1986,1991). This is not the case on this factory floor where the women are employed in the lowest status jobs and where their presence is dominant. Although the women have little control over the production process I had a strong sense that they were feisty women, in charge of their own bodies and immediate workspace.

At the administration site, however, the potential for sexual harassment was evident in Annie's claim that women were employed as typists or clerks only if the men considered them “sexy” enough. She had been unsuccessful in attempts to get employment on that site and acknowledged that management was “very clever” in telling her she was more useful on the factory site. She recalled how the management paraded women applying for jobs past a window so that they could be rated on the scale of 10, and suggested that the next time she applied for a job there she was going to wear “false tits and a bum”.

**Worker solidarity, or a Women's Network?**

It has been claimed that capital deliberately employs people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds to work together (Alcorso & Harrison, 1993:74). This is said to promote competition and conflict, and weaken worker solidarity. Ines, when complaining that there was too much “fighting and bitchiness” on the factory floor, partly attributed this to there being “too many different nationals in there”. However, “bitchiness” was also referred to by women I interviewed who had worked in the factory for only a short while and were not from a non-English speaking background. They said the group was cliquey, wouldn't talk to them, and was unduly possessive about such things as where they would sit at lunchtime. One
suggested that this might be due to their having such little control over the work procedures that the only place that they could assert some control was in the staffroom, but it was probably also due to the resentment about “outsiders”.

Within the core-group itself there were complaints that it gets “too bitchy”. Some women workers blamed themselves by implying that women were inherently “bitchy”, especially when there are “too many” of them working together, rather than acknowledging that they were working in difficult conditions. Working cheek by jowl with each other, jostling for the best paid work, hurrying each other up to meet the production demands, “bossing” each other to keep the supervisors and managers happy, and being careful not to have an accident. When I asked Annie how well the women got on together she replied:

We get on famously, we bitch famously too, but that's normal, isn't it? It might be about something major like someone not pulling their weight and they might not be happy about it and say well, that's my friend, and then this group, or that group of women will band together - the blokes will band together too. Or it might be about something stupid like, gee you walk funny and bang! I think it's a real healthy sort of thing. We have our days when two people can quite happily kill each other and probably nearly have, but what do we do when we have a day off? We all go for afternoon tea, we go to girls night out, we go to all the Raunchy Boys nights and to clothes parties, yeah. But we still bitch and carry on, I mean that's normal, isn't it? I think so. It's healthy, you gotta blow off steam, we all do it, we all gotta do it and we do, yep. We might not talk for a day but the next day we're back to normal.

Annie went on to suggest that when people spend most of their waking hours together, five days a week for seven to ten months of the year, some conflict and tension was bound to occur. But she said, “It doesn't matter whether they give me the shits ...I still like them a lot ...and there is no real hatred or prejudice amongst those on the floor".
Despite there being, as Ines put it, “too many different nationals in there”; Chinese, Indonesian, Filipino, Yugoslav, and Australian born women socialised together and they invited me to join them several times. Not all the women on the floor participate in the morning teas (referred to as smokos), or the Friday night entertainment, but the group that I met, despite coming from very different backgrounds, did spend most of their limited leisure time together. These women supported each other emotionally and materially whenever they could. I witnessed them blowing kisses down the telephone to each other, calling each other darling, baking cakes together to celebrate a child’s first communion, and commiserating with each other when things went wrong; such as a husband losing his job. They also congratulated each other when a child did well at school, or there was something to look forward to. On one occasion when I was having coffee with a group of the women, Hannah, from Rumania, expressed concern about not having enough money to send to her sister in her country of origin. Nancy, from the Philippines, said, “Don’t worry, I’ll give you some money on Monday, now you are not working”. Hannah, a single parent, had been stood down suddenly during the previous week. The offer was not discussed or debated, but quietly accepted as if it was a normal occurrence. One of the women I interviewed had also been having trouble with an ex-husband still harassing her five years after their divorce. She told me she had to leave him because of domestic violence and returned to work in the factory. As a neighbour, Nancy had supported her when she was physically hurt, and when she faced making difficult decisions about the separation and divorce. Although ten years older, Marianne said she wished she was as strong as Nancy. At this point in the discussion Nancy interjected by stating: “I told my husband if he ever raises one little finger to me, that’s it! I am off. He can keep his house, he can keep his kids - plenty more men out there”.
The fact that they were from very different cultures did not seem to cause major conflict amongst this core-group of workers. They bonded together because of the similarity of their experiences at work and away from work. As women, and mostly as women from non-English speaking backgrounds they are expected to do dangerously repetitive work which researchers have demonstrated affects their health. Outside of the workplace they have additional stress; many had unemployed husbands or husbands in uncertain employment, children to support, a domestic workload at home, and were living in an isolated rural community with little familial or community support. I asked Nancy to describe her usual day for me,

Oh, I get up in the morning between ...before 6 or 6 o'clock, then I am doing ...make some lunch for kids, after that I just wake up all my kids before 7, get them ready for school, and I prepare myself a lunch to take to work. And 7.30 or quarter past I leave. I pick up my sister because she works there, and go to work and maybe half past 4 or 5 o'clock I come home and never sit down. I go straight into the kitchen, start cooking for tea, and after I have dinner and everything, wash the plates and help the kids with homework, and maybe, just one time I sit, a quick one before I go to bed, and maybe between half past eleven or midnight I go to bed, not early, no way! Sometimes, if I finish my jobs in the kitchen I can sit down and watch a movie.

All of the women interviewed followed a similar routine and carried the burden of the “second shift” (Hochschild, 1989). Two of the women, whose husbands left town to seek work in the city, travelled all the way back on their own in order to earn a living but this also caused them stress. Ines’ husband was out of work for most of 1995 and 1996 and when she joined him in the city she enrolled in a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) course to improve her spoken English and grammar but had to drop out because of their lack of work, and her subsequent return to the North. She had been orphaned as a child and was desperate to maintain close contact
with her teenage son, her only child. She said she “dies” with worry about him when she is away. She is a very hard working woman, she said she intended working all week in the factory and sending the money down to the “boys”; then she would work as a labourer on a “farm” on the weekends, and that would be her money. She also intended enrolling again at TAFE while she is working! When her husband and I suggested this might all be a bit much she said, partly with humour but also with resignation and despair, 'So, I will work and work and one day I will die - what else can I do?'.

All the women would like to be in better work, and would like more support in the areas of training and learning English. For as long as they can not get other work, however, they are resigned to their position and are either pessimistic or optimistic according to their circumstances and personalities. Annie said she would soon get over "feeling disgruntled" and said, "It can only get better...it has to. Yeah, it will get better...". When she returned the following season, after the Christmas break, things did not get better; the pressure on Annie increased, and she asked for stress leave. This was refused and she resigned. After a short break because, as her friends subsequently informed me, she had “a breakdown”, she took two part-time jobs in Shrimpton. Margot had to take over Annie's work load but couldn't cope with the additional pressure of taking on work that only Annie had the skills to do. Management subsequently sacked her. A man was then brought in to run the new technology and supervise the whole floor. The dismissal of both these women was followed by the sacking of Murray who, after thirty years, was told he was “no longer employable”. His duties were also to be undertaken by the newcomer.

The processors were outraged by the appointment of the new factory floor supervisor/manager. He had been brought into the factory a few weeks
earlier to work as a processor alongside the other workers. When he was suddenly promoted over them they felt they had been spied on from within their ranks, and that Murray had been betrayed. Although they often expressed discontent with some of his decisions and attitudes they regarded Murray as of one of their own. As Ines said when discussing struggles over wages, “He is only one of us, what can he do?” Murray could not, and would not “do anything” because in order to keep his job he supported management’s view that unions should be kept out.

Joining the Union

The women processing seafood at Adamson’s are a marginalised and subordinate group generally treated with contempt by the management, and they have little opportunity to improve their situation through challenging any decisions about their work conditions. Academic research on industrial relations, occupational health and safety, and the conditions of migrant women often advocates union membership as the only way out of the impasse (O’Donnell & Hall, 1988; Quinlan (Ed.), 1993). In a study of migrant women in Melbourne (Storer, 1976) where union membership was compulsory in all food processing factories (in the state of Victoria), the women complained that union officials and shop stewards did not understand them as migrant women; multilingual material was rarely available, and “they never received a visit from an organiser” (Storer, 1976: 19). The women at Adamson’s made similar complaints. Nancy recalled how a few workers had joined the union a couple of times during the 1980s but said it didn’t work because “some people left, some stayed and others were only tourists”. On another occasion Ines recalled trying to get people together to join the union but said the union representative, who had to travel a 1,000 kilometres, said he wouldn’t come just for four people when there were 100 people working there. She also pointed out that when any
interest was expressed in joining the union people were likely to lose their jobs and if she said anything about conditions she was told to be quiet.

Management at this site during the 1990s was strongly opposed to unionism. In 1995 the manager very proudly told me that it was the 'biggest non-unionised industrial site in the state'. Margot, although a processor as well as a supervisor, was in alliance with management on this issue and stated that there was no union "because they don't need one, they know they can come to us". My research clearly reveals otherwise and even itinerant workers I interviewed, one man and one woman, both stated that they felt the workers needed union support. They were also aware that the workers were afraid they would lose their jobs if they showed any interest in joining a union.

When I asked if there was any union membership amongst the workers Ines said:

No, no, they don't want any unions in there, ... Management don't want the union in there, because then they couldn't do anything that it is wrong to do. Like if you got a union you can complain about the safety side of things, the factory, and about the pays, the holiday pay and everything. If you say anything when you are not in the union it is whatever he (management) says, that's it. You are amenised, just say amen! And that's it.

The process workers have not been unionised for about ten years. In 1989 there was a strike following an accident involving a man driving a forklift in the processing plant\(^8\). The man was not authorised to drive the forklift and the company refused compensation for his broken leg. The fitters amongst the maintenance staff, who at that time worked in an adjacent shed, "went out in sympathy". Only a few of the process workers were unionised but a union representative came to the site and urged them all to

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join and go on strike. The process workers then moved to join the strike but Mal said:

But there was a scare tactic involved, by management, they basically said, 'you join the union and go out on strike and we'll just lay you off and get other people in'. So they didn't [go out]. The fitters that were on strike ended up leaving or getting sacked ... management has always been very hard against it and they put it out that if [you join] don't think about doing that cause if you do you won't have a job next season type of thing. It has always been like that, yeah.

Apart from the threat of being laid off if they made moves to unionise, or strike, the workers are also reluctant to join because they are seasonal workers and can't see the point in paying union fees if they are only working for six to nine months of the year, or less. There is also a sense that “unions aren't always that good anyway”. Both Mal, and Ian, an itinerant worker I interviewed, also suggested that lack of unity was a problem. Ian suggested that this was because so many people “come and go and communication, rapport and interaction” were poor.

The management of this plant has also indulged in some appalling strategies to re-inforce the low status of the women and maintain their low rate of pay. Ines once challenged management over the low hourly rate she was being paid and the manager sent her home with a video to watch. She said she had been paid $8 an hour, before tax, in 1981, then after five years it was $10 an hour and remains now at $10.30 an hour. The video, according to Ines, showed “Asian” women processing prawns by hand for fifty cents a day. She said the manager said, “See - if they can work that hard for 50 cents a day why shouldn't you work for 10 dollars an hour - don't ask for more”.

This group of workers obviously has very little power or control in their workplace but there have been instances of resistance. Young people, who
perhaps feel they don’t have quite so much to lose as the married migrant women, and have greater freedom in their search for work, often “play up”, go slow, fail to turn up for work, or actually sabotage the product by putting prawn heads in “meat” packs or doing similar things. Ines, who appeared to be the most aware of industrial relations amongst the migrant women, was more willing to take risks and speak out. She attributed this to her sense of injustice and the fact that she was brought up in a communist country. She recounted to me a story about how she had told Murray that she thought there had been some mistake in everyone’s pay and that he ought to look into it. He took no notice and then a member of senior management came from the city (in the 1980s when the factory ownership had a city branch) to “give a talk” to the workers. Ines told her work colleagues she intended following up her question but they told her not to. When she stood up at the meeting her friends tried to pull her down, and Murray said “shoosh” to her, but she persisted. The company man said he would look into it and fax her the result. A few days later he sent the fax confirming that she was right and that everybody would get back pay. Murray, she said got over a thousand dollars and she got a few hundred.

Occasionally a new staff member suggests that joining the union is necessary because of the lack of an afternoon tea break, or because people are stood down with only an hour’s notice but they get little support from workers or management. The women like Ines and Nancy have pretty well given up the struggle for unionisation, especially in the face of managerial resistance. One supervisor referred to women trying to “talk people into joining the union” as engaging in “stand over tactics”. She didn’t seem to consider the actions of the company as “stand over tactics” and although exploited herself seemed to put her faith in the goodwill of the company and her own

9 In the course of my research I met three single women who as itinerant workers had worked in the factory but gave it up to work on trawlers as cook deckhands. One of them, Sandy, subsequently trained for her Marine Engine Driver’s ticket and worked as a Mate (see Chapter 5).
ability to “get over things” rather than take action through a union. As Mal suggested, under these circumstances, the processors “haven’t got a leg to stand on”.

As Michael Quinlan (1993:147) points out, when there is a high rate of unemployment and new jobs are only part-time or casual, government support for industrial relations reforms which intensify work practices and weaken trade unionism allow little opportunity for collective action.

Conclusions

The production of seafood at Adamson’s is sex-segregated and the sexual division of labour is maintained by having “men’s jobs” and “women's jobs”. Every effort is made by the company to encourage the employment of men but it is necessary for women to be employed to perform the work that men refuse to do. The first manager interviewed implied, in his concern about unemployed youth, that his intention was to encourage young men to take up employment in the factory, and the second manager was explicit about encouraging the employment of men as “breadwinners” in preference to “those second income earners - women”. Although both men referred to the difficulty of attracting sufficient processing labour and acknowledged that men “won’t touch the stuff”, they denied the dependence of the company on the labour of the women. Neither man referred to any effort being made to encourage the employment of women in the factory. Women’s employment was justified on the grounds that they had “more nimble fingers”, were “better” at directly handling the product and were prepared to take on boring, repetitive unpleasant work. Several of the women I interviewed pointed out that they felt like outcasts if they went into town on their way home from work because people said they “stank of fish”.
From the discussions I had with the women employed at Adamson’s, I would argue that they would be equally productive, if not more so, if they were made more welcome. Finding “reliable” local labour would be far easier for the company if it was prepared to employ the women as fully waged workers rather than as casuals with no sick leave or holiday pay; if child care was available; if there were opportunities for training and promotion, and if the women’s skills were more highly valued.

Rather than improving conditions for women, or even acknowledging the contribution of their labour, and their right to paid work, the management complained about the cost of employing the women while initiating enticements designed to attract men, enticements such as employing young men on adult rates, making them leading hands, taking them on in clerical work because “you can train them as managers”, and wherever possible keeping them on between seasons in maintenance work or promoting them onto the maintenance staff. As the process becomes more automated and technologically advanced the proportion of men to women employed in the factory increases.

The most powerful participants in the fishing industry are men who as entrepreneurial owners of the means of production have colonised what has been traditionally regarded as “women’s work” in fishing communities. In the pursuit of profits based on the exploitation of the marine environment, women processors are also exploited. The women’s limited access to paid work influences their availability to Adamson’s as a reserve labour force.

The women themselves, are engaged in struggles to find the best ways to live their lives. In the process of earning their livings, and in many cases as
sole supporters of their families, they struggle for better conditions and economic rewards, while they develop highly valuable skills.

Their experience of a sex-segregated workspace enables them to gain some sense of solidarity with each other, and support for each other. However, their segregation into the lower status “women’s work” maintains their unequal status with men and restricts their opportunities to access more rewarding paid employment. The unequal division of labour within their marriages, as wives and mothers, also contributes to their marginalised position in the labour market. At Adamson’s, although the women do work which has customarily been assigned to women in fishing communities, the issues of ethnicity and gender intersect with the interests of the capitalist development of the industry in determining who works where and when. It is not simply the “image” of fishing that is masculine, the industry is structured around masculine interests; men own the processing plants and the boats, and control the space in which the women work.
Chapter 5

“Nice girls” and “tough birds”: women on fishing vessels.

In his paper “Women in the Fishing: The Roots of Power between the Sexes” Paul Thompson (1985) noted that although work at sea has been “commonly thought of as a man’s business” while women work on shore and in the home, this division of labour has not been consistent. He argued that in response to economic pressures women fish workers in Scotland were required to take up seasonal work far away from home, and that when work customarily allocated to women was performed on contemporary Russian factory ships women also worked at sea. Thompson also makes brief reference to women and “girls” in the cod fishery of Labrador, Newfoundland, and in the Baltic Sea (1985:6-7). He suggests that,

Fisherwomen are exceptions, ... their existence helps us to see beyond the “naturalness” of a male stereotype, a parallel to women miners. Their own experience, their view of the world, would be well worth knowing and as widely illuminating as those of the women miners has proved to be. ... these very exceptions are also a striking illustration of ... the importance of local variations in the position of women, and of the historical roots of these variations.

There have been few attempts since Thompson published this paper to “illuminate” the experiences of fisherwomen although in 1988 Irene Kaplan published a short article in which she compared the women working on “draggers” to those in other “non-traditional” or blue-collar occupations. As Davis and Nadel-Klein (1992) commented, being portrayed as exceptions in “non-traditional” occupations merely reinforces the view that the work women do is “men’s work”(p. 139). Allison, Jacobs and Porter presented an informative account of women in the fishing industry in 1989 through the editing of ten life stories of women employed in a variety of capacities in the
Pacific North West Fishing Industries. In this publication, *Winds of Change*, they suggested that in fishing communities women moved in and out of different work spaces and were “happy at home, on the land or at sea”. Allison, Jacobs and Porter, used the concepts of “customary” and “non-customary” to define work which is often described as traditional or non-traditional (p. 160). The authors claim that this distinction “rests not only on the nature of the tasks performed but also on the social and physical contexts within which those tasks are embedded” (p. xix). They acknowledge that although the “fishing industry has many jobs that can be viewed as extensions of women’s customary home work”, there are times when “the available work has also included women’s direct entry into the labour force in positions sometimes viewed as non-customary” (p. xix).

In taking this approach to discussing the labour of women in the fishing industry Allison et al. avoid any direct critique of, or identification of, a sexual division of labour. In their methodology section they state that they started with the assumption that “women would be found in all sectors of the fishing industry” and if they were not present they would ask “why?” They claim this is a positive approach to researching the contribution of women “in order to elucidate patterns in women’s participation” in the fishing industry. They critique feminist authors such as Rosaldo (1974), and Ortner (1974) claiming that they are “proponents of the negative approach” which implies “that women everywhere are in one way or another subordinate to men and are devalued in the societies in which they live” (p.xii). Such accounts, Allison et al. claim, also establish “the relative powerlessness of women vis-a-vis men”, because the argument is “that women do not participate in, or have access to, the domains in which men work” (p. xii). In their challenge to this approach, Allison et al. use what they refer to as a 1970s feminist anthropological method which enables the women they interviewed to present their own stories and promote a picture of free, equal and active
agency on the part of women working in the industry. However, in so doing they make no reference to any link between women’s and men’s continuing social and economic inequality, and a sexual division of labour.

Analysing the sexual division of labour amongst workers at sea has been rare. In their 1992 paper Davis and Nadel-Klein agree that women must be regarded as persons who are thinking social actors employing strategies in their day to day living (p. 142), but also note that their work experience must be situated within a political economy approach like that of Connelly and MacDonald(1991) which analyses women’s work, the sexual division of labour and the status of women in a capitalist state. Kaplan recognised the fact that more women were being encouraged into so called non-traditional occupations, but Eva Munk-Madsen noted that although the 1980s politics of equal opportunity extended “a ladder” to women enabling them to work on Norwegian factory ships, they were “admitted for the reason of sexual difference, not for the reason of sexual equality” (1991:2). They were encouraged onto the boats for the purposes of performing work which Thompson had described as “customarily allocated to women”. Thompson suggested that when preparation and sale of the catch, and “control of space” was combined with economic responsibility, a woman “had a clear practical basis for power”. When women also controlled property, such as boats or land, or independent businesses, their basis for power could be further enhanced. He also pointed out that “[T]he control of property may, in fact, in some contexts emerge as a decisive factor” (Thompson, 1985: 18).

These observations have relevance to the work of women on Western Australian trawlers, and as independent owner operators of fishing vessels. In 1995 I interviewed thirteen men and fifteen women who worked as fishers and deckhands on prawn and scallop trawlers, and on wet-liners and lobster boats. As already noted, the Western Australian fishing industry has a
marked vertical and horizontal sexual division of labour and few women skipper boats or own and operate their own fishing enterprises. Many women have worked on family fishing vessels, and on the trawlers but men resist their incursion by fetishizing the occupation of fisherman, and exaggerating the hazardous nature of the work. They also live a lifestyle which is often alienating to women. This is especially obvious amongst the workers on trawlers where women are more likely to be drawn into “women’s work” rather than undertake formal training as Masters. Although a few women have skippered trawlers other women have found greater independence as owner operators of their own wet-liners or lobster boats.

It is my intention to present a balance between revealing women’s active participation in what has been regarded as a masculine occupation, and an analysis of gender relations. My aim is to achieve this through comparing the experiences of three independent women fishers who currently own and operate their own fishing boats with the experiences of fourteen other women who have worked as employees on prawn and scallop trawlers. The chapter is therefore structured in two parts; Part 1 deals with the experiences of independent women fishers, and Part II with the experiences of women working with men on prawn and scallop trawlers.
Independent women fishers: "For me it's a perfect lifestyle"

Although research on women in Western Australian fisheries has been extremely limited there have, since at least the 1920s, always been women who "loved" fishing or worked on fishing boats with husbands or fathers. A few have held fishing licences in their own right¹. The numbers of women owning and operating their own fishing vessels remain small and, in contrast to many of the women I interviewed on the trawlers, Gwen, Jude and Anne have strong familial connections to the fishing industry and a childhood attachment to the marine environment.

Gwen, a net fisher who lives on an Inlet in the rural South West, was born in 1937 and took over her father's scale fishing enterprise in 1978 when, following divorce from her husband, she needed to earn her own living. She recalled,

...when we were kids we used to go out with Dad and put the nets around mullet and things like that, always go out line fishing with him, and I have sort of been mad on the water all my life really, more so than [my brother]. He used to like swimming and fishing and that, but he never liked the net side of it. It was too hard ... [laughter]. It was hard work too. I started in 1978, ... I got my licence and went out and bought a 14 foot Brooker ... I did that for 4 years on my own, and then Richard [teenage son] worked with me after that, came with me as my crewman.

Gwen purchased this smaller vessel because she found her father's boat too big to handle on her own. Although she was pleased to have been able to earn her own living from fishing she stated that she fished because she "just loved it".

¹ See interviews with women, transcripts for Western Australia (PRO, 1989, OH2266), and "Fisherfolk of the Peel Region", oral history project conducted by Moira Wills, PRO, 1989, OH2475/1-7.
Jude - a lobster fisher - came to Western Australia from Dover, England, as a six year old in 1956 when her parents and her Aunt migrated to participate in the development of the mid-west lobster fishery. Her family was amongst the pioneers of the community of seasonal fishers who are the only people allowed to take up residence on an environmentally fragile group of coral islands. Jude works an aluminium jetboat in the breakers off a dangerous plate reef area. She grew up on the unique low lying rocky islands hundreds of miles North of the metropolitan area. When I asked how she became involved in the fishery she said, “Well, I couldn’t help it really”. She said she grew up loving the Islands, spending half the time she should have been doing correspondence lessons, and every spare moment of her holidays catching fish and crabs, walking around and discovering things, beachcombing endlessly, and building little rafts and boats.

During the fishing season Jude lives alone, in a hut she built herself, on a very small island that officially bears her name. When she is not fishing she either lives in the city port of Fremantle with her two young adult sons, or works off the coast of Sumatra as the skipper of a tourist yacht. When recalling her family history she stated,

...my father was working, you know, it was that time [1950s and 60s] when he thought his job was to work and earn the money, and my mother looked after the kids. My mother wasn’t very happy doing that, ...I don’t think she was a very contented mother ...[she was on the Islands from the start] with all the little kids, and she had chickens and had another little boat and used to go out fishing...she had a life of cooking up the chickens, going beachcombing ..... I think just going catching fish for dinner was a pleasure as much as anything, and a way of doing something else other than being in the hut and cooking and that sort of thing. She liked it, and she liked it over there better than she did on the mainland, we all did, because the Islands are special. The coral reef is pretty amazing, and you get to love it. ... and because we didn’t grow up there from the beginning, [coming from England] we had to name everything, we didn’t know the names, so we made up all our own names to
describe the environment. ... we were perfectly happy there; we’d rather be there than anywhere.

Jude’s father had been a shipwright and a lobster fisher in Dover (U.K.), and her Aunt acquired legendary status in the mid-west lobster fishery in Western Australia because she had operated her own boat and fishing licence since the 1950s, and built her own shallow “beamy double diagonal jarrah planked” boat in her back yard. She also trained Jude and both of her sisters to skipper their boats. Jude stated that as a result of her relationship with her Aunt she worked a boat at the age of twelve and was employed as a deckhand at the age of 14. She eventually became a schoolteacher, studied Fine Arts and is a successful landscape artist. She took up permanent work fishing in the reef breakers following the death of her brother in 1983 and her Aunt remains her partner. She explained,

[Initially] My Aunt was still fishing, and she’d work the best bit, the first bit of the season and then I’d work the rest, that’s how I started. I had just finished teaching .... my kids were fairly little then and that worked out pretty well. And then she retired and I sort of work on a share basis where she gets a third and I get two thirds ... It is quite a good arrangement, one boat sort of keeps three families even though it is a small boat: the deckhand, myself and my family and Aunty too.

This is a similar arrangement to that which Gwen now has with her son and their net fishing enterprise on the south coast.

Anne, born in 1944, also lives in a remote and isolated setting 500 kilometres south of the metropolitan area and at least a 1000 kilometres away from Jude. The town she lives in is a very small community; she has no telephone and no public electricity supply. She works alone and is involved in a small fishery where, in 1989 she stated there were only three other permanent fishers still working the area. Anne holds a Master Class V ticket and a Marine Engine Driver ticket, and separate licences to enable her to fish for
lobster, go deep sea fishing, and net fishing. She operates her own thirty foot jarrah planked boat in summer and uses two smaller boats for fishing in the Inlet (not the same one as Gwen) in the winter.

I was unable to interview Anne myself, but when I interviewed her mother Emma, she informed me that her daughter’s first encounter with the sea was in 1947 when her father was part of a salmon fishing team operating a seine net from the beach. She said the men refused to allow women onto the beach because, as her husband informed her, they used rough language, “horsed around” and often worked naked. They allowed Anne onto the beach because she was still a child. Emma recalled,

She [Anne] had a marvellous time because she was so utterly spoilt, she was very slow at walking, but she learnt to run around there with everyone. They had a little dinghy for her down on the beach ... and one day one of the fishermen was sitting ... just waiting, looking for salmon and she was down the front playing. This little dinghy ... only an eight footer ... Anne had seen how the men rowed out to go round the salmon, so Bob was watching her. He said she got into the dinghy, she did a bit of rowing, the oars were in the rowlocks, then she got out and she struggled with the anchor - put that in the dinghy and went round the front and started struggling to put it in the water. And she was going to take off! [She was] two, yes.

Although Anne’s father was a fisherman at this time, she also had a particularly close relationship with her mother who shared her love of the marine environment. They lived for many years on the site of remote lighthouses and Anne’s mother combined teaching her through correspondence lessons with exploring the rock pools, fishing and sailing toy boats. Anne eventually undertook nursing training and worked as a theatre sister in Australia and Vietnam. In 1971 she took a holiday with her mother who had recently divorced and moved to the fishing harbour where Anne still lives. Anne felt she needed a break from nursing and started fishing,

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2 Anne [a pseudonym] was interviewed in Western Australia by Jack Darcy for the Australian Fishing Industry oral history project (PRO, 1989, OH2266).
“just for fun” with an old friend of her father. She then trained with him and qualified as a skipper. Her mother assisted her with the purchase of a boat to enable her to enter the fishery in 1972.

“Fishing is hard work”
When Anne described her boat she referred to it as “a slow old boat” but said, “it does me ... It is big enough for me, I can get into enough trouble with that”, and implied that a larger boat would not suit her. She does all her hand lining, drop-line fishing and net fishing for scale fish on her own, but during the lobster season she usually tries to employ a deckhand. The work was often difficult because the area was known for a lot of bad weather and she described the fishery as a “very spasmodic type of craying [crayfishing]”. She usually only went fishing for lobster from January through until April because after that the big seas caused a loss of gear.

Anne works sixty lobster pots in one limited entry area, and ninety three in another. She keeps the lobsters in holding pots and every two to three weeks shares the transporting of the catch 500 kilometres to the city market with another fisherman. The wet fish catch consists of snapper and jewfish, groper, kingfish, cod and sometimes shark.

During her interview in 1989, Anne referred to having to consider retirement not simply because “the economic situation” was “forcing a lot of the south coast fishermen out of it”, but because she was a woman. She said,

Oh well, I think I’ve got to be realistic about it. After all I am female, I mean I know we are not allowed to discriminate any more but I’ve never forgotten the fact I am female .... No, you’ve got to be realistic about this. I mean I’m physically not as strong as a man is, although you’ve got machinery and things to do the work. So certainly I’ve got to think about looking at retiring. I don’t want to, and I’m not going to until I have to. But, yeah, I’ve got to think about it.
Anne has handled heavy pots, nets and lines, outboard motors and engines, and used tractors to bring her boats in and out of the water. All this work is heavy and all three women expressed concern about the work taking a toll on their bodies.

Gwen was officially retired and in receipt of a government pension when I interviewed her, but she was still filleting fish, doing the bookwork and mending nets while assisting her son with some of the fishing. She recalled the ways in which the work could be dangerous as well as heavy; she had been stung by cobbler fish, strained her back and arms lifting a tangled net or lifting boxes of fish, got her outboard motor stuck in the net and most threatening of all, “nearly going down on a rough day”. She stated that she had always preferred fishing in the Inlet when there was always someone else around, and that she would never go out in the ocean. She added, “I take my hat off to women who do. It is not for me”. Despite this, she said, “I have nearly been down two or three times with big waves, and too much mucky net in the boat, slipped to the back. We have our moments! But, no, I have never been to the bottom yet. I have been close, but not quite”.

Gwen retired from full time fishing because the work was so hard on her body. She laughed as she told me,

Take that job on you won’t need [chest expansion exercises]. It is very good [as a career for a young woman], it is very hard work, builds up your muscles, I know that! Because it is working from the shoulder, but it does your back in, and your knees later on. I am suffering like mad all the time with my legs at the moment ... [and] strain from the back here [pointing]. It is great picking up a net full of fish but you pick up a net full of seaweed and muck caught in it you can hardly lift it, then you are in trouble. But no, my arms are great, and shoulders [laughs] although now I have gone down to nothing because I am not doing it.
It was a problem with her legs that finally drove Gwen to give up full time net-fishing. She sat on a chair and demonstrated to me how her knees banged constantly against the boat. She explained,

...when you are setting the net you are sitting with your leg on the handle of your outboard and my knees... I don’t know whether I have arthritis in them or what, but they are that bad they throb, still do even today. If I am spiking cobblers sitting up the front with my knees against the seat, your knee is pushed right up... Daytime doesn’t worry me, as soon as I go to bed at night they throb and I can’t put them anywhere or do anything with them. I think I have ruined my body through fishing. So if any young girl wants to take it on it is damned hard work. It is not just the fun of it, but I would do it again, even if I am suffering now, it is just something I like doing, being out in it.

All the women referred to in this section liked “being out in it”. Jude’s work is particularly challenging and she fishes in a rather unusual and highly skilful way which she described when I asked her about her day’s work. She always gets up early in the mornings but on load up days she starts at 3.30 am, drives her dinghy across to the main jetty from her little Island, picks up the deckhand, refuels the fishing boat and transfers the lobsters from their holding crates into baskets. She then drives the boat, in the dark, using a spot light and a few markers to avoid getting stuck on the reef. After loading the lobsters she and the deckhand return to the main Island where he sometimes goes back to sleep while she catches up on some reading until it is light enough to go out to the big reef. She described her fishing technique:

We steam across the lagoon - about 12 miles to the reef where we pull and set 54 pots. They are strung along, maybe three quarters of them, in the breakers - we call them gutters - places where it’s breaking outside and breaking inside [the reef] but there is a little bit of an area in there where it just heaps up, it doesn't quite break. So you jump [the boat] over the insider breakers and go into that place, pull the pots, reset them. It takes a long time because we are not like the big boats where they just drop them in off an echo sounder - we don't use an echo sounder, it's all by eye, so we are pulling them into little
holes and leaving them against rocks, and they stay there and [because we are] sort of watching them we are slow, so it takes us 6 hours to pull 54 pots, something like that. They are strung right along the reef, and on the southern end of the reef - it is a very shallow plate reef with huge breakers breaking on the outside - they are breaking onto such a hard plate reef they smash themselves into big foamies in a very short distance and those foamies run across the reef and then sort of trickle off in. So the reef is almost higher than water level, but the water is going over it because the breakers on the outside are so big. So down there - this is what the jet boats are for really - we wait till there's a foam going, we sit, then go fast, jump up onto the foamie and run up onto the reef towards the outside part of the reef. Where the foamies'd be going there's enough water to slow down, and there's little holes and things out there where the crays...it's very shallow, but there's lots of crays there because they come from the back edge, that's where the most crayfish live, right on the impact zone. So we are the only people who fish there, it's our little niche really, the only people who fish that area.

Jude's Aunt, aged over seventy years when I met Jude, often warned her to take care of her body by employing a male deckhand to help with the heavier lifting as she gets older. Jude is very strong and used to lifting drums of fuel as well as cray pots. However, she agreed with her Aunt that stacking pots was hard, because they had ballast in them and could weight a hundred kilos. Although they are winched up onto the "tipper" they have to be picked up by hand and stacked on a pile of pots already three or four pots high. She said,

It is hard, it is hard work, too hard for most women really. It is probably too hard for most men actually [laughs]. If it was in any sort of controlled union I would say they might have something to say about it. But lots of men do it happily because they earn good money, much better than they'd earn doing anything else.

Jude expressed an interest in seeing more women become involved in the industry but said she thought most would not be strong enough to handle the work unless they could start early like she did on "the ropes or floats"
assisting another deckie. She also pointed out that the technology for lifting would not be improved, and that the bigger boats coming into the industry could make it harder for women to get into the work because they required the lifting of an even greater number of pots. On a more positive note Jude suggested that a young woman wishing to enter the industry would need to be “fairly stubborn and tenacious” and added, “but I think women are fairly good at that”.

Jude surprised me by stating that she had a preference for employing male deckhands herself. She said she had always done the heavy lifting but now felt she had “done enough of that already”, and had earned her right as skipper to employ a deckhand to help with some of the heavier lifting:

I mean I do do quite a lot of heavy work as it is. I have to pull crates up and lift things and move things and I’ve had enough of it, do enough as it is. So for a girl to come and work for me she would have to be pretty strong, and the only option [for her] would be to work on a boat with two deckies so that you could work just on the ropes and winch ... so it is quite hard I think and that is probably what stops a lot of women. And also just the idea that it is man’s work, [makes them think] it is too hard for them. But I love it.

Jude’s Aunt whom she said “still loves it, does everything, looks after the pots, mends the huts, makes floats, goes fishing and is still very active” has had two hip replacements which she attributes to the constant pounding motion of the boat coming up against the body. She constantly reminds Jude that it is not good for her to keep doing such heavy work and urges her to use a deckie to help. Jude said, “I can still do it but you know she is making me stop. Which is probably wise, she knows, she’s lived a life of doing that and thinks it is not a good thing to do”.
In choosing a deckhand Jude also prefers to employ “surfie boys” because they are most likely to have the “confidence to know which waves are gonna break and which ones aren’t, and to make the judgement, because if you make a mistake you are gone; you’ll roll the boat”. Jude’s Aunt once rolled her boat, the first boat she built, in the breakers. Jude recalled the “drama of it, her swimming around” and being afraid of sharks, but pointed out that a fisher was not likely to die but “just get into a lot of trouble, financial difficulties, and ...miss a great chunk [of the season]”. She added that there was a lot of luck involved and that she had been lucky because a lot of people do roll their boats because “...things can happen if you are in that area and you are taking calculated risks”.

Both Jude and Anne referred to men chauvinistically offering to help them when they saw them lifting; Jude found it amusing, and Anne, probably just as strong, commented “If someone runs down the beach and offers to help take the dinghy or give me a hand, I don’t knock it back [laughs]. I accept that”. Although quite independent and capable both women acknowledged that they would use the strength of men when it suited them.

**Men’s attitudes**

When I first started asking fishermen to direct me to women who fished they would refer to a woman by name and add, she is a “nice girl”, or she is a “tough bird”, often adding “she can chuck cray pots around like any bloke can”. One man actually referred to “the best deckie” he ever had as a “woman in a man’s body”. I eventually discovered that “nice girls” were usually the wives or daughters of fishermen, and “tough birds” were not only physically strong but “loose” women as defined by Janice Raymond (1986); “free” and independent unmarried women or at least not related to any fisherman. In some cases they were also considered “promiscuous”. They were also women who more blatantly challenged conventional sexual divisions of labour.
Although there was some evidence of an awareness of men thinking they were a joke, teasing them or having a chauvinistic attitude Jude, Gwen and Anne all recalled good working relationships with other fishermen. Jude noted that deckhands sometimes thought they ought to be driving the boat and that one she employed refused to work with her because, she said, he decided he couldn’t handle working with a woman - “he thought he should be making all the decisions”. This is an example of what Allison, Jacobs and Porter (1989) refer to as “authority conflict” and it is clearly related to Jude challenging the young man’s belief in an appropriate gender order; not just the skipper and crew relationship or the role of a wife as a helper to a husband.

Anne made no reference to conflict with male deckhands but like Jude, and Gwen, spoke about working with fishermen within her own small fishing community and earning their respect as fishers. Jude laughed as she said she thought this was because she had caught more crayfish than a lot of the men, but she also thought it was due to her Aunt having earned respect through demonstrating her skill. Although the informants seem to take this attitude for granted, it is evidence of the fact that when women enter occupations considered the province of men they have to prove themselves as exceptionally proficient before they are treated with respect.

Being elected to office bearing positions in fishers’ organisations was also taken as a mark of respect by Anne and Jude because they represented a large number of fishermen. Anne said, “the guys [in my community] are great. They’re very good. But all round I think with most of them I have been pretty well accepted. I think they think if a woman is stupid enough to do this, well they’ll have to put up with her!”. Here Anne admits that she is regarded as an “exception”, and that the men are a bit patronising but have had to accept her as a fisherwoman. She told her interviewer that she rather
enjoyed being the only woman at fishers meetings because all forty men had to stand and make a toast to “the ladies” when she was the only one present. She joked about being sorry when the organisation changed the terminology to “fisherperson”. This little story demonstrates how changing gendered language to accommodate “difference” can result in a woman disappearing; losing her primary identity.

Jude avoided confrontations with fishermen as men, by deliberately separating herself from them. She claimed that this was easier for her than it would be for women on trawlers who, she suggested, might be more vulnerable to sexual harassment. She said she employed only one deckhand whom she picked up from his quarters early in the morning and dropped off later in the day. She lived alone on her own Island except when employing her own sons and said,

I do think it is a different situation [to working on trawlers] I think it is the fact that we don’t have to live with them, and I don’t associate with them. I don’t drink alcohol, spend a lot of time in the pub, or talk to fishermen or spend time with them on mass. I don’t really know what they think [about me] particularly [laughs], but they treat me pretty well really ...they elected me director of the company [fisherman’s co-op] so they must have some respect for me.

Relationships: partners and children.

All three women are not only independent fishers, but independent women. They have all successfully negotiated masculine resistance to their presence in the industry and claimed space for themselves at work and in their personal lives. Like some of the women on the trawlers, they are all attracted to the outdoor lifestyle and have worked hard at maintaining their independence while remaining involved in the industry. Gwen divorced at

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3 Women fishing off the coast of the United States refuse to accept the label fisherperson or fisherwoman and Allison et al. state “[T]he term fisherman ...includes women who fish. The women identify with the occupation fisherman...’ (1989:xix). I suggest that this is because the term fishermen, or fisherman carries greater status than fisherperson, or fisherwoman.
age forty and remained a single woman; Anne’s mother Emma, informed me that she had always been “independent” and had no children; Jude told me she didn’t believe in “that little piece of paper that says you are married” however, she was the only woman who made any reference to living with a partner, and dealing with child care issues.

Women I interviewed who had worked on trawlers had trouble combining family and community interests with their work, and were faced with the difficult decision of foregoing the lifestyle because of child care responsibilities. As Jude pointed out, this balancing act can be easier with the operation of a smaller boat in a fishery which only requires day trips, and regardless of whether the children’s father shares the parenting. Jude recalled stories from her own childhood, her parenting experience and her sisters’ adult life to demonstrate this. Although she told me she didn’t believe in marriage; she had been involved in happy long term relationships with men.

The first long term relationship that Jude entered into was with the father of her children. They remained together for fifteen years and were both fishers working on the Islands. They eventually separated because he was also a musician and his interests and lifestyle conflicted with that of Jude as a fisher. Jude accompanied him when he gave up fishing, when her children were still small, and moved to the city. She worked as an art teacher until her father asked her to return to fishing eight years later. Her partner did not want to go with her. She said that they had already stared to “drift apart”, and,

He was not keen [to return to fishing] he was more keen to sort of live off the government than I was [laughs]. So that came into it to a certain extent. I mean, I guess we just had different ideas about it. I never liked the dole [unemployment benefits] much ... I prefer a bit of enterprise in one way or another. So I think that was our main problem.
The next long term relationship into which Jude entered was with a writer who she suggested was used to working in isolated places and because she was “always fairly independent” they got along well for nine years. However, she stated that he had left her two years prior to my interview with her because he had been unable to totally fit in with her lifestyle. She said, with a chuckle, she could not say it was entirely the fishing that drove them apart because he said he was “going off to find God...having a mid-life crisis, or spiritual awakening”. She did note, however, that he had “a few problems around it, I think as much as anything it was being faced with a lot of competent men around, he said he felt inadequate ...And I was doing something he couldn’t do”.

Her partner also developed what Jude described as “rope paranoia”:

...if someone handed him a rope he didn’t know what to do with it! So he had quite a lot of trouble with it [my lifestyle] and I, well even though he lives a vagrant sort of lifestyle, is always going off someplace anyway, wanders all over the place, our lives sort of fitted together and I lived with him for 9 years

Although speaking fondly about her relationship with this man, Jude did make the comment that she thought her lifestyle as a fisher had been a bit difficult for the men with whom she had lived, in marriage-like relationships. When we discussed how women often have trouble adapting to the lifestyle of husbands who fish she commented:

Well traditionally, women sort of...women fit in with the men and where men fit in with the women it is probably gonna be [rare]. I mean, it hasn’t been a real problem in my life but then I am fairly independent so maybe it is like... I haven’t let it be a problem ....

Allison, Jacobs and Porter (1989), found that “[M]ultiple attempts to combine wife-husband and captain-crew relationships failed” when an independent woman fisher ran her own operation. They suggest in their work that
“married yet independent women fishermen” encounter “customary authority conflict” if they try to work together on the same boat. They state:

The usual line of authority on a fishing vessel is vertical, from the captain to each of the crew. In a customary view of the American family, the husband is the head of the household and has authority over the wife. If the wife is also a crew member, these two vertical lines of assumed authority coincide. If she is the captain and the husband is the crew member, the two lines of customary authority conflict. (1989: 163).

Allison, Jacobs and Porter, in avoiding the “assumption” that women are subordinate to men, overlook the fact that many men assume that they ought to be. This situation can arise for any woman in the fishing industry regardless of whether she is a wife or not, and can also arise when the husband is not a fisher. In my opinion the conflict arises because of the challenge to a socially and culturally established gender order.

One woman, whose story appeared in Winds of Change, referred to conflict with her husband because she fished away from home without him, and brought home a paycheck which was bigger than his (Allison et al, 1989:47). She divorced this husband eventually and had four husbands all together. At the time she told her story she was still happy with her latest husband who adapted to her lifestyle. Although he sometimes went out in the boat with her she said he accepted the fact that she ran the boat. This woman pointed out that it was more acceptable for a fisherman to make fishing his priority in life than it was for a woman, and noted that fishers’ wives could not complain about it, “because that’s their grubstake. The husband is the one that brings home the wallet.” Because men are not usually economically dependent on a woman as breadwinner, and women do not customarily make their work their lifestyle, as Janet Finch (1983) notes, men rarely have to adapt to their partner’s working life.
Children

Jude was the only independent fisher I was able to interview who spoke about bringing up children while fishing. Although she did this in a similar way to many other single parents she had a “modern” and flexible approach to parenting which included not being rigid about attending school and believing that living for short periods with other people was beneficial to children’s personal growth rather than detrimental.

She balanced caring for her sons when they were babies with fishing close to the Islands and taking them out with her but when the boys were aged about one and three she and her husband went overseas for a year and then stopped fishing except during holidays when they returned to the Islands and Jude’s family. When she separated from the children’s father she took the children, aged seven and ten, to Indonesia on a yacht before returning to work regularly as a fisher. They then did their correspondence school work while Jude went fishing and she supervised it when she returned later in the day. She also employed someone to look after them at the Islands from time to time but eventually she left them on the mainland so that they could attend school because she had little choice:

That was the only thing I could do really and so they had somebody they knew who lived with them and cooked for them and then they’d come over to the Islands for extended holidays as well. We’ve never been too worried about attending school with the utmost regularity - so we’d stretch their holidays, and I’d try to make my season short...that seemed to work OK. And I actually think, that if I was away and they had to live with somebody else is quite good for them, they sort of, well they still live at home as you can see, and I still go away, so it’s the same sort of thing. They do all the cooking at home, and I do the washing up! [laughs] They learn to look after themselves, do their own washing, so I think it’s been quite a good arrangement. Probably because they have been more self reliant, with me not being there.
Jude’s sons, aged in their twenties, were at home working in the kitchen when I interviewed their mother. They followed their mother’s interest in surfing as well as their father’s interest in music and combined fishing with playing in a band. They had also recently persuaded Jude to skipper a charter boat they had been on off the coast of Sumatra, because she was a much better skipper than the one with whom they had travelled. Jude has also taken them travelling and encouraged them to travel alone, to “see the world isn’t all just like Australia”, and learn to appreciate different cultures.

Jude’s own childhood was obviously one of freedom, almost a perpetual holiday compared with that of Australians living in the city and she was pleased to be able to share her delight in the Islands with her sons. She also told me about how her two sisters had combined parenting with fishing. Both were skippers who had also worked with their Aunt. One sister worked a boat while pregnant and breastfeeding. Jude recalled,

...she used to have someone to help her but she’d breast feeding her kids, going out fishing, she’d take out some milk [express it] with a suction...leave it for the person who was at home on the Island looking after them...race out and pull the pots and come back and so ... she did it while her kids were little and she had the partner living with her there looking after the kids while she worked [laughed]. So you can do anything really....

“I have learnt that there is a bit more to living than the dollars”

When Jude discussed her unique method of lobster fishing she said she deliberately stayed with the smaller boat because bigger boats could not get into the reef area. They can be used for fishing further out to sea in deeper water but she didn’t like that style of fishing because she couldn’t see the bottom. She said her father had fished the way she does in the “old days when everyone had their own area and it wasn’t as competitive”; however, the increased competition in the industry led to it becoming “pretty cut-throat” and fishers went in for increasingly bigger boats and more mobility.
Both she and her Aunt preferred using the smaller “scooter” or jetboats and fishing in close to the reef. She elaborated,

I have probably got quite a high catch rate per pot because I fish in this particular way, but the reason we’ve done it is because I like to do it like that, it’s sort of reactionary in a way, I am not ... I don’t have a GPS [global positioning satellite] and I don’t have all the satellite technology, computer technology on the boat, still do it by memory and by eye, ... I get to know every spot, it’s like having your own little piece of land, you get to know every little ledge and ... but ... the sea is more difficult to know than a piece of land ... especially over there, the trade winds are so constant you know the surface of the water is so often stirred up by the wind and you can’t see perfectly every day. Especially in the deeper gutters, ... it’s probably water about 3 fathoms deep so you can’t see the bottom all the time and so it is harder to know where you are exactly every time. But it’s interesting, I like it. And you see so many things, much more life working in the shallows. I see seals and dolphins and turtles and every kind of beautiful coral fish, that’s a lot more fun for me, it’s a bit like driving a truck or something on a bigger boat.

The mid-west lobster fishery has become increasingly dominated by larger boats, and in Jude’s opinion, this is because fishermen think they can’t survive with smaller less technologically advanced vessels. The larger boats and “high - tech.” equipment allows them to fish larger areas and travel further distances in the hope that they can have more pots and catch more lobsters. Jude fishes mainly during the Island season and only part of the time during what is known as “the whites”. She explained:

... they still earn a lot of money at the Islands, but ...in the whites, - when the lobsters are migrating off the beach [after moultning] they walk out - If you work a big boat you follow the crayfish out and out and out, carry pots a long way and you end up fishing 20 miles out. I don’t do that - I fish them in the shallows out to about 10 fathoms, and pack up and come home for Christmas and I don’t fish again until the Island season, whereas everyone else fishes all the way through ... I am at a definite disadvantage [financially] but I just don’t care,
you know? I just make it a short season and then forget it, stop fishing - I don’t want to fish all the time.

A lot of the men who fish lobster, according to Jude, would rather be fishing than staying at home, but she stated she had “a lot more things happening” in her life. This is her way of saying that although she loves fishing she does not live to fish. To her this would be an unwise attitude and although she doesn’t put money first she has encouraged her sons to be enterprising, and creative. She said her sons fish because they like boats but they are also musicians and she thinks it is “better to have some other creative thing in your life as well as just going fishing”.

These three women referred to loving the sea or fishing, valued the lifestyle before making profits and were not interested in upgrading their boats or investing in the latest technological equipment. Gwen simply said she “liked to give the fish a sportin’ chance”. Anne and Jude both referred to using their eyes and reading the landscape. Anne said:

I have got a coloured sounder ...I haven’t got radar ... I normally only fish in the daytime and I do most of my fishing by visual, by landmarks and compass bearings and that type of thing. For the size of the boat I think I have got sufficient equipment. I mean, you can go overboard about equipment and you can get over capitalised. And the way the fishing industry is going now I think you’ve got to look at, with a small boat and small business, you have just got to look at scaling down, you know, and just keeping within your limit. My boat is slow but it is economical. There’s only me, so the overheads are not great, so I don’t really need to catch a lot to keep ahead.

Anne considers this way of fishing a natural way of conserving the stocks and admires the “old timers” who she believes have been forced out of the industry because of the government’s perceived necessity to limit the effort of fishers, the cost of increased capitalisation and the competitiveness of overseas markets. Anne felt that a lot of people who had recently bought into the south coast fishery thought they were going to “make a fortune”,
however they found it so expensive they tended to “fish more and more, and fish longer, and fish harder” and this put pressure on the whole industry. She said she had learnt a lot from the older “traditional” fishers in her area and believed it was unfortunate that they were being lost to the industry while a “lot of young tearaways” came in and did not think about the future, or conservation. She added:

You know I think a lot of people when they see the dollar sign you know, that is it, they go for it. I am lucky in a way, I suppose, dollars - while they are necessary - don’t mean a lot to me. Probably because of my little stint overseas [nursing in Vietnam], I have learnt that there is a bit more to living than the dollars...

While Anne said she could understand why people would be tempted to sell their interest in the fishery, even to investors or overseas companies, she felt fishers should try to continue working on a small scale. She said,

On the south coast you really need to have a little bit of everything to make it viable, but with these limited entry fisheries it has confined us to one fishery and put a heck of a lot of restrictions on us, and made it very, very difficult. And the way it is going at the moment it is just squeezing most of us out of it. Particularly small operators. And it looks like we are going to finish up with just a few big boats and that will be it - which to my way of thinking is a bit silly because a few years ago I could afford to employ a deckie all the time, now I can’t afford to employ one at all. I think if you talk to most of the fishermen they will be saying the same thing.

The management of the fishery was as much an issue to Anne as the incursion of bigger boats and investor fishers. She agreed that the fishery had to be managed to protect the stocks but thought governments could “go overboard with it” and this was contributing to the numbers of “good fishermen” who were leaving the industry. Increasing costs, however, were
her main personal concern and she felt she could probably keep fishing only for a few more years. She said,

I am obviously looking at another five years if I am lucky and that will suit me fine. But I really don’t want to get out until I have to get out. I enjoy it. I love it as a matter of fact.

Managing to “balance her books” so that she could keep fishing was achieved by Anne continuing to do relief nursing work at the local hospital. She considered herself fortunate to own everything she needed and reiterated her love of the lifestyle:

At the moment I would say I am just going along even keel, certainly not making any profit, but I am going along even keel and I am happy with that, because I like the way of life. And I think any fisherman that stays in the industry that is the reason they stay, because they like the way of life.

Gwen, and her son, also work in a small fishery where “traditional lifestylers” have long predominated, and both she and her father had no interest in accumulating capital or upgrading their boats and technology. Gwen’s son may be drawn into a different style of fishing in the future, however Gwen herself was simply grateful that her fishing had enabled her to build her own home overlooking the Inlet where she fishes. She still works with the fish; any cobbler which are by-catch from her son’s catch she fillets and takes to the local market for herself. She also assists her son when he needs her and considers the Inlet a great place to live. Because she is officially retired she combines mending nets with gardening, taxidermy, and handicraft hobbies. She also sells soft toys and potted plants at a local market to supplement her now smaller income.

Jude, and her family, have benefited from their involvement in what is frequently referred to as one of the most successfully managed and valuable fisheries in Australia but also expressed concern about conservation of the
stock and the threat of entrepreneurial fishing. She spoke about a decline in the operation of smaller boats and said:

Well, it is still very much families, still families very much involved in fishing and they try and get their kids a boat, and or retire and give their kids boats. It’s still very much family, but it’s, it is edging out of that, just like everything I suppose. Investors are buying pots and they’re leasing them to people and so it’s changing, it’s changed dramatically probably since my father and Aunt had their boats and were fishing in their little boats...And it wouldn’t matter who you were [man or woman] it’s...the price of pots has just gone through the roof, it’s impossible. I can’t see how anyone could start from not being in the industry and buy in unless they are extremely rich...

Although Jude has a very strong attachment to the marine environment and lifestyle she has a broad outlook on life and is both enterprising and varied in her interests. She considers fishing more financially rewarding than any other job and “in other ways, certainly much better than teaching”. She suggested that for a woman to be successful in the industry she should be healthy, love the ocean, be skilled and know how to manage her own business. She considers a big boat too expensive to run, and that what she does in “just taking a small boat out and coming back home” is for her “a perfect sort of lifestyle”.
Between March and November the trawler fleets in the North of Western Australia attract tourists and itinerant seasonal workers as well as trainee deckhands and qualified skippers who are mostly employed on casual seasonal contracts. The majority of my informants were employed by the one company which owns fourteen trawlers and a processing company. Others I interviewed were employed by smaller companies, families or individuals owning between one to four trawlers. Skippers, including those employed by companies, employing their crew on sub-contracts. The crew of a trawler can be a close knit group of friends or relatives, or a disparate group of itinerant workers.

The seasonal nature of the work, the isolation of the fishing zones and the need to be at sea for long periods influences the availability of experienced crew members and there is a high turnover. It is relatively easy for travellers to get work on a boat simply by walking up to the wharf and asking. The industry attracts casual labourers with no previous or familial links to fishing, and many are not interested in a fishing career. Most are Anglo-Australians who have been unable to get work elsewhere, or people who work for a short period to earn the money to put themselves through university, purchase some capital item, or establish a small business. Some are local or international travellers, commonly referred to as backpackers, working their way around Australia. Others simply have a sense of adventure, or are running away from personal problems or even the law. People with a view to achieving a more permanent career in the industry, especially as skippers, can earn themselves a good reputation within the community by living permanently in the town with their families or returning year after year to work the same boat. Deckhands mostly come from outside the town but may
also work for the same people each year, work up their sea time and study for their skipper tickets; Master Class IV or V, and/or Marine Engine Driver tickets.

A number of skippers and deckhands leave their families hundreds, or even thousands of kilometres away while they work the seasons and can be away for as long as 10 months of the year. The prawn season is from March until November and the boats stay at sea for three weeks at a time only coming in on the full moon for a few days. This is in accordance with Fisheries Department regulations but it is also economically beneficial to the processing and trawler companies, and provides some rest and recreation for the crew. The scallop season is slightly different and the boats come in only to unload; once a week or every three weeks. There is a belief within the community, expressed by business people, public servants and some skippers and their wives, that the itinerant fishermen - mostly single men who live at backpackers' hostels or in the hotels between trips - constitute a “rough element” and give the industry a bad name. When the fishers are “in on the moon” the usual number of police in the town is increased from 30 to 40 or 45.

The trawlers operate on a share basis and contractual agreements vary considerably. Some workers board the boats with only a vague verbal agreement but there is a general view that the pay is good. Given that a weekly income for those other than the skipper may average out at only $A1000 and costs to cover stores and the running of the boat, as well as insurance and tax have to be deducted, it is really no better than many other forms of casual labour. If the catch is down the pay can be very poor and some inexperienced workers, especially women and backpackers from a non-English speaking background, find they have worked only for the cost of their food. They are referred to as “tucker deckies” and the situation is justified on
the grounds that they are undergoing informal training. The more experienced deckhands and skippers earn a much higher percentage of the catch; between $A20,000 and $A100,000 each season.

Most fishers have been trained “on the job” but a recent spate of fatal accidents has resulted in increased attempts to provide and encourage formal training. These initiatives, primarily implemented to “meet the needs of the industry”, are still in an experimental phase. There has never been a fishermen’s union in Western Australia and any suggestion that there should be is resisted by both individual fishers and owners or operators of boats. The individualistic itinerant and seasonal workers have little desire or opportunity to build workers’ solidarity through joining a trade union. Those with the potential to make a career of fishing aspire to owning and operating their own boats and join professional fishers’ associations formed to protect the interests of fishers as self-employed businessmen and employers of labour. The peak organisation representing these fishers is committed to maintaining a “union-free” industry.

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4 This was apparent in my conversations with fishers, crew and owner operators, and demonstrated by a ‘warning’ about attempts to unionise the industry which appeared in the Australian National Fishing Industry Council Newsletter, Vol. 1, November 1993, p. 5.
Fig. 1: Forty Fremantle footballers on the *Maritime Image*, the training vessel of W.A.’s Maritime College of Technical and Further Education, combine to present a masculine image of Fremantle and the fishing industry (Poster supplied by the publicity department, South West Metropolitan college of Technical and Further Education, 1998).
Women on trawlers

There are no statistics available to confirm the actual numbers of people who crew on trawlers in any one season but my estimate, based on interviewing the major employers in the Shrimpton fishery, is that more than 300 people were employed in the 1995 season. During the month that I sought these figures there were probably only three women actually working on a trawler. A few others had been employed during the season but only for short periods of time. It was repeatedly suggested to me that “women can’t stick it”, and that there had been more women, especially during the 1980s. Although I was given the names of ten women who had operated trawlers I met no woman employed in Western Australia as a trawler skipper between 1994 and 1997.

Women can get work on the trawlers only if they are invited onboard by skippers who like to have at least one woman in the crew. Some are blatant about expecting them to work as cooks and keep the boat clean because the men refuse such demeaning “women's work”. Others expect them to work as the “wheelhouse whore” or a moral guardian exerting a “civilising” influence on the men. Several men interviewed said women were less likely to get drunk and are better to talk to because “you get sick of all that ockerism after a while”. Some skippers also claim that women are better than men because many seasonal workers, whether overseas backpackers or itinerant Australian workers, have no interest in developing a career in the industry. Women who have an interest in a career are described as more conscientious and reliable because they have to work so hard to prove themselves. Women, only two or three out of thirteen crew, are more frequently employed on the scallop trawlers. Scallops used to be brought inshore to be shucked by women in processing plants but since the 1980s this work has been done at sea so that a greater amount of meat can be brought in. On prawn
trawlers, where there is a crew of five, the product is not processed but bagged and frozen whole. If grading is undertaken and there is a woman on board then she is more likely than the men to be grading.

The main reason women are invited onto boats is so that they can cook for the crew. One woman who started her career as a cook and skippered prawn trawlers during the 1970s and 1980s, suggested that this was an advantage women had over “boys” as they could use it as a “kind of apprenticeship”. However, there is a danger for women in this strategy because they are expected to do all the domestic service work including providing emotional and sexual labour and find it difficult to work their way up. If they also work as sorters and graders of the product this only increases their hours and their work load. The men go to bed but the women clean up afterwards. Even women who undertake some formal deckhand training prior to taking work on a boat find they are still expected to go on as cooks. It is assumed that as women they have “natural” skills for servicing the crew. Men are not expected to have this skill and are taken on because they are assumed to have a “natural” capacity for manual labour and to learning the skills to operate the boat and the gear. Being invited on to cook is therefore not an advantage that women might have over the men but many accept it as the only way to get work on the boats.

Lester, a skipper for twenty years, acknowledged that the men on the boats give women a “terrible time”, and stated that fishermen don’t know anything about equal opportunity and anti-discrimination policies or legislation. He emphasised the point that “they make sure they don’t”. Other fishers interviewed about women working on boats used the dualistic and contradictory discourses of “equal opportunities” and “practical considerations” (Wetherell et al, 1987: 61). They claimed that women “should be given a fair go”, or “could work as good as a man” and then countered this
by justifying their subordinate role on boats with biological or naturalistic assumptions about their inferior strength, ability to “hunt”, and predisposition for coping with boring repetitive work, such as cooking, cleaning or processing. They also said that women should not expect to be treated any differently to the men, but then went on to describe just how differently they were treated. Bluey, who is not a qualified skipper and has only a few years experience on trawlers, tends to speak and act as though he is the skipper. He said that, as far as he was concerned, when “a girl gets on a boat ... she's not a girl no more she's just a deckie”. He also said, “a girl can drive a boat just as good as a bloke can, although [when I work with a woman] I reckon I am the captain and she's the crew, and that's the way it is ...”.

Some women willingly settle into a subordinate, “housewife” role, enter into relationships with the crew or marry a fisherman. Shipboard romances can be temporary, shortlived or even multiple but some are based on a mutual commitment and undertaken because both partners enjoy the lifestyle. Such couples take advantage of accumulating two shares of the catch to establish a home and a family business. But the woman's fishing career then becomes intermittent or ceases altogether as she meets the demands of running the business and being “mother and father” to the children. Some have taken small children on boats with them. Ray and Gail informed me that they had strapped their baby in a motor vehicle safety seat in the wheelhouse; others referred to having used netting to fence off an area on the deck especially for children, but this arrangement requires a lot of co-operation on the part of the skipper and crew. Most women find it is easier to bring up children on the land.

For a woman to use her experience as a cook and move into full-time deckwork or qualify as a Marine Engine Driver or Master of a vessel, she has to ally herself with a skipper, prove herself “better than the men” and treat
them as her mates. In Australia, being a mate implies that one adheres to a code of conduct based on equality and friendship - amongst men. For a woman to be referred to as a mate she would have to prove to the men that she was “one of the boys” and demonstrate complete loyalty towards them as men and workmates. She may then be successful in demanding a more equal share of the manual work and a higher percentage of the catch but it is a tenuous position because in the eyes of the men a woman can never really be a mate because she is not a man. Women have to constantly be on their guard because those who prove themselves competent fishers claim, “the men will try anything”, even sabotaging the fishing operation when a woman is driving the boat. With or without a male mentor, the women have to “learn how to handle the men”, and stand up to them. Sandy stated that:

Some men think they got a job and it’s theirs and no-one else can do it - I tell ’em they gotta share - I can pull up the winch and shoot away as good as they can, if not better. And if they expect me to be the only cook doing all the washin’ they are sadly mistaken. I tell ’em, I’m not your mother, we share it. If I cook you wash.

If the men complained about her cooking Sandy said, “If you want a feed get it yourself”. After her first season as a cook she convinced the skipper that she wanted to learn about the engine and that for safety reasons it was important for her to learn how to drive the boat. When men “muscled” in on her to prove how tough they were lifting giant sea sponges, sting rays or sharks, she pointed out that they would do themselves an injury, and told them, “we gotta winch - use it!” She said, “It's all up here” and implied that women were more willing to use their brains than men. Sandy’s skipper now backs her if she has a dispute with the crew because she has proved herself better than many of the men and acts as his mate in both senses of the word - second in charge and a workmate.

The sexual division of labour on the trawlers can be very much like that in a family household. Women as cooks work either as the married partners of
the skippers, or act as though they are by providing domestic, sexual and/or emotional labour. If they do other work they may still be in a “helpmeet”, or assistant role providing service to the skipper, the Master of the boat. As Rosemary Pringle (1988: 28-56) notes, this sort of relationship is common in the workplace and maintains unequal gender relations. Like the boss and secretary, doctor and nurse, the relationship mirrors that of a complementary heterosexual couple working in a team as husband and wife, or mother and father. Cynthia Cockburn (1991: 142) points out that under the “original terms of the sexual contract a woman's proper place is at home. If she is drawn into the paid workplace, then her proper place is in clearly-defined women's work at or near the bottom of the organization”.

Sexuality

The trawler is a highly sexualised workplace. Crew referred to fishermen “getting an enormous horn while hunting prawns”, men and women admitted to indulging in “terrible orgies”, protecting the skipper's wife from the knowledge that he was “bonking the cook”, and enjoying working in the sunshine in their underwear. Gender and sexuality are, as Pringle (1988:84) points out, central in all workplace power relations. She adds that:

Far from being marginal to the workplace, sexuality is everywhere. It is alluded to in dress and self-presentation, in jokes and gossip, looks and flirtations, secret affairs and dalliances, in fantasy, and in the range of coercive behaviours that we now call sexual harassment (Pringle, 1988: 90).

The implications of Pringle’s arguments are that rather than “banning” sexuality from the work place or relying on legislation to protect women from sexual harassment, women should be empowered so that sexuality is a mutually pleasurable part of one’s working life. She suggests that women assert their own sexuality and engage in subversive strategies to turn the tables on the men (Pringle, 1988: 250-266). Some of the women I interviewed, or observed on the boats did flaunt their sexuality, play with it, or use it to
their advantage, but others resented being drawn into heterosexual games and were oppressed by the men’s sexuality. As cooks, deckhands or skippers, and regardless of how good a rapport they had with the men, all of the women I interviewed had either experienced or witnessed sexual harassment. Men used their sexuality to threaten, intimidate, control and dominate women, and women used different strategies for dealing with it. Some confronted it, some lodged complaints, some even acquiesced, but others simply left. No matter what strategy was used there was no guarantee it would work.

When I first met Elaine, playing pool in a hotel bar with fishermen she worked with, I asked her what it was like working on a fishing boat. Her response was, “It’s not the work that’s hard, it’s the sexual harassment”. She regarded the men as her mates and thought she could fit in by being “tough”; dressing in shearers’ boots and a lumberjack’s shirt, drinking with the “boys” and using their crude language. She had worked on two boats during the 1995 season and the first skipper had told her she was a good worker and could come back to work for him the following season. The second skipper taunted, teased and verbally abused her, put her down and “hassled her out”. When she attempted to lodge a complaint with the company management she was told that if she couldn’t get on with one skipper then she wouldn’t be able to work with any others. This was despite the fact that the company had recently issued a policy statement, a token one-liner, stating that sexual harassment would not be tolerated on its boats. When I interviewed management they denied any knowledge of the incident. The first skipper closed ranks with the other one and persuaded Elaine to drop the complaint. She said, “they really had me by the balls”. I observed Elaine’s male crewmates in the hotel telling her that she had to learn to play the game. She had tried desperately to fit in, boasting to me of having spent $A800 on “piss” in the pub, but she could never be “one of the boys”, and in trying to assert her rights as a woman she demonstrated to the men that she wasn’t their mate either.
Sandy is a woman who would prefer to stand up to the men and confront the situation rather than lodge a complaint. She told me how she dealt with “a guy who put the hard word” on her. She said:

One night this guy was giving me the shits and I was that pissed off with him I walked outa my room and said you say that to me one more time I’m gonna stab ya...and he said oh yeah? an’ he went off at me one more time and I went into the galley, and you know those big knives in the movies - I grabbed that and he went out of the galley and shut the door.

Sandy then humiliated this man in front of the other men by calling him back to remind him that he was on kitchen duty - she said, “I thought right, I’ll get him, give me the shits I’ll give him the dishes”. Sandy survives quite well in this environment; she treats the men as her mates and enjoys sexual power games with them. She claims women have more sexual power than men and should use it. She says, “they think they’re such ladies’ men” and teases them about it. When they have been into town “on the moon” and not been successful in “getting a root”, she tells them she’s only got to snap her fingers and she can choose from half a dozen men. Sandy has a strong sense of her own sexuality and enjoys “giving as good as she gets”. She seems to find it easier to assert herself than some of the other women. She lives in the town with her “bikie” husband and rides a Harley Davidson which she rebuilt herself. She says her father taught her mechanical skills and that she was brought up to “take no shit from no-one”. Other women flaunt their femininity and sexuality by working in their bikinis or walking around the deck naked amidst accusations that they “get off on the men’s attention”. I suspect that some do this to avoid being labelled lesbian or too “butch” or unfeminine, but others do it because they do wish to attract the attention of men and engage in relationships with them. One young woman, Nicky, who was very capable at doing the “hard yakka” on the deck, referred to taking time out for a bath, painting her toe nails and “doing nice little things for the men”. She was engaged in a sexual relationship with the second in charge;
the Mate, and hoped one day to qualify herself, marry a good skipper and work towards establishing a business and a family. But when a younger deckhand joined the crew and “gave her a hard time”, her boyfriend, Brett, refused to back her up. She said he told her it wasn’t his problem and that she should handle it herself. She told me “he just wanted to maintain that sort of steady-steady going between him and Adam - to make things easier for himself - so in that sort of case they really don’t take a lot of notice of what’s happening to the girls”.

Women who objected to unwanted sexual attention or harassment frequently found that the men closed ranks against them when they complained, or joined in with the harassment. Even the skippers referred to as “good blokes” passively allowed it to go on by staying in the wheelhouse to let the crew “fight it out amongst themselves”. This was justified by the need to have a compatible team working the boat. But it also meant that inexperienced or somewhat naive young women were particularly vulnerable. No-one ever asked them if they had been trained to cook, and they often had difficulty learning how to perform the manual labour. Men used the mistakes they made to justify throwing tantrums about the quality of the food, complaining about their work on the deck, and threatening to throw them overboard if they didn’t meet sexual demands. Jan, an ex-skipper, recalled the following:

I had a Dutch girl once, a cook, who was getting harassed by the only crew [member] I’ve ever sacked...but they all let it happen ... everyone was sitting around one night on the anchor [drinking] and we were all singing and it was fine and then she went off to bed...in my cabin, and Syd went in and closed the door and she was just you know um, ...started yelling 'get out of here, get out of here', and they were all laughing and I just got up and ....said to Jimmy, 'I don't like this, ...and so I stopped it. Made him get out of there, and Jimmy had a lot of respect for me too but you know even he [joined in]...that didn't ever happen again as I said, that was one night when I just saw it come out in them though, yeah.
Jan said she had worked her way up through choosing suitable mentors; Nicky and Sandy are attempting to do the same thing; but most women who complained or confronted the unequal division of labour, division of the catch or sexual harassment had more difficulty finding a mentor and adapting to the mateship ethos of the men. A pattern I noticed in several interviews was that the man most likely to harass women on the boats was often the youngest and least experienced. Jan explained her involvement in such a situation:

...a young bloke, came back on the boat when I knew the deck...had my side of the boat...and he actually picked up a lump of steel and [menaced me with it]...I just stood up to him...well then he didn't talk to me for ...5 or 6 weeks....he was a tough little surfer nut...and they'll really zone in on the female of course because they think she'll crumble first.

A young man like this may be expressing his frustration with being at the lower end of the hierarchy but his actions also result in a consolidation of the dominant position of all the men on the boats as controllers of women and their workplace. As already noted in Elaine's case, it filtered up through to the company management and across to other boats. Cockburn points out that “Men's power in the extra-organisational world, in the family, the state and civil society, enters the workplace with them and gives even the most junior man a degree of sexual authority relative to even senior women”(1991:143). The women on the boats can become fair game for the “fraternal gang”, and their best strategy for survival is to seek a male mentor but even then many are discouraged from seeking a career in fishing.

Several women told me similar stories and spoke about men throwing sea-snakes at them, “you know - one bite and you're dead, eh?..Big joke...”. The men also teased them by shooting at dolphins, cutting the fins off turtles to “teach them a lesson”, and refusing to talk to them if they wouldn't speak crudely or didn't share the men's rednecked ideals. One young woman who
tried to turn the tables on such men by putting detergent in their cordial bottles was sacked because, as her senior deckhand told me, she was “dangerous ... could have poisoned us all”. Carol, a university student working her way around Australia said, “it is all putdowns, shit, crap, sexual innuendos and direct crude sexual demands”. She was also put off the boat for being a trouble maker when she complained. She was told that her 24 year old tormentor, who had only a few months’ experience, could keep his job because he was a more “productive” worker than she was. Nicky dealt with the young man hassling her by refusing to talk to him or provide him with cups of coffee, but she would not use underhanded subversive strategies such as contaminating the men’s food. She said, “you can’t retaliate [like that] because the guys will actually turn around and lay into you - a lot of them have got no qualms about punching a girl” if she asserts herself.

If the harassment doesn’t actually drive a woman off a boat, or she has no choice but to stay, it can seriously undermine her confidence and affect her health and ability to work. Carol and Nicky both recalled having violent dreams about how to cope with the men harassing them, and Christine said she “felt like shit” following weeks of harassment. She was muscled out of the way when she tried to do anything on the deck, had the meals she cooked thrown into the sea, and was verbally abused. Her hurt response caused her to lose face with the rest of the crew. She said, “I was basically just hiding from them and just doing my work and then not socialising with anyone else”. She removed herself to the roof over the work deck and wrote in her journal:

My stomach is in knots, I am so nervous, but I am trying to keep going. I am pathetic at this, I still can’t get anything right. Kenny [the youngest deckhand] hates me and I am trying to do the right thing by him but it is like talking to a brick wall. I am going to persevere and just try and try to do everything he tells me and not get aggro and defensive. I know now that he just gets a macho big dick over telling me what to do and making
life hard. He said his last Cook got the same treatment so it's not personal. [I must] be positive, [but] I need to hide my feelings out here and just do what I have to do without losing my soul...I should be able to act it out...my new personality out here will have to be, initiative, obedience, strength, patience and tolerance [towards the men's attitudes and behaviour].

Christine had signed up for four months at sea on a vessel that rarely came into port. She was determined to get her fair share of the catch and had to accept the harassment, the longer working hours in the subordinate position as cook and part-time deckhand as well as the smaller percentage of the catch. She resisted capitulating to sexual demands, risked losing her soul by ignoring the more blatant cruelty towards some of the sea creatures and eventually earned herself a bonus. This bonus she earned by allowing her labour to be incorporated into the workplace on the men's terms. She stated she would not work on a trawler again.

Sexual harassment is a masculine political weapon used to maintain male dominance in the workplace. In the fishing industry it can be used to maintain a workplace not "contaminated" by women. Some fishermen still claim the boat is no place for a woman, not because of old superstitions, although these may be invoked occasionally to justify exclusion, but because women as "The Sex" are seen as problematic (Cockburn, 1991:159). They are either feared because they are perceived as being too sexy, or not sexy enough (1991:150-1). Many fishermen and their wives expressed this view of women by stating that a flirtatious woman can come between a fisherman and his wife or cause trouble amongst the crew. A woman described as "too feminist" can cause conflict when she objects to sexual harassment or discrimination. But, as Cockburn points out, it is not women's sexuality that is problematic, it is men's. Some fishermen made it clear that they regarded women as problematic simply because they were not men. Bluey stated:
You know, if some of them'd had balls you'd a just kicked 'em all round the deck mate, see that's where you gotta draw the line with women, if they're lazy and most of 'em are anyway - you [they] can't go round complaining about hours and safety issues- they're just useless and lazy you know....

Bluey invokes biological difference to justify treating men and women differently. He uses verbal sexual abuse to deal with "lazy" women rather than physical abuse directed at men. He recalled threatening to "bait his hook with a cook to catch a shark", and continually referred to women as "useless cunts". Dishing out abuse is seen as a traditional right of the skipper, as the Master of a team of workers, and flows down through the hierarchy on the boat. Women are told not to take it personally; however there is a difference between being yelled at for being a "lazy bastard" and being called a "useless cunt", especially when men use this latter expression to insult each other and imply that being female is despicable. It is directed at the centre of a woman's sexual identity; nothing could be more personal or indicative of the masculine view that women as "The Sex" are different from and inferior to men.

The experiences of the women I interviewed show that when women exercise their own sexual power to deal with sexual harassment on their own terms, use direct confrontation or subversive tricks, men continue to play power games which maintain their hierarchical positions. Whether a woman is driven out of the workplace by threats of sexual violence, sacked because she can't or won't accommodate the demands of the men, the underlying assumption on the part of the men is that they have the right and the power to dictate the terms under which women may be incorporated into "their" masculine workplace. When women leave, this confirms the men's view that they are the superior workers - women aren't tough enough. Carol, who lasted only eight days on a trawler said she would not go to sea again because,
Some things are always in demand

Fig. 2: A feminine image of the fishing industry appearing in the combined "Voice of The Australian Fishing Industry": the Australian Fishing Industry Management Authority and professional fishermen (Professional Fisherman, Vol. 17, No. 11, October 1995).
“you have to give so much, you lose so much of yourself - give up what you believe in ... adapt conform to them. They think they rule the world because they ride the high seas ... they won't adapt to you”.

Several fishers referred to the trawlers as “floating factories”, because workers do partially process the product at sea. However, the masculine culture lived on the trawlers bears more resemblance to that of “Dionysus Down Under” (Fiske, Hodge & Turner, 1987: 1-17). Many of the boats resemble “floating pubs”. The world of the pub has been constructed in Australian culture as a place inhabited only by men seeking freedom from the constraints of the industrial world of work. It is also regarded as a retreat for men fleeing the constraints of domesticity (Fiske, et al., 1987: 9). This is a masculine world view that equates women with a negative image of suburbia, and men with the “wide open spaces, achievement and heroism” (Fiske, et al., 1987: 9, citing Rowse 1978). The only place for a woman in this pub is that of the barmaid:

[S]he fulfils the stereotyped female functions of happy service and provision of sustenance. But she contrasts with the wife at least in her ‘wifely’ role in the lounge room. She can be discreetly chatted up, .... Sometimes her sexuality is frankly a commodity ... and in this way contrasts with the ideology of marriage (whatever is said about its reality). Most important, she does not represent the ‘civilising’ and repressive function of woman as mother, censoring bad language and ‘dirty’ talk ... What the pub offers, then, in a schematic, temporary and emotionally uncomplicated form is an alternative version of the dominant familial relationships (Fiske, et al., 1987: 9).

Even the wives of some skippers who had worked on the vessels with their husbands confirmed that as far as all the men were concerned being a woman on the boat was synonymous with providing domestic and sexual service to them. Gail said the crew always treated her “as a woman - a second class citizen”.
However, like the pub of the 1990s, the trawlers are not all the same and range along a continuum. The owners or skippers of some are quite content to conform to this Dionysian sub-culture, other boats where actual wives work with their husbands, or where the cook/deckhand has a good rapport with a less “ocker” skipper, show some signs of a feminisation of the workspace. One I visited had Indonesian Batik curtains and wall hangings in the galley instead of the obligatory pornographic “girlie” posters. Trawlers more obviously dominated by self confessed “cowboys” steam out of port with crews hungover from the previous night’s revelries, revelries which often continued on the vessel before and after “shooting away” the nets and bringing them in.

The masculine lifestyle

Bluey insisted that women should adapt to the masculine culture on the boats and declared that the major requirement was for women to “love the lifestyle...as much as we do...”. He made it clear that he was not referring to fishing or being at sea. His lifestyle included working to the point of exhaustion “without anybody having to tell you what to do...24 hours a day”, not “stopping for a yarn” while you work, or admiring the scenery or the wildlife. Then you have to “unload the mind”, go into the hotel on the moon to “have a fat time,... get pissed, have a fight, have a fuck, if you can get one”, and then head out the next day with the heavy metal music blaring, and “go back out there for another month”. He added that “… you might be a bit drunk and a bit pissy…”, and “the DOHSHA [health and safety officers] mob are trying to cut that out”, but “you need that sort of shit”. Anyway, he said, “everything’s gonna be alright” because someone will be sober enough to drive while the others sleep it off.

Bluey stated that the fishing was “a pretty high risk sorta thing you know, like it’s not for everyone”, and listed hazardous work practices performed without
life jackets or safety harnesses: “[you could] fall in the water, or get somethin’ dropped onya, you get ate up by the winch or ...fall outa the riggin’, that’d be a bastard”. He also described working on the otter boards which open the nets and are attached to the outriggers:

...like it’s, y’out on the boards and that ....and that can be a bit hazardous especially if you’re out in the rough weather and stuff like that cause you gotta sort of run out on the stick[gantry or boom] and climb down ...and there’s two boards that sort of bang together ... they weigh about 250 kilos each....if there is a really bad swell it’ll sorta throw ’em around and it’s just um part of it....

He listed “monsters” that came up in the net as by-catch such as manta rays with “thousands of tiny teeth” and jaws capable of “squashing your hand off”, and the beaks of loggerhead turtles “…that’ll just take your arm off...plus you got sea snakes and stonies [stonefish], blue ring octopus and sharks and the little striped cobblers...sting ray barbs through your foot”\(^5\). He went on and on proving how tough he was, how hazardous the work was and then added,

...it’s not for wimps eh? ...like it’s a hard life, geez mate you only gotta check out my face you know, yeah you gotta be a hard cunt it’s the only way to put it - it’s the sort of general drill on the boat you either go hard or you go home, you know, that’s it.

*Go Hard or Go Home* is a common slogan fixed to the wall of the work area on boats, and yelled at people to encourage competition. The shared payment system contributes to this culture. The skipper makes an agreement with a company (if he is not running a company of his own) for a certain percentage of the catch and then allocates percentages to the crew. The percentages vary from about 5% to 20% and may be negotiated while the work is underway or decided at the end of the trip. This is often not finalised for crew members,

\(^5\) Several fishers claimed they hated turtles because they were ‘stupid’ and ‘stink’, they and sharks; rays and other large animals caught in the trawlers nets were referred to as ‘monsters’ and they decried the use of turtle extruders (TEDS) which can protect them. The devices have been used in the United States since 1978 and incorporated into conservation regulations. In 1995 the US government ruled to prohibit the importation of prawns from countries who have not adopted such measures. The Director of the Western Australian Marine and Coastal Community Network advised me that this prohibition was to come into effect after 1st May 1996.
especially newcomers, before leaving port and it is therefore in the interests of the crew to prove themselves worthy of a “decent” share while at sea. If a man, for example, can demonstrate that a woman, or a backpacker from overseas is not working hard enough he can increase his share of the catch by decreasing the perceived worth of the other person. He will also display and assert his own superiority as a worker. As each crew member is drawn into this competition the catch and its value increases and so does the income of each individual crew, skipper and boat owner and/or owner of the company. The capital interest in how well the trawler crew works together interlocks with the interests of individual men who have fetishized their physical work situation to exclude competition from outsiders. This creates, attracts and supports a dominant male culture which believes that fishing is the work of “real men”.

Bluey made it clear in his own words that he gets a “buzz” out of the “hazardness” and generally making it so hard that “women just can't handle it”. He said: “.. if it was easy everybody would be doin' it, wouldn't they?”. This attitude clearly demonstrates the effort to exclude others: women and men who complain about unhygienic, unfair and unsafe conditions, express an interest in carefully handling the by-catch in order to return it to the sea, or refuse to be obsessive about hard physical labour. The men who complained about the attitudes of fishermen included an Anglo-Australian university student and seven backpackers from non-English speaking backgrounds. They complained about the amount of alcohol consumed, especially when compared to the quality of the food - “too many meat pies and red meat”, and were offended by misogynist, homophobic and racist attitudes.

Many of the fishers interviewed were particular intolerant toward Aboriginal people whom they referred to as “lazy”, and members of the “most lazy race” because they didn’t work all day and all night every day of the week.
According to Sandy, fishermen in *Shrimpton* attempted to sabotage a boat provided through Federal government funding to an Aboriginal community. She said they told her they had done this “because the niggers shouldn’t have a boat like that”.

In presenting himself as a rugged individual who “needed nothing and no-one”, Bluey denied feeling physical or emotional pain and said he couldn’t be bothered talking to anyone but his fishing mates. When I asked him if he had a family, he drawled “I gotta 1950 Thunderbird, fuckin' beautiful that”. He exaggerated his tough qualities and his superiority as a worker. Most of his time on the boat is spent shucking scallops, work traditionally regarded as women’s work. He is studying for his tickets and can’t wait for the time when, as he said, he is the Captain and “she’s the crew”. When telling me about how tedious shucking “all them little white buttons” was, he said, “no matter what you do to ’em, you can’t make ’em bleed. No, you can’t make ’em bleed”. I found myself wondering, does this mean that “real” man’s work is that which requires him to kill?

Although all the women interviewed made a point of saying that “not all the fishermen are like that” and acknowledged that some men were willing to share their skills and knowledge with women, the trawler is a worksite of hegemonic masculinity. Many fishers believe that loving the lifestyle and being part of the team means accepting misogynist, homophobic, racist attitudes. They also display a blatant disregard for the natural environment, rules and regulations. Those unwilling or unable to adapt are marginalised, subordinated, or ridiculed. Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1987), in developing the concept of hegemonic masculinity, explain how “particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance” over other groups of men as well as women (1987:179). They point out that, while the “culturally
exalted form of masculinity” may correspond to the actual characters of only a small number of men, very large numbers of men are responsible for sustaining the hegemonic model. This may be due to “gratification through fantasy”, or “compensation through displaced aggression”. However, hegemonic masculinity “embodies a successful strategy in relation to women”, and the primary reason for men's complicity is that most men benefit from the subordination of women (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1987:180).

**Health, Safety and Risk Taking**

The crews on trawlers usually work from about 3 pm through to 9 or 10 am taking only short breaks for rest when they can. During this time the nets are “shot” away and the catch brought up and dumped on a sorting table. The crew works at a frenzied pace standing up sorting, processing, grading and packing the product away in the freezer hold before the next “shot” is brought up. This is done three or four times between 4 pm and 7 am every day of the week for weeks or even months at a time. The occupational health and safety hazards of this work are high. During the interviews people referred to having tools dropped on them from the rigging, brine tank lids crushing people's heads and being rescued after being poisoned by freezer gas or engine fumes. Reference was also made to being stung, bitten and spiked by “nasties” brought up in the net. I observed one young woman who had the soles of her feet peeling off from severe “athletes foot” caused by working barefooted in the humid and wet conditions. Fishers also spoke about infections from prawns pricking them and rashes developing into “sea boils” from the shells of the scallops. But they all tend to say, “he shouldn't have been there”, “I should have got out of the way”, or “you get used to it”. No one seemed to consider that health and safety might be the responsibility of the boat owners. Sleep deprivation is also a hazard but fishers were more intent on impressing
me with their stamina as “tough guys” than questioning the necessity to work all night and half the day, day after day.

In a 1992 report (DOHSWA, 1992: 29), the Chief Inspector of WorkSafe (then DOHSWA) noted overcrowding and inadequate quarters and sleep deprivation amongst scallop fishers and stated that he found the conditions “in this day and age ... incomprehensible”. These conditions, he stated, were defended by members of the industry on the grounds of economic necessity. He suggested that standing for long hours shucking scallops, which requires quick repetitive movements while standing on an uneven and cluttered floor space, must lead to accidents from knife cuts and occupational overuse syndrome. Occupational overuse syndrome, or Repetitive Strain Injury was mentioned by two deckhands and one skipper I interviewed, but I met few deckhands who complained of it, presumably because no one would listen and they simply got off the boat. Sandy said, “I had RSI once - but I worked out what I was doin' wrong and changed the way I was doin' it”. According to WorkSafe investigations the common attitude amongst fishers is that fishing has always been hazardous and “that's the way it is”.

The first detailed study of work related traumatic fatalities in Australian fisheries was published in 1994 (Driscoll et al.). It was based on data relating to 47 cases over the whole of Australia for a period of three years; 1982 to 1984. The incidence of fatality was 18 times higher than the incidence of fatality for the entire workforce, and higher than that of mining and agriculture. During the twelve months prior to June 30, 1990, 72 accidents were reported to the Western Australian Department of Marine and Harbours but most accidents go unreported. In the four years, 1991-5, fourteen deaths occurred on the North West trawlers operating around the Shark Bay fishery. Two were individual accidents involving faulty equipment and the other twelve were on boats that sank. Two of these twelve deaths were young women, itinerant
workers, working as cooks for the first time. The causes of these fatalities have been attributed to unsafe and crowded work spaces, a lack of routine maintenance of boats and equipment, the use of alcohol and drugs, inexperienced crews working in unsafe weather conditions and fatigue associated with the poor work conditions. It is also an indication of the failure on the part of owners and skippers to pay sufficient attention to their legal responsibility - their General Duty of Care under the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act 1984/87. Owners have been accused of being more concerned about cutting the cost of running the boat and accumulating profit, than they are about the condition of the boat and the safety of the crew.

The 1992 incident which cost five lives involved an overcrowded overloaded scallop trawler which capsized. The crew of this vessel had also been implicated in drug charges. The 1995 incident, described by the local press as Australia’s worst maritime tragedy in 20 years, was the result of five vessels being caught in a cyclone five nautical miles off the North West coast. Two of them sank with the loss of seven lives. Following investigations involving the Police Department and the Department of Transport, WorkSafe recommended charging the owners of the two vessels that sank with failing to provide a safe workplace, and the owner of another vessel that got into difficulties with failing to ensure the crew’s safety by not monitoring the weather. One of the owners also owned the trawler that capsized in 1992. A Coronial inquest was held in June 1996 and the Coroner delivered a finding of death by misadventure and accident. The case was complicated and the finding controversial because the Coroner had not called for the WorkSafe reports on the incident. His finding was that the skippers “made monumental errors of judgment” and were responsible for failing to find safe

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6 Discussions with Chief Inspector, Fatalities and Special Investigations, WorkSafe Western Australia (previously Department of Occupational Health Safety & Welfare) on January 19, 1995. All these incidents were referred to during interviews with fishers and confirmed by access to reports by WorkSafe.
anchorage for their vessels. He did not apportion any blame to the owners of the boats (Buck, 1996).

In this case the question as to whether the owners failed to provide a safe workplace, or whether the skippers took unnecessary risks may never be resolved. However, resistance to undertaking training or using safety equipment, together with risk-taking by fishers, does play a part in the continuation of unsafe work practices. Although acknowledging that owners have a responsibility for the safety of boats and crews, and pointing out that fisheries legislation aimed at reducing “fishing effort” by restricting vessel size and horsepower contribute to unsafe conditions of work, the WorkSafe Investigation (1995:60) also states:

The trawling sector does not appear to be aware that safety involves a partnership between safe work environment and safe workplace behaviours. This would include the fact that most safety activity focuses mainly on reducing physical risks in the environment and a lot less effort focuses on increasing safety behaviour, mainly because people see it as too difficult to change. The industry has many people who still relate to the old adage that 'they have been doing some things the same way for years therefore it must be right'. Behaviour and attitudes must be seen as a major challenge if the loss of lives is to be prevented in this industry.

Crews are notoriously stubborn in adhering to old practices and adopting a “she'll be right, mate” attitude. As noted above, deckhands often make an analogy to working on land-based factory sites, claiming that “it is no worse than working in any other factory”. But this contradicted the view that the work was a “pretty high risk sorta thing” and too hard for most people. Whether denying risk or exaggerating it such men are confirming their hyper masculinity and maintaining their perceived right to work free from government interference. If they were working on land they would have to wear protective clothing, safety boots, ear muffs, and safety harnesses in
riggings. Attempts by work safety authorities to introduce improved life jackets, harnesses and safety training are fiercely resisted. Most of the cooks and itinerant deckhands I interviewed were not aware of the storage place for life jackets or safety beacons and told me they had not been shown how to use them. One woman said she thought the life raft was rusted onto the top deck, another described a “scary” trip down the coast in 1995. She said it was terribly rough, the door fell off the wheelhouse, the cook fell over and under a table, and when she took the initiative of preparing a bag in the event of having to leave the boat, no-one knew where any of the safety gear was. She could not prise the safety beacon off the wall because of the rust. This young woman, and her friend, also a cook/deckhand, stated that they thought it was always the women who worried about health and safety on the boats. One of them had undertaken a Maritime College training course but agreed with her friend that it was a joke when she actually got on the boat and men told her such things as safety lines were unnecessary.

Laughing off health and safety hazards was a common response to my inquiries and the same thing happened when I asked about alcohol or drug abuse. The WorkSafe inquiries, like my own, found only anecdotal evidence of these practices and there has been no other quantitative research undertaken in Australia. The attitude of fishers leads me to believe that alcohol and drug use is seen as part of the lifestyle, according to Bluey, an essential part. It can also enhance the heroic risk-taking status of the men. Many people associated with the industry stated that they believed the prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse had diminished since 1992 because “attempts have been made to clean up the industry”. The majority of informants however, discussed the current availability of alcohol and drugs such as “grass”, “speed”, and “acid” on boats and admitted an interest in using

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7 Nor-West Seafoods Pty. Ltd. has formal employment contracts and provides some health and safety training at the beginning of each season. None of the deaths which occurred in the 1990s occurred on that company’s vessels. The company management advised me that it supports safety training programs. See also The Northern Guardian, July 8, 1992:2.
some of them. No-one admitted to using heroin and several said they couldn't understand why anyone would use it because it “made you too laid back”. Amphetamines or “speed”, they suggested would make more sense because the work is so tiring.

Attempts have been made by some companies and skippers to prevent alcohol and drug abuse by running a “dry boat”; alcohol and drug free. Others turn a blind eye, or find it difficult to enforce. When I asked crew whether they were on “dry” boats they tended to laugh at me and say “nobody gets wet on our boat”. I collected several stories about fishers who had died from a drug overdose or required treatment for drug abuse. One informant recalled a deckhand who died in her arms, another spoke about a fifteen year old girl being found dead in the toilet with a needle in her arm. But a lot of people asked me to turn off the tape-recorder while they spoke about such painful experiences. They either did not want to give the industry a bad name because it would make it even harder to find suitable crew, or they feared retribution from unscrupulous unnamed people. My research assistant and I were refused interviews with several people because they feared we were undercover police with the Drug Squad.

This suspicion of government regulations, fear of policing, and bureaucracy was expressed by owners, processors and fishers alike. As mentioned earlier, during the course of my research I was accused of being “with the union”, collecting information to write “bullshit reports”, or a “spy” with the taxation department, or “that DOSHWA mob”. Some of the more powerful members of the industry have made attempts to implement changes to the industry, but companies and professional fishers' associations maintain a right to “self-regulation” in the industry and resist government intervention in employment, training, health and safety issues⁸. This self-regulation is

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⁸ The Western Australian Fishing Industry Council, has since 1992, employed an independent consultant to assist with occupational health, safety and training issues. In the WAFIC Annual Report of 1994/5
similar to, but clashes with, the fisher's belief that he has a right to control his own workspace; one free of restrictions and regulations.

The work on trawlers can be hard and dangerous with long hours worked in cramped uncomfortable accommodation on an often unpredictable sea, but many of the individualistic and self-sufficient fishers willing to share heroic tales of the hazards, have little regard for health and safety issues. As "brave" and "free" men they believe that they should take responsibility for their own health and welfare even if this involves risk-taking. Adapting to or coping with difficult work conditions and hazards are a challenge and success confirms their confidence, dominance and self-sufficiency (Donaldson 1991:10-11). To complain about conditions or accept the imposition of regulations would challenge their self-perception as warrior/heroes who are superior to "wimps". Posters in some of the men's sleeping quarters read: Apocalypse, Immortality and Escape, and a self-destructive "live fast and die young" mentality is apparent.

This dangerous risk-taking, which pushes at the limits of social conformity and is expressed through excessive alcohol and drug abuse, is referred to by Fiske, et al., citing Nietzsche, as "physical intoxication in all its forms". As these authors point out, his is supposed to be indicative of a "radical egalitarianism" but it results in political fragmentation and neutralises any sense of "oneness and power" (Fiske, et. al., 1987: 12-13). This hypermasculine culture which blurs the distinction between work and leisure operates to the benefit of the capital interests of the entrepreneurial owners and controllers of the industry. It is most obviously symbolised by the practice of seeking sponsorship from brewing companies to pay for painting some of the

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the chairman stated that amongst challenges of the future for the industry was the need to 'ensure that we shape our future the way we want it and not have it moulded by outside influences'. A list of aims of the Council included: 'Ensure that the industry remains union-free', and 'Minimise Government Regulations'.
trawlers. They carry the colours of the company and the name of the product on the bow so that the boats look like floating beer cans.

This integration of a site of leisure into that of the workplace also benefits trawler owners and works against any form of “worker solidarity”, because the crew tend to see themselves as “mates” working on equal terms with the skipper who sub-contracts them and participates in the social time on the vessels. The contracted skippers tend to valorise the vessel owner as a “hero” and self made man creating opportunities for others to come up through the ranks. This is also the case amongst skippers and crew in other fisheries such as the lobster industry. Worker solidarity is also undermined by the blurring of the distinction between production and consumption which benefits capital interests; the costs of alcohol, cigarettes, food, toiletries, magazines, entertainment videos as well as accident insurance and fuel for the boat are all purchased by the crew from the owners of the boat - deducted from each worker’s share of the catch.

Conclusions: A career for women?

There appears to be some truth in the men’s claim that “women can’t stick it”, and to my knowledge there was no woman skippering in the Western Australian trawler fishing in 1997. One woman who is said to have been the first to obtain the qualifications to skipper a trawler during the 1970s has now retired with her husband, a skipper with whom she worked. Two other women, referred to in the introduction, worked their way up from the position of cook to Master Class IV and Master Class V by carefully choosing male mentors, and now teach in a maritime college. But both gave up fishing when faced with the responsibilities of single parenting.

There are four main reasons why women leave the trawler fleets - the demands of marriage and children, choice of a different lifestyle, continual
resistance from men, and the pressure of a highly competitive industry. Some successful female skippers, those I was told worked from Shrimpton during the 1980s or 1990s and were “tough” or had learnt to “handle the men”, or “really showed the men up”, have also left the industry. At least three (not interviewed for this project) left after suffering the effects of drug abuse, which some observers attributed to “cracking under the pressure”. A most successful female skipper widely acknowledged as “beating the boys at their own game” sought assistance for drug addiction and also lost her licence after being caught fishing in a restricted zone. This is a practice sometimes undertaken in order to maintain a consistently high record as the “most efficient skipper”, something she had achieved several years in a row. These women seem to have paid a price for striving to beat the men at their own games. The two younger women mentioned above, Carol and Christine, left the boats during their first season because they felt that adapting to the men’s lifestyle could lead to them losing their own values or sense of self.

In comparing the experience of independent women fishers with those of women employed on prawn and scallop trawlers it is clear that those working on trawlers are engaged in a constant power struggle with men. Those working their own smaller vessels enjoy not only the “freedom of the lifestyle” they have chosen for themselves, but much greater social and economic autonomy. These women also find it easier than women on trawlers to combine fishing with bringing up children. This is the case even for women not physically or emotionally supported by the children’s father or a partner.

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9 This information was confirmed by her employer, colleagues, supportive friends and a Fisheries Officer during informal and recorded interviews.
10 In 1991 Carpenter and Acosta wrote: ‘Even if the women become more skilful than the men at the men’s games, they might win only to find that winning has cost them their souls.’, this is quoted in McKay, 1994.
Although women employed as deckhands on lobster or wet fish boats may find themselves cooking for husbands or crew and working as "assistants" it is easier for "unattached" women like Gwen, Jude and Anne, who hold their own fishing licences, to work as Master of the boat and not find themselves restricted to work defined as "women's work". As Jude pointed out the expectation that a woman should provide sexual service to a skipper or crew mate is also less prevalent when a woman does not have to live with the crew on the boat or on the land. Being the Master of her own vessel also gives her power to choose her own crew and maintain a division of labour which she herself chooses; one which is not primarily based on sexual difference or masculine and feminine ideals.

I am not arguing that there is any inherent difference between men and women, or that if more women worked on the boats, or in the management of the industry it would "humanise" the conditions or result in a more benevolent attitude towards people from different cultures or the natural environment. I am arguing that the fishing industry is dominated by ruggedly individualistic men, some of whom are itinerant workers, and by entrepreneurs and these two categories have more in common than first meets the eye. They can both be competitive and aggressive, believe in the freedom of the individual, that their work is their life, and separate themselves geographically and emotionally from women or their families. They can both have a "rapacious" attitude to the natural environment, and attitudes and actions that identify them as racist, homophobic and misogynistic. This exaggeratedly masculine culture has the power to dominate and exclude others and sustain an unequal sexual division of labour. It also results in the work being unnecessarily competitive and

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11 These two categories have been used by fishers and researchers. Fishers have 'an attachment to and expression of a way of life that emphasizes self-reliance, independence, and individual control of the labour process', see Jenoft and Davis, 1993. Also see Thomas et al, 1995. Entrepreneurial fishers may be competitive, independent owner-operators, or companies which own boats and processing plants. The two groups are dependent on each other but while the relationship has potential for conflict it also promotes competition among the independent fishers.
hazardous as men actively create the “lifestyle” or adapt to it in order to prove toughness and superiority. This is either tolerated or embraced on the grounds that it promotes competition and increases the income of each individual crew member as well as the profits of owners of trawlers and fishing companies - the majority of whom are men. The ruggedly individualistic masculinity plays into the demands of the entrepreneurial or managerial masculinity which names its boats: Top Gun, Deadly Weapon, Supersonic, Predator.

Women will continue to challenge and resist hegemonic masculine ideals and negotiate their way through the resistance of men. But all that is really needed for them to participate in the industry as fishers is that they receive appropriate maritime training, have a love of the sea, an enjoyment of fishing and manual labour, and the ability to cope with long periods of being away from friends and family on the land. For a permanent and economically equal place in the industry they also have to decide whether to ally themselves to the overall goals of a increasingly competitive capital-intensive industry, one which has been referred to as having a history of “rape and pillage. Bugger up one species then move onto the next”\textsuperscript{12}. This has international global, social and economic ramifications. Any change therefore, must not simply be about getting more places for women in the industry but about challenging and transforming the exclusive, masculine culture that promotes an heroic ideal of risk taking, a ruthless exploitation of the natural environment, a competitive hierarchy and a negligent attitude towards the rights of others to work in a safe environment.

\textsuperscript{12} See article by Cribb, J 1995: Weekend Australian. In the course of my research no fisherman interviewed expressed any concern for the ecology, the depletion of stocks or future of the industry. One ex-skipper said in response to my question about having concerns - “No. That’s the good thing about capitalism, they will always find something else”.
Chapter 6

Summary and Conclusions

This thesis has examined the everyday life experiences of women in the Western Australian fishing industry. It has demonstrated the importance of women’s paid and unpaid labour to the production of seafood and its benefit to individual fishermen. My findings are that in the three major sites of the industry women’s labour is exploited through a consistent and rigid sexual division of labour. Masculine domination of the industry as well as unequal gender relations in the wider context of Australian society, as discussed in Chapter 2, sustain and maintain this horizontal and vertical division of labour. The labour of women is undervalued and their choices are constrained and restricted. I also found that through their participation in the shaping of their own lives, some women adhered to conventional gender relations and adapted to the sexual division of labour. Others challenged the boundaries of gender expectations and created more autonomous lives for themselves.

Working for the family.

As I suggested in the introduction, the structure of the fishing industry supports and maintains an unequal sexual division of labour in fishers’ households. In Chapter 3 I demonstrated how the expectations entailed in being a fisherman’s wife require her to work under extreme conditions including the virtual absence of her husband at sea. Once she has married or made a commitment to a fisherman, she regards it as her job to adapt to his lifestyle and “make the best of it”. I demonstrated how “cautionary tales” are used by some of the women to “police” each other and reinforce their role as a wife/helpmeet who should adapt to the needs of their husbands and the structure of the industry. This results in their labour being incorporated into his occupation and is of benefit to the
entrepreneurial owner of the vessel, or the fishers’ own “family business” which is often maintained for the benefit of sons.

My study confirmed that fishers’ wives have increased domestic, emotional, administrative and parental responsibilities which are unfair and inequitable. My findings also support Thompson’s suggestion (1985) that this provides the potential for an increase in women’s power and control of the temporal and spatial aspects of their lives. The women interviewed for my study are clearly aware that having increased responsibility should give them more rights in their households. They uphold the belief that the division of labour is “natural” or complementary but they do not always acquiesce to their husbands authority, especially when running the household and disciplining children. This often results in conflict which arises not only because of the structure of the fishing industry but because of the expectation that a man should be the head of his own household and a woman should provide solace and comfort “for better or for worse”. Some are able to increase their power and made decisions in their own right, however, they also adhere to the “hierarchical order of priorities” identified by Janet Finch (1983) as placing his occupation and the interests of the family before her own. The hegemonic “hard” masculinity which maintains a distance between the “world of men” and the “world of women” contributes to the difficulties that men and women have in “coming together and separating” (Binkley and Thiessen, 1988) but men have the power and authority, as husbands and fathers, to negotiate with their wives over how best to share responsibilities or spend time together. With the exception of Vanessa, who maintains her own career and leisure pursuits, all the women “make sense” of the demand for their labour and make “ongoing investments” in his occupation because of the material necessity to do so, and also because they have some enhanced status and power from “making his project hers” (Finch, 1983).
The rhetoric of the family and the belief that family businesses are crucial to the development of the Western Australian fishing industry continues to hide much of the labour of wives. The symbolic placement of the Fax machine in the kitchen confirms this. As I also demonstrated in Chapter 3, this facilitates the incorporation of wives' labour, and although the machine is sometimes used by women to enable direct communication with each other - even passing on jokes aimed at subverting men's status - it also encourages women to participate in political action on behalf of fishers. This action is partially motivated by "women's issues" such as improving services to remote fishing areas, but the wives are caught up in conflict caused by the limited entry management and capital intensive development of the industry: they fear "big men" with the potential to drive out "little men". They acknowledge that their political involvement is primarily undertaken to protect the family business so that it can be passed on to their sons.

The ideology of marriage and family is as influential in fishers' households as it is in the majority of other Australian households (Baxter, 1993; Poiner, 1990; Wearing, 1984; Bittman and Pixley, 1997). Specifically, fishers' wives appear to have much in common with farmers' wives who also have their labour exploited in outdoor work, manage the family business, undertake the major responsibilities of household and childcare, accept a conventional division of labour and put the interests of the family enterprise ahead of their own (Poiner, 1990). In hard times farmers' wives are also called upon to take paid work outside their households in order to keep the business afloat. As Poiner (1990:122) found with farmers' wives, these increased responsibilities may facilitate greater involvement in decision making on the part of wives, but their interests are frequently overruled as decisions about property are made for the benefit of husbands, sons and the "family business". The fear of the consequences of dividing assets in the event of
divorce also plays a role in the wife’s acquiescence to her husband’s authority in this decision making. In both farming and fishing, the masculine image of the industries conceals the importance of wives’ labour in sustaining the family and the business. It also absolves the men from most household labour or direct caring labour. At the same time, fishers’ wives have a particularly arduous workload as a result of the frequent requirement that their husband’s live and work at sea - a situation not applicable to farmers’ wives.

Although some fishers’ wives had increased status and power, made some decisions in their own right and overcame limitations on their lifestyle, my study revealed that for all fishers’ wives marriage is the primary “tie that binds” (Smart, 1984). Based as it is on naturalistic assumptions about appropriate heterosexual relations, marriage validates fishermen’s authority at home. I concur with Finch (1983) that this, together with women’s restricted access to paid work, and the ideology of motherhood, influences their decision to “make his job hers”. As noted in my introduction, women respond differently to being drawn into work associated with the fisheries. Some declare resentment and a dislike of fishing and the associated lifestyle; others actively embrace the lifestyle and “love” having something to do with the boats. This is especially so amongst those women who left their work in service industries or offices and went fishing prior to meeting their husbands. These are clearly women who enjoy work which does not confine them to their homes or roles as wives and mothers, however, their husbands continue to be absolved from direct caring labour associated with children and housework. They are also relieved of much of the land based work associated with the “family business”. The masculine image and culture of the industry reinforces this sexual division of labour so that the dependency of fishermen, as well as the industry, on women’s labour remains obscured.
Working with men.
I noted in the introduction that according to available sources, men either regard the presence of women on fishing vessels as "trouble" and resist their presence, or expect them to accept a subordinate role similar to that of a wife; cooking, cleaning, assisting with deckwork and even providing sexual labour. I found in my study that this is indeed frequently the case. Women who are attracted to an outdoor lifestyle or working at sea are offered the opportunity to work on boats primarily as providers of services required by the men. They are expected to accept the sexual division of labour and work like surrogate wives or helpmeets, in a hyper-masculine workplace. Women who challenge these expectations are met with fierce resistance, even extreme sexual harassment. Those who aspire to train as skippers or become boat owners themselves mostly succeed with the support of a male mentor or partner. The masculine domination of the industry results in men labelling women: "nice girls" if they marry fishermen and go home to bring up the children; "tough birds" if they remain single, adapt to the masculine culture and perform the same kinds of physical work as the men.

Despite the determination of women, who in the words of Nicky, "get out there and do it and train others to come in", it remains a struggle for them to negotiate the division of labour and masculine domination. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, this remains constant regardless of whether they accept the sexual division of labour or challenge it. If they qualify and start out on a career but marry a fisherman or have children they also find themselves giving up fishing because their partners expect to be able to continue fishing and leave all the parenting and household responsibilities to the women. The best option for women is to own and operate their own boat in a fishery which does not require them to be away from home too long of live with a crew. Jude, whose father and aunt entered the Western
rock lobster industry during the 1950s has been able to take over their niche in the mid-west lobster industry and hopes to pass it onto her sons. She lives a more balanced lifestyle than many of the men and her family appears to have a secure future in that industry. However, in this modern capital intensive industry which Wright (1992) found created an “immense amount of wealth”, even men are struggling for a place. Like Anne, they are faced with the possibility of having their licences bought back by the government as it continues to limit the entry of vessels into areas where stocks are being depleted. The increasing cost of buying into this industry, as well as the trawler fleet, is contributing to the entrepreneurial domination of the industry so that many fishers are not “traditional lifestylers” but members of an “investing class”. This helps explain why women are drawn into protecting the family business in the interests of their sons.

**Working for the Company.**

*Adamson’s Ocean Products*, owned by an entrepreneur who has extended his interests into owning trawlers and processing plants, benefits from the labour of fishers’ wives, skippers and cook/deckhands and the women in the factory. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, as long as the industry continues to create wealth from the high prices of the overseas luxury seafood market, fishers’ wives are more likely to work at home or seek paid work outside the industry. Processors will use whatever labour is available but since most men resist directly handling the product, women with the least choice are the most likely to be employed for this purpose. My study shows that the experience of the women at *Adamson’s* may not be very different from those of other women in factory work (Game and Pringle, 1983; Ainsworth, 1993). The conditions, however, are more extreme because of the seasonal nature of the work and the fact that if the product is not available workers are sacked without notice. Married migrant women from a non-English
speaking background are regarded as those most prepared to do “women’s work” and accept part-time seasonal employment. The majority are available because as wives they have followed their working class husbands to the North West in search of employment, and they have very limited options.

Many are primary breadwinners who struggle with low wages and poor conditions as well as the domination of the workplace by Anglo-Australian men. The ideology of motherhood and family is re-inforced amongst these women whose identity is shaped by their common experiences as married migrant women. They have so little time and space for themselves to develop projects of their own that they spend most of their leisure time together sharing their family and home centred experiences. Their access to paid employment is also limited. This sustains inequitable gender relations at home and at work. They are not “unwitting dupes” or “passive victims” but they do have the most restricted options for paid work and juggle their double load of running households and caring for children with earning a living. My study confirms that in the factory site, gender, ethnicity and class intersect so that factory workers have the most restricted and constrained choices of the women involved in the production of seafood. On the other hand, I found some evidence that adventurous independent young Australian born women have left the factory and taken the opportunity to work on the boats.

The structure of the fishing industry, with a predominantly masculine image and culture, is maintained by a conventional sexual division of labour. Fishers’ wives carry a particularly heavy domestic work load and allow the incorporation of their labour into their husband’s work. This, together with their restricted access to the labour market, and the ideology of motherhood, influences their decision to “opt in”. The social and cultural
expectation that a wife should support her husband, no matter what occupation he has, is however, the primary cause of wives’ constrained choice. Although I have shown a variety of ways in which fishers’ wives make choices for themselves and assert their own needs, the majority adhere to the expectation that they ought to be “married to the job” and adapt to his lifestyle.

I have also shown how, in the factory site, labour relations and ethnic relations intersected with gender relations as migrant women struggled with low wages and the domination of the workplace by Anglo-Australian men. It is extremely difficult for these women to challenge the sexual division of labour which enhances the industry’s ability to profit from their labour. Their work also benefits their husbands and children. They had the most restricted options for paid work, had difficulty “making ends meet” and also carried the double load of running their households, caring for children and earning a living. My research confirms that as working class migrant women from a non-English speaking background their labour is undervalued, backgrounded and denied.

Some of the women who work on trawlers also have restricted choices; undertrained itinerant workers seek work on the boats but have to accept the conditions set by owners, skippers and crew. Men either resist their presence or expect women to accept a subordinate role in the galley or on the deck. Other women are drawn in as the partners of fishers but also expected to work like “helpmeets”. Some accept the sexual division of labour, or as Nicky said, “do nice little things for the men” to avoid “rocking the boat”. Others exercise power where and when they can and contest the social and cultural construction of femininity because they love the lifestyle as much as the men do. Those wishing to train as skippers and work as the Master of a vessel negotiate the sexual division of labour and fierce resistance, and a
few women adopt the characteristics or traits which are assumed to be essentially male: they work as rugged individualists, demonstrate competent manual skills, and resilience or enterprise. They are however, unable to use the labour of a wife to assist them with running the family business, raising capital, or rearing children. The women with the most autonomy are those who own and operate their own small boats. The three who were independent fishers had greater autonomy than any others interviewed.

Each site then produces and reproduces unequal gender relations which are sustained and maintained by a horizontal and vertical sexual division of labour. Women negotiate the demands of this sexual division of labour, and work for the benefit of their husbands, families and the industry. There are however, as many “masculinities” and “femininities” in each of the sites of seafood production as there are in the wider Australian society (Connell, 1987:63). Men working in the industry may be itinerant labourers who spend most of their time working or drinking with their mates; aspiring skippers who are more conscientious fishers, or “family” men from different ethnic backgrounds. Women may choose to “stand by their man”, put the interests of their families first, adapt to an unequal division of labour working in remote areas, or challenge conventional notions of femininity and go fishing themselves.

It must also be noted that the social categories of class, and race/ethnicity, intersect with that of gender and affect the material reality of women’s lived experiences (Saunders and Evans, 1992; Bottomley, De Lepervanche & Martin, 1991). This results in economic and social inequality between different groups of women as well as between men and women. This is not specific to the Western Australian Fishing Industry but widely apparent in
contemporary Australia and other post-industrial capitalist societies (Bradley, 1996: 202-3).

Discussion and issues for further research

In my introduction I made reference to the fact that apart from Malcolm Tull’s short pieces on the economic development of the industry, there was a dearth of historical and sociological research relating to the Western Australian, or indeed, Australian fishing industry. There is therefore plenty of scope for further research on “fisherfolk” in Australia. My research was undertaken at the micro level of a sociological analysis of women’s everyday experience but there is a need for more research and analysis at the level of a critique of the Australian political economy, a recognition of its links to the international economy, and the entrepreneurial development of Australian fisheries. The impact of modern fisheries and the effect of limited entry management on the sexual division of labour could then be explored more fully. For example, in Chapter 3 I revealed how some fishers’ wives had undertaken paid work to repay debts incurred through purchasing increasingly expensive vessels and a place in the limited entry fisheries. The wives of “traditional lifestylers”, who I quoted in my introduction, also worked as the partners of fishers before the post-1960s development of the fisheries and undertook paid work to maintain their household economies. However, this was due to the seasonal nature of their husband’s work as well as the low prices available for seafood at that time. A comparative study of modern and traditional fishers could reveal whether or not the more modern industry makes greater demands on women’s paid and unpaid labour as “mum and dad to the kids”, financial manager of the household and supporter of the “family” business.

A comparison with overseas fisheries such as those of the North Atlantic and the Pacific North West might also test out the claim that Australian
fisheries are “the best managed in the world”, because fish stocks continue to be depleted in Australia and indeed throughout the world. As the Western Australian industry continues to develop, using bigger, more efficient boats and technology for the purpose of achieving ‘record catches’, it may be important to consider the value of wives allowing the incorporation of their unpaid labour into the family business rather than developing the means by which they might earn their own living. Adhering to a conventional sexual division of labour, which reinforces women’s dependent status, has had a devastating effect on women’s ability to survive the collapse of fisheries in Newfoundland.

Further research on the labour required in the processing factories is also needed because it may be that the plant in Shrimpton is unique in Australia, or even within Western Australia. On the other hand, processing factories may all be similar if the majority of processors all over Australia are more recently arrived migrant women. The impact of changes in the processing of luxury seafood also needs further detailed research to test out Barbara Neis’s suggestion, referred to in Chapter 4, that as more technologically advanced and computerised equipment is being used in processing plants the numbers of women decrease and the numbers of men increase. The conditions experienced by the women in Shrimpton were poor, but industrial relations do not look like improving when in Fremantle, for example, some of the large factories are contracting out the processing or employing young people under government subsidised youth employment and training schemes. At the same time it appears that men continue to refuse to actually handle the food, and small pockets of women remain in the least pleasant and worst paid areas of the factory.

Since I wrote up my chapters on the factory and vessels in Shrimpton, Adamson’s have purchased two new $500,000 vessels with more modern
accommodation, processing and freezing facilities on board. If these changes are indicative of a trend to increase the amount of processing at sea there might be a reduction in factory workers and an increase in the numbers of women being encouraged onto the vessels to do “women’s work”.

From my interviews for Chapter 5 it would appear that increased numbers of women took up work on fishing boats after the 1960s. The increased numbers of women might be attributable to the development of the industry coinciding with a growing awareness of women’s right to equal opportunities in paid work, especially work previously considered “men’s work”. Some informants suggested their presence peaked during a “boom” period of record catches in the 1980s. By the mid-nineties there appeared to be a decline in their presence. Without accurate statistical evidence it has been difficult for me to validate these suggestions although my research does confirm that masculine resistance to the presence of women on boats continues; women at home and at work are expected to adapt to the structure of the industry and the lifestyle of men, and even female skippers and fishers are expected to return to the land to bring up fishermen’s children. These factors help maintain the small numbers of women fishing. The increasing capital investment required to enter the limited entry fisheries also contributes to the apparently declining numbers of women qualifying as professional fishers and Masters of vessels. A more detailed study of women who have worked, in the past and in the present, as professional fishers and skippers would be of value to the women and the fisheries. The two female ex-skippers, interviewed for Chapter 5 who gave up fishing and took on work as maritime trainers, expressed an interest in such research because they found it increasingly difficult to encourage young women to undertake training as skippers and deckhands, or consider fishing as an occupation.
"Australian women are tough, they'll go to tough areas."

The above statement, made by Michael Kailis (Joll, 1993), and referred to in my introduction, is intriguing. My first response was to think about how useful the labour of wives, cook/deckhands and factory workers were to him and his companies. My second response was to consider how in Australian pioneering mythology women have been expected to go to remote areas, where ever their husband's work took them, and put up with any hardship or disappointment that might arise. I then thought, since the Kailis family are members of the Western Australian Greek community, he might make this statement as an acknowledgment that Australian women are different to other European women. This is an idea worthy of further consideration. In the social construction of Australian identity pioneering woman have been presented as ideal 'helpmates' stoically enduring hardships. Feminists have acknowledged that this image does not fit the reality of their position as exploited labourers with constrained and restricted choices. However, I suggest that there is a gap between the image and reality which might be filled by another reality: many Australian women have enjoyed an outdoor lifestyle and relished the opportunity to work the land, do manual labour or go fishing. In Australian history and culture living and working closer to nature has been portrayed and valued as a masculine characteristic but it can be as appealing to women as it is assumed to be to men.

In 1994 Sara Henderson was awarded Business Woman of the Year for her work on a pastoral station. In 1992 she published an autobiography, From Strength to Strength, in which she revealed how, as the wife of a wealthy business man and pastoralist, her labour had been exploited under extreme conditions in order to establish a family enterprise in the "outback". Her alcoholic husband drove the company into bankruptcy and according to the cover notes on her book "Through sheer strength and determination, she
transformed the debt-ridden million acres into a working property worth millions”. As country women branding cattle, rounding up stock and managing the business Sara and her daughters pushed the boundaries of gender expectations and “confining notions of femininity”. Sara’s book has sold over a 150,000 copies and she has become something of an icon in popular culture. Her image, including that of herself wearing Akubra hat, moleskin trousers and riding boots, is being used through the media to promote a variety of products and services ranging from encouraging women over 50 to undergo breast cancer examinations, to selling soap powder to stockmen. This positive image of an Australian woman is immensely appealing and inspiring to women who reject the lifestyle of the conventional housebound urban wife to combine a spirit of adventure and a love of an outdoor lifestyle with marriage, or independently earning their own living.

When I think back on my experiences of meeting and interviewing women in the fisheries I am drawn to the image of June proudly welding new parts for the boat; Gail sorting the catch on the back deck while her son sleeps in the wheelhouse with his father; Tammy, Val and Gail and their friends declaring that they couldn’t wait to get back to sea; 23 year old Nicky driving a 76 foot trawler and “hooning around like a cowboy”; Sandy hauling a winch as “good as any bloke can” and all of them, even the young women who couldn’t put up with the antics of the men, telling me how “beautiful it is out there”. In my study there is ample evidence that women, as wives and as independent fishers are “tough”, resilient and adventurous. Lake (1987) and Finch (1983) suggest, and I agree with them, that being a “helpmeet” results in women having to do more than their fair share of work, and is often economically unrewarding. However, I suggest that these practical, capable strong women who actively embrace the lifestyle which their husbands also enjoy, are going beyond simply making “his project
hers”, or passively adapting to their husbands’ work. They are as innovative and enterprising as the ideal Australian man is supposed to be. They also love working outdoors or at sea just as much as men do. Helen, Gail and Tammy had all left home and their office or retail jobs, travelled to remote areas and were fishing before they met their husbands. They clearly married fishermen because it allowed them to combine marriage and motherhood with remaining involved in the industry. Their participation in outdoor work has been undertaken entirely through their own choice, not simply a response to the needs of their husbands or the demands of his occupation. Seeking freedom in a lifestyle away from domesticity, frequently considered a masculine pursuit, is also desired by women. Evidence for this appears not only in the stories of Jude jetting the waves, or Beryl giving “the fish a sportin’ chance”, but also in the stories of fishers’ wives, and even in the factory where some independent adventurous young women travelling around Australia have moved on to work on trawlers¹. Actively embracing a lifestyle that they like allows strong, capable, practical fishers’ wives to reconcile their status as a subordinate “helpmeet” with their preference for non-conventional work, and an ability to make decisions in their own interests. This applies to those women who either adapt to the sexual division of labour on fishing vessels or negotiate it in order to skipper their own vessels. Notwithstanding the highly developed horizontal and vertical sexual division of labour in the Western Australian fishing industry, there are women who challenge conventional gender relations; defy “confining notions of femininity” and strive for independent and autonomous lifestyles. They are as happy at sea as they are on land and determine for themselves how, where and when they will work.

¹Sandy, who was interviewed for Chapter 5, stated that she had gone to sea after working at Adamson’s because she ‘wanted to see where it [the product] came from’. This is a typical Australian working class understatement; she really saw working on the boats as a much more adventurous and challenging way to earn her living. Annie, who was interviewed for Chapter 4, expressed an ambition to work on the trawlers and stated that she had promised herself she would go to sea in the year 2000 when she turns 40.
Appendix I

Interview prompts

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the interviews were conducted in an informal and loosely structured way. Participants were invited to engage in a conversation about their lifestyle and everyday work experiences. The following questions were held by the interviewers on prompt cards and used where and when appropriate.
Fishers’ wives.

Biographical details and family history.
How did you first come to be involved in fishing?

Where did you meet your husband? When did you marry?
Were you working when you met? Have you undertaken paid work since your marriage?
Where and Why?

How did your husband come to be fishing?
Do you remember any particularly difficult times for you that were associated with his fishing?
What was the season? How long was he away? Did he work for himself?
Which company did he work for?

Has he ever given up fishing? Or done any other work?
Do you think he missed not being with you and the children?
What sort of things did/do you do that are related to the fishing or business?

How do the children cope with him being away?
What was it like for you, being alone and with the children on your own?
What sort of things did you do that were your own interests?
Who do you spend most of your leisure time with?

Do you think that there is a particular sort of man that makes a commitment to fishing?
What does your husband do when he is home?
How does your husband like to spend his leisure time?

Was it difficult to maintain contact with your husband?
Do you remember any time that you had to deal with a particularly nasty crisis?
Do you ever worry about your husband’s safety?
What is it like when he leaves?
What is it like when he comes home?

Do you think there are particular qualities that a woman needs to be a fisherman’s wife?
What do you like about the lifestyle?
What do you like least?

Has your husband ever talked about working with women on boats?
What do you think about women working on boats? (have you done so yourself - or would you like to?)

Are your children interested in fishing?
Have you ever thought about a career for yourself?

Have you ever felt economically vulnerable, being married to a fisherman?
How would you manage if you were unable to rely on your husband’s income?
( Depending on the rapport built up - ask in the event of divorce, accident or death)

What do you think about the future of the industry?
What do you do for holidays?
Factory workers

Biographical/Family history.
Previous work experience/marital status.

How did you come to be involved in the fishing industry?
(What was your partner doing?)

What exactly were/are you doing in the factory?
Can you describe how you do that?

What is the season? Have you worked each season?
Is it shift work?

Can you describe the staff structure for me?
Clarify the titles?

What do each of these people do?
What are your duties?

Do men and women do the same work?
What do they do that is different?
Why don’t men and women do the same work?
Do you think they could, or should?

Do they have the same wages?
How do you get to earn more?

Can you describe the factory floor for me? The order of the process and who does what?

Why are some people paid more than others in the processing?
(special allowances etc.)

What are your responsibilities? (safety, hours etc.)
Have you ever been sick as a result of your work?
What compensation arrangements are available?
Have women ever complained about sexual harassment?

Can you tell me about the machinery? Is it difficult/easy to work with? Have there been changes?
Have you ever had an accident or witnessed an accident?

How well do the staff get on generally?
What are relations like between staff and management?

Do you have workers from different countries working with you?
How does that work out for you all?
Do you supervise anyone else?
Who is your ‘boss’?
How do you get on?

Does a core group come back each season?
Do backpackers work there regularly? How do the core group get on with them?
Have there been any increases or decreases in the numbers of men/women working in the factory?

Have you ever belonged to a Union?
Do you know which union would cover your work?
Would people like to be in a union?
Why? Why not?

What do you like about your work?
What do you like least about your work?
Why do you work at the factory?
What work would you prefer to be doing?

Tell me about your family?
Do you have enough time to spend with them?
What difficulties do you have (child care/financial/socialising)?
Do you have any hobbies or interests of your own outside of work?

Is there anything special you are looking forward to this weekend?

Women on boats

Introduction and biographical details (family history and place of birth).
How did you come to be working in the fishing industry? Which fishing industry is it that you work in? (lobster or prawn etc.)? What is the season? Do you do other work between seasons? (or have another occupation).

Do you have a partner - does he/she work in the industry?
Does she/he do any work associated with your work?

What years did you work on the boats in WA? Do you own the boat or are you employed by the owner? What kind of license is required by you/the owner/the boat? Do you do other work?

Can you describe the method of catching? How many people usually work the boat - what is the hierarchy? Can you describe the different work that is carried out on board? Do men and women do the same work?

How long are you required to be out at sea? How are people usually recruited? how are they paid? (e.g. by contract or otherwise). Do people from different cultural, racial or ethnic backgrounds work together on the boat? How well do people work together? Do any difficulties arise amongst crew?

What do you enjoy about your work? What do you dislike? Do you consider the work unnecessarily hard, dirty or dangerous? Have you been involved in any accident or witnessed any accidents or other hazards detrimental to the people on board? What procedures are followed to enable people to claim compensation?

Do you think fishers get a fair deal when it comes to conditions, safety and wages? What do you think of the government intervention in areas like occupational health safety, or equal employment opportunity or anti-discrimination legislation?

Have you ever experienced or witnessed sexual harassment on the boats?
What action would you think was appropriate in such a situation?
Any other unfair treatment of women?
Do you enjoy working with the men?
Have you ever worked with a female skipper? Would you like to?
How, or did you, consider it any different to working with a male skipper?
Do you think women are as capable as men working on boats?
Are there any special requirements needed for women on boats?
Do you think it is a good job for a woman?

Do you belong to a union? Can you join one? I understand there is no award for deckhands - does this mean there is no union they can join? Do you think crew should have such an organisation to support them?
Have you experienced any difficulties with being away from your family/usual home situation?

How do you meet your practical social and domestic needs? e.g. where do you live - how do you attend to such chores as washing or cooking? How do you spend your time when you are not fishing?

If you have a partner does he/she do any unpaid work connected with your work?

What qualifications do you have? What training did you undertake - where? Who did you train with? Do you think it takes a particular type of person to be a fisher?

Do you have any particular concerns about the future of the industry? (take response and then use prompts re depletion of stock, environment, government intervention, personal ambitions etc.)

What are you planning to do this weekend? - or are you doing anything special now it is the end of the season? (a positive less formal point to end the interview on).

Men on boats.

Introduction and biographical details (family history and place of birth). How did you come to be working in the fishing industry? Which fishing industry is it that you work in? (lobster or prawn etc.)? What is the season? Do you do other work between seasons? (or have another occupation).

What years did you work on the boats in WA? Do you own the boat or are you employed by the owner? What kind of licence is required by you/the owner/the boat? Do you do other work?

Can you describe the method of catching? How many people usually work the boat - what is the hierarchy? Can you describe the different work that is carried out on board?

How long are you required to be out at sea? How are people usually recruited? how are they paid? (e.g. by contract or otherwise). Do people from different cultural, racial or ethnic backgrounds work together on the boat? How well do people work together? Do any difficulties arise amongst crew?

What do you enjoy about your work? What do you dislike? Do you consider the work unnecessarily hard, dirty or dangerous? Have you been involved in any accident or witnessed any accidents or other hazards detrimental to the people on board? What procedures are followed to enable people to claim compensation?

Do you think fishers get a fair deal when it comes to conditions, safety and wages? What do you think of the government intervention in areas like occupational health safety, or equal employment opportunity or anti-discrimination legislation?

Do you belong to a union? Can you join one? I understand there is no award for deckhands - does this mean there is no union they can join? Do you think crew should have such an organisation to support them?

Have you ever worked with women on the boats? What work do they do? Do you think they are capable of doing the same work as men? Do you consider they require any special considerations or different facilities on board? Do you think working on a boat is a good job? Why? (or not?) Do you think it is an equally good job for a woman?

Do you have a preference about who you work with on the boats? Have you ever worked for a female skipper? If not would you like to? Why-why not? Is it any different to working with a male skipper? How?
Have you ever witnessed any unfair treatment of women on boats? What action, if any, do you consider is appropriate in such situations? Do you think your view is widely held amongst fishermen?

Have you experienced any difficulties with being away from your family/usual home situation?

If you have a partner/wife does she do any unpaid work connected with your work? How do you meet your practical social and domestic needs? e.g. where do you live - how do you attend to such chores as washing or cooking? How do you spend your time when you are not fishing?

What qualifications do you have? What training did you undertake - where? Who did you train with?

Do you think it takes a particular type of person to be a fisherman? Do you spend much leisure time with people from other occupations?

Do you have any particular concerns about the future of the industry? (take response and then use prompts re depletion of stock, environment, government intervention, personal ambitions etc.)

What are you planning to do this weekend? - or are you doing anything special now it is the end of the season? (a positive less formal point to end with).
Appendix II

Consent Form

Fishing Industry Research
Researcher: Leonie Stella
P.O. Box 74,
South Fremantle 6162

Telephone: 337 5257

Please print, except for signatures:

I, _____________________________________________ (full name),
of _____________________________________________ (address),
give permission to ______________________________________ (interviewer),
to use the interview, or part of the interview, conducted with me on
______________ (date of interview), for research, publication, and/or
broadcasting, and for copies to be lodged in the State Library Oral History
collection for the use of other bona fide researchers (delete those not agreed
to). I, the undersigned participant have read the information above, and
any questions I have asked of the interviewer have been answered to my
satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I may
withdraw at any time without prejudice.

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided
my name or other identifying information is not used.

Signed (participant) __________________________
Signed (interviewer) __________________________
Dated _____________________
Appendix III (a)

Wives/Partners of Fishers Interviewed (Tape-recorded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Work prior to Marriage</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
<th>Fishery</th>
<th>Status of Husband</th>
<th>Present Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Dress-Maker</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Contract Skipper</td>
<td>Home/Contract C/deckhand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yvonne</td>
<td>Office</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Snapper</td>
<td>Owner Operator</td>
<td>Home/Family Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linley</td>
<td>Shop Assist.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Office</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lobster</td>
<td>Contract Skipper</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Waitress</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lobster</td>
<td>Owner Skipper</td>
<td>Home/Family Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherry</td>
<td>deckhand</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Contract Skipper</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>deckhand</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Owner Skipper</td>
<td>Home/Family Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>Barwork</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Contract Skipper</td>
<td>Home</td>
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<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Contract Skipper</td>
<td>Home/Trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>Office</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Scallop</td>
<td>Owner Skipper</td>
<td>Home/Family Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>Shop Assistant</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Contract Skipper</td>
<td>Home/Childcare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Barwork</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Owner Skipper</td>
<td>Home/Student</td>
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### Appendix III (b)

#### Fishermen Interviewed (Tape-recorded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Crew Status</th>
<th>Fishery</th>
<th>Current Occupation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Ex-Skipper</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Fleet Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Skipper</td>
<td>Prawn &amp; Scallop</td>
<td>Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rex</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Ex-Skipper</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Skipper</td>
<td>Snapper</td>
<td>Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lester</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Skipper</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Contracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluey</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>deckhand</td>
<td>Scallop</td>
<td>Contracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franz</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>deckhand</td>
<td>Scallop</td>
<td>Casual-Traveller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>deckhand</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Casual-Traveller</td>
</tr>
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<td>Chris</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Ex-Skipper</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Fisheries Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jacques</td>
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<td>Single</td>
<td>deckhand</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Casual-Traveller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>Skipper</td>
<td>Snapper</td>
<td>Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>63</td>
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<td>Skipper</td>
<td>Snapper</td>
<td>Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Skipper</td>
<td>Snapper</td>
<td>Skipper-trainer - ATSIC</td>
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### Appendix III (c)

**Adamson’s Staff Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Interview Format</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reg</td>
<td>Company Manager</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1994 Formal Unrecorded</td>
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<td>Bob</td>
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<td>Australian</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1995 Formal Unrecorded</td>
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<td>Tom</td>
<td>Staff Manager</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1995 Informal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marg</td>
<td>Proc. Supervisor</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1994 Informal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Clerk Typist</td>
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<td>Australian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1995 Informal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Processor (Traveller)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1994 Prelimin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1994 Prelimin.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dagma</td>
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<td>Rumanian</td>
<td>Separated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Processor (Traveller)</td>
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<td>English</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1994 Prelimin.</td>
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<td>Fran</td>
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<td>Portuguese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ines</td>
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<td>Yugoslav</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
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<td>Filipino</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marianne</td>
<td>Ex-Processor</td>
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<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1995 Formal recorded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>Ex-Processor</td>
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<td>Australian</td>
<td>Lesbian Partnership</td>
<td>1994 Formal Recorded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mal</td>
<td>Processor (Local)</td>
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<td>English</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1995 Formal Recorded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Processor</td>
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<td>English</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1995 Formal Recorded</td>
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<td>Narelle</td>
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<td>Tracey</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>1995 Formal Recorded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>Skippers’ Accounts</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1995 Formal Recorded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>Fleet Master</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1995 Formal</td>
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## Appendix III (d)

### Women Fishers Interviewed (Tape-recorded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Crew Position</th>
<th>Fishery</th>
<th>Current occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Skipper (Ex)</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ailsa</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>de facto</td>
<td>Skipper (Ex)</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>Trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicki</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>Cook/deckh.</td>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>contracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>Cook/deckh.</td>
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<td>contracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Cook/deckh.</td>
<td>Prawns</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
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<td>Married</td>
<td>Mate</td>
<td>Prawns</td>
<td>contracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
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<td>Single</td>
<td>Deckh.</td>
<td>Prawns</td>
<td>contracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
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<td>Single</td>
<td>Cook/deckh.</td>
<td>Prawns</td>
<td>contracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Val</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Cook/deckh.</td>
<td>Prawns</td>
<td>contracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Cook/deckh.</td>
<td>Prawns and scallops</td>
<td>Home &amp; Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>de facto</td>
<td>Cook/deckh.</td>
<td>Prawns</td>
<td>Home (and student)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Cook/deckh.</td>
<td>Prawns and scallops</td>
<td>Home &amp; Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Professional independent fisher</td>
<td>Scale-fish, net fishing</td>
<td>Semi-retired</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jude</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>ex-de facto</td>
<td>Skipper</td>
<td>Lobster</td>
<td>Owner/ operator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne*</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Skipper</td>
<td>Lobster and Snapper</td>
<td>Owner/ operator</td>
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</table>

* Anne was interviewed by Jack Darcey for the FIRDC Oral History Project in 1989.
Appendix III (e)

Supplementary Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Relevance</th>
<th>Form of Interview</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guido</td>
<td>Admin. Fremantle Processor</td>
<td>Formal/unrecorded</td>
<td>1994</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merv</td>
<td>Inspector, WorkSafe WA</td>
<td>Formal/unrecorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nannette</td>
<td>Safety Consultant, WAFIC</td>
<td>Formal/unrecorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>Owner Processor, Fremantle</td>
<td>Formal/unrecorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
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<td>Clive</td>
<td>Fisheries Employment Taskforce (TAFE)</td>
<td>Formal/unrecorded</td>
<td>1994</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leanne</td>
<td>Director, Marine /Coastal Network</td>
<td>Formal tape-recorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>Regional Development Commission</td>
<td>Formal/unrecorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Fleet Manager</td>
<td>Formal/tape-recorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
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<tr>
<td>Petra</td>
<td>Housemate of fisherman</td>
<td>Formal/tape-recorded</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nino</td>
<td>Highschool Careers' Advisor</td>
<td>Formal/tape-recorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Drug Prevention Committee</td>
<td>Informal discussion</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>Policewoman (Shrimpton)</td>
<td>Informal discussion</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coral</td>
<td>Accountant, Fremantle Processor</td>
<td>Informal discussion</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Manager, Backpackers’ Hostel (1)</td>
<td>Tape-recorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Manager, Backpackers’ Hostel (2)</td>
<td>Tape-recorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Senior Fisheries Officer</td>
<td>Tape-recorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiny</td>
<td>Asst. Fisheries Officer</td>
<td>Informal discussion</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernie</td>
<td>Senior Fisheries Officer (Onslow)</td>
<td>Informal discussion</td>
<td>1995</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Senior Fisheries Officer (Esperance)</td>
<td>Informal discussion</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Asst. Fisheries Officer (Esperance)</td>
<td>Informal discussion</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Admin. Asst. Fisheries (Shrimpton)</td>
<td>Formal Tape-recorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
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<td>Sally</td>
<td>Secretary, WAFIC Womens’ Assoc.</td>
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<td>1995</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>Mother of ‘Anne’</td>
<td>Formal/Tape-recorded</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>WA Dept. of Training</td>
<td>Formal discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lorraine</td>
<td>Police/Community Rel. Committee</td>
<td>Formal/Tape-recorded</td>
<td>1995</td>
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Appendix IV

Research Time Line

1994
Preliminary Research:
February to May 1994:

• Archival research: Fisheries Department correspondence and publications, Department of Labour correspondence, published fisheries/community histories, in State Library of Western Australia. Reading transcripts from oral history projects.

• Interlibrary search (including internet and CD Roms) for publications relating to the Australian fishing industry and overseas publications relating to gender relations in fishing communities.

• Visits made to seafood processing companies (Perth and Fremantle), and officers of the Fisheries Department, staff at WorkSafe, TAFE, Department of Employment and training, Marine and Coastal Community Network. Collecting names of possible informants and research sites. Department of Training, staff at TAFE, and ABS contacted regarding various statistics but advised by all that they would be difficult, in not impossible to obtain.

• Reading Feminist Research Methods; drafted exploratory paper on participation of women in the Western Australian fishing industry. Draft feminist theory and comparative literature paper regarding concepts of patriarchy/capitalism/sex/gender systems and the intersection of race/class and gender. Researching the history of Australian’s women’s experience of the sexual division of labour at home and at work.

Preliminary Research Trips (total of 4,000 kilometres)

• May 1994, research trip through the South West of Western Australia. Held discussions with people involved in the industry in Denmark, Albany and Esperance. Collected names of sixteen possible participants, taped interviews with one professional fisherwoman, and one other wife of a fisherman who was also the mother of a professional fisherwoman. Others too difficult to contact; unwilling to participate, or unavailable due to illness or death in the family. Fisheries officers verbally confirmed that fishers’ wives were frequently ‘the brains behind the business’. Contacted small seafood processing companies but met with resistance, especially when asking questions about staff numbers and seasonal workers.

• July 1994 undertook preliminary research trip to North West, following telephone contact with fisheries people in Geraldton, Dunsborough, Shark Bay, Carnarvon, Broome, and Derby. Made good contact with Manager of large processing company who expressed positive interest in the project and offered support including an invitation to tour the processing plant and undertake preliminary interviews with processing staff. This man also invited me to tender for a research report on the employment and training needs of the regional fishing industry. Tender for contract subsequently unsuccessful. Interviewed six factory workers who volunteered to participate in more in depth interviews in 1995. Spoke with two Aboriginal people involved in establishing Aboriginal community fishing enterprises; four Anglo-Australian women employed on fishing vessels, and three wives of fishermen who also expressed an interest in participating in the project. Was introduced to two male skippers about the possibility of participation in the project, and obtained the names of some female skippers from Fisheries Officers.
• **August to December 1994** further attempts to locate reliable statistics on employment in seafood plants, numbers of women qualified as skippers, or crewing on boats unsuccessful. ABS advised that specific employment details as numbers of seafood processors difficult to confirm because they could not be separated from general food processors. Also, seasonal casual workers in processing (and on boats) difficult to confirm, not constant enough for firm statistics. Skippers tickets issued by Department of Transport include recreational fishers and those of leisure craft etc. Fishing licences issued to companies or vessels, not individuals.

• Following this research trip decision made to focus on *Shrimpton* (a pseudonym for a town in the North West) as the major site, but to include interviewees from the metropolitan areas of Perth and Fremantle because some wives of fishers, owners of vessels, seasonal crew and processors live in these cities. In *Shrimpton* fishers (companies and individuals) operate scallop and prawn trawlers, wet-liners for snapper and tuna, and much of the catch is processed in the town.

• Due to the dearth of published history, sociological research and statistical material regarding the Western Australian Fisheries, I spent the rest of 1994 searching library sources for overseas publications relating to fishing community studies, gender relations and the sexual division of labour in fishing communities. Also worked on Australian historical and sociological comparative literature reviews regarding Australian women's experience of the sexual division of labour. This material subsequently reworked for Chapter 3 of the thesis.

• Joined an email multilist *Fisherfolk* and made contact with researchers in USA and Canada. Received a bibliography of publications relating to gender issues in fishing communities.

**January to August 1995**

• Drafted up tentative methodology, possible interview questions and format; lists of possible informants (at this stage 6 factory workers, 3 fleet managers, 4 fishers wives, 2 skippers in *Shrimpton*, and 2 skippers and 4 fishers wives in Fremantle). Also followed up on other personal contacts, Fisheries Department information relating to seasons, occupational health and safety issues, and previous oral history projects (Lancelin, Peel, Tull).

• Travel research funding was granted from Murdoch University for formal (second) research trip to *Shrimpton* in August 1995. Research assistant appointed and caravan booked for five weeks. Questions or prompts for interviews were redrafted and confirmed in consultation with supervisors and research assistant, and 4 tape recorded interviews conducted in Fremantle prior to departure for *Shrimpton*. Advised, on the eve of departure, that the manager of Adamson's had relocated to Tasmania. Decided to continue with plans using other informants and obtaining an appointment with the new Manager.

• **August-September 1995 Research Trip**

Enjoyable learning experience; some disappointments, but good rapport with research assistant - shared skills, successes and failures - community mistrust was contradictory. Thierry hassled by police (as a stranger in town!) - asked to prove his identity! Fishers wary of both of us. We were accused of being with the Drug Squad or working as Tax spies. The Drug Squad, we were informed by locals, had recently been in the town carrying out investigations into the possibility of fishers being involved in drug trafficking. Two informants I interviewed were members of a newly formed anti-drug committee established in the region. On some occasions Thierry was assumed to be the researcher and I the assistant. Previously arranged interviews 'fell through', new informants were sought. Assistance given by members of local Task Force established to link employment issues to the needs of the industry.
Established new list of interviewees using assistance of Fisheries Department staff, A Regional Development Officer, Managers of backpackers' hostels, personal contact with two fleet managers. Snowballing effect from personal contacts due to my having lived in the town for 5 years (during the 1970s).

Conducting the Research
Thierry and I shared a caravan and each morning set out contacts to be followed up, interviews to be confirmed and, depending on the outcome, two or three interviews to be conducted. In the evenings we compared notes, worries and achievements and discussed ideas about our method of conducting interviews. A daily research diary including notes taken during unrecorded interviews, and observations of crew on boats, interaction on the factory floor and household relations was kept. Discovered that some men resisted Thierry because he was French and not 'local', while some women were more drawn to him as a researcher. Some men were more drawn to me as a local person and were sometimes inclined to include me in conversations as a 'mate', even referring to me as such. A few women, on the other hand, resisted close interaction, and even declined being interviewed for a 'feminist' project. Both of us encountered fishers' wariness on the grounds that we would write 'bullshit' reports for the government, or might be 'spies' with the Drug Squad or Taxation Department. At the time we were interviewing the newspapers were carrying stories about a supposed collusion between Fisheries officers and taxation authorities.

Members of a Regional Task Force established to co-ordinate the needs of the fishing industry for employment and training of crew assisted in introducing us to fishers and their families. They also assisted by providing informants who had, or were still, working in processing plants. This was particularly useful as the new manager of Adamson's was not interested in the research and would not allow interviewing of factory staff on the premises. I subsequently made contact with women from a non-English speaking background and interviewed them in their own homes. The most senior processor/supervisor of processors was also interviewed.

Itinerant boat crew were interviewed in Shrimpton in backpackers hostels, the caravan, and in hotels. After returning to Fremantle some of them were interviewed in their own homes, and two in a restaurant. Two others were interviewed in my own home. Three women who had skippered fishing vessels as professional fishers were also interviewed in Fremantle. Total number of people interviewed 85; 60 interviews were tape recorded.

• September-December 1995 - On completion of the research trip, and additional interviews in the city, 60 tape recorded interviews were transcribed, coded and used for drafting sections of each of the three main research site chapters: Factory, Household and Boats.

My contact with overseas researchers through the multilist 'Fisherfolk', led to my being invited to attend the Society for Applied Anthropology annual conference (1996) in Baltimore, Maryland. The conference was due to take place in March 1996 and a session on women in the fisheries was being chaired. I submitted an abstract based on my research on gender relations on board scallop and prawn trawlers in the North West of Australia. This paper became incorporated into Chapter 5 of the thesis.

January to March 1996
• Funding granted by Murdoch University for travel costs to Baltimore conference. Attended the SfAA conference in March in Baltimore, and was involved in discussing the possibility of publishing a special issue of Anthropologica focussing on women in the fisheries. Was invited to submit a paper for same which was subsequently published in January 1998.
From Baltimore I went to Nova Scotia and made contact with staff at Dalhousie University, Halifax, who were involved in fisheries research. Here I was assisted with my literature search and referred onto other feminist researchers at St. Mary's, Halifax and Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland. This enabled me to appreciate both the similarities and differences in the experiences of women in fishing communities, and widen my knowledge of research about the decline of fish stocks all over the world, and its impact on men and women dependent on the industry. I was also able to access research into gender relations within fishing communities and the different impact social and economic changes were having on men and women, and their families.

Upon my return I reworked the conference paper for publication, and then broadened it for inclusion in Chapter 5 of the thesis. New literature obtain through the overseas trip was read, and an update search of local literature undertaken. Drafting of other chapters continued.

January to December 1997
Continued transcribing, coding and writing up as well as searching for relevant literature on women and fisheries, labour relations in fisheries, gender relations, feminist research relating to women and labour issues and fishing communities. Finalised paper on trawling, and drafted paper on historical and social development of sexual division of labour, in Australia.

All chapters were drafted up and reworked towards the end of 1997. The overall structure of the thesis was confirmed: an introduction to the topic in its local context; a methodology chapter outlining the way I carried out the research; a chapter discussing Australian women's experience of the sexual division of labour in an historical, social and cultural context, and chapters relating to each of the sites where women performed labour associated with fishing.

January to June 1998

All chapters were revised and edited to final draft stage and the thesis submitted in June, 1998.
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