

WORDS CARRIED IN WITH THE TIDE: BOUNDARIES OF GENDER IN
FISHERPOETRY

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The FisherPoets Gathering is an annual event where expressive art is performed exposes the explicit and implicit gender dynamics of the occupation of commercial fishing. Through these performances, women tackle gender issues that bridge the gap between the fishing industry and the event. Through performance and interactions with fellow female FisherPoets, the women validate themselves as fishermen and comment on the behavior of their male colleagues. These performance-based expressive art forms enable them to address the fishing industry's gender power dynamics and begin to make social change.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2014 I found myself working with the fishermen (a term used for men and women) of Nushagak beach in Bristol Bay, Alaska (see Fig. 1). Locals refer to Nushagak Beach as “fish camp”. Located across the bay from the town of Dillingham, Nushagak is composed of a series of small rudimentary cabins, which fishermen only inhabit during the summer months (see Fig. 2). Nushagak is an isolated community composed of set-netters and their family members.



Fig. 1: Cabins on Nushagak, Bristol Bay, AK. 2015.

Originally inhabited by the Yup’ik and Athabaskan tribes, Nushagak was also the site of a Russian Orthodox mission in the early 1800s. The Russians’ large white cross, by far the most prominent land mark, still looms over Nushagak (see Fig. 3). Amidst the tall grasses of Nushagak are the remains of past canneries as well as the headstones of Russian missionaries (see Fig. 4). After the Russians, several different cannery

companies operated on the beach, including the Pacific Steam Whaling Company (VanStone). Over the years, expanding mudflats made it increasingly difficult for vessels to reach Nushagak, forcing the canneries to shut down. The mudflats refer to the stretch of muddy shoreline affected by the bay’s extreme tides. The water covers the mudflats during high tides, and during low tides the mudflats are uncovered stretches of deep muddy ground. Thanks to fishermen like Curt “Ole” Olson who purchased the land, Nushagak is now the site of a set-netting community. In a 2014 interview, Ole explained his concern that the mudflats continue to encroach, forcing individuals to abandon cabins along the outskirts of the community. Nushagak’s isolation makes for a fairly exclusive community.



Fig. 2: My cabin on Nushagak. 2015.



Fig. 3: Cross on the hill above Nushagak, Bristol Bay, AK. 2015.



Fig. 4: Headstone in the cemetery left behind by Russian missionaries. Nushagak, Bristol Bay, AK. 2015.

My arrival came after the peak of the fishing season as fishing slowed down, so my work was split between two different captains based on who needed me most. The odds were stacked against me. I am a short woman in my early twenties, and I was inexperienced in fishing. This would have been enough to make it difficult for me to

immerse myself in this tight-knit community, but I was also coming in as a researcher. I roused suspicions about how and what I might write about the community members. And, as an inexperienced worker coming in after the busiest part of the season, I inspired the ire of some of my fellow crewmates, for good reason. My crewmates worried that I would dilute their hard-earned wages. Crewmembers receive a “crew share” that is divided up based on experience level, hours worked, and pounds of fish caught. Other factors include the expenses that go into running the operation, such as how much money it takes to run the boats, feed the crew, and occasionally pay for flights.

I was determined to prove my worth. My first captain, Ole, sent me to fish for his foster son within two days of my arrival. When I was sent to the second captain, I was the only other person on the skiff (a small aluminum boat used to set-net), so I had to learn quickly and work efficiently (see Fig. 5). After a little over a week of working for him, others told me that I had impressed my second captain so much that he had changed his views on women’s ability to keep up with the work. He sent me back to Ole and to a beach full of fishermen who did not know me and had not seen me work.

With the fishing season slowing down, Ole put me to work on beach projects instead of returning me to work on the boat. I spent my time carrying lumber to build a deck for one of the cabins, cooking, watching children in the community, and preparing the nets for storage until the next year. Despite all this, I felt like an interloper, tolerated but not entirely welcome. My acceptance by the “Nushagakers” finally came one evening when I went to a farewell party that was attended by most of the community. I soon found myself attracting unwanted attention from one of the fishermen, a husband and

father in his forties, who thought it was appropriate to spend the night making advances. After I politely and repeatedly asked him to stop, I ended up punching him.



Fig. 5: Set-netting skiff on Nushagak, Bristol Bay, AK. 2015.

I left the party quickly after, mortified with myself and terrified of the ramifications of my action. I had struggled to make a good impression for days, and I certainly did not think punching somebody would win me any favors. I was certain that my captain was going to kick me off the beach. But as I emerged from my cabin, people who had barely interacted with me previously approached me to joke about my “big fight.” I was still concerned about Ole’s reaction. At the end of the day he returned from town and sent a member of our crew to fetch me. I dragged my feet on my way to his cabin and found Ole sitting on the porch, a scowl on his face. ‘This was it’, I thought.

Ole’s scowl quickly turned into a broad, wicked grin as he boomed, “Where’d you learn to fight like that?” Rather than sending me packing, Ole was impressed and amused. I had established myself on the beach and won credibility among the fishermen. My new status and my reputation as a hard worker earned me a spot in the following season in 2015. My story is illustrative of one of the many issues faced by women

commercial fishermen, who refer to themselves as fishermen, working in the male-dominated industry of commercial fishing.

My introduction to this fishing community began when I interned for the Oregon Folklife Network, the state's public folklore program, as a first-year folklore master's student at the University of Oregon in 2014. Through that work I was introduced to fishermen who share their experiences through performance at an event called the FisherPoets Gathering in Astoria, Oregon. I immediately felt myself drawn into the world of commercial fishing through the FisherPoets' performances. The women's performances particularly interested me, because I had previously associated the occupation with men. My interest in FisherPoetry is what led me to Alaska, inspired by the tales of adventure and grit in the performances.

The FisherPoets Gathering is an occasion where gender roles pervasive in commercial fishing are performed, reinforced, commented upon, and sometimes contested. The goal of my thesis is to identify and understand how FisherPoets' expressive performances engage and expose gender dynamics present in the occupation. I emphasize the perspectives of women participants, many of whose performances confront these power relations. My main argument is that FisherPoet women take the stage to create solidarity among women and to open up discourse about the inequalities persistent in the occupation. FisherPoet women assert their competence as poets and as fishermen through their performances, and in doing so they disrupt the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of women in commercial fishing.

Research Focus

My research focuses on the perspectives of women, almost exclusively of European heritage, who fish in the Pacific Northwest and perform FisherPoetry. There is a higher concentration of women fishing in the Pacific Northwest in comparison to other fishing regions in the United States. According to Charlene Allison's 1980's fieldwork, the "Pacific Northwest appears to be unique in having women who regularly fish commercially" and that "although the percentage of women fishing in the Pacific Northwest is perhaps only nine to ten percent of all fishermen, it appears a greater number than fish elsewhere in the United States" (243, 249). The women who are the focus of my thesis have worked on boats rather than onshore. The vast majority of performers at the FisherPoets Gathering are non-Native, which is reflective of the monopoly Euro-Americans have on the fishing industry (Allison).

Methodology

I conducted qualitative research among the FisherPoets and in the commercial fishing industry from the winter of 2014 through the summer of 2015. I attended two FisherPoets Gatherings as both an interviewer and audience member in February of 2014 and 2015. Additionally, I went twice as an interviewer and audience member to She Tells Sea Tales, a FisherPoetry event featuring only women performers, in March of 2014 and 2015. I conducted nine interviews with eight different people, seven FisherPoet women and my captain, Curt Olson. The women I interviewed included Erin Fristad, Tele Aadsen, Mary Jacobs, Mariah Warren, Kelley Watson, Jen Pickett, and Sue Sutherland (see Appendix B). I also collected thirty-three recordings of performances (video and

audio), and took 135 photographs at these events. I used digital audio and video to capture interviews and performances, as well as a digital camera to capture images. A list of the titles of poems appear in Appendix A, and a sample script of questions can be found in Appendix C.

Research Population and Setting at Events

The FisherPoets Gathering

The FisherPoets Gathering occurs each year in the sleepy coastal town of Astoria, Oregon. Commercial fishermen who call themselves “FisherPoets” reunite in the off-season to perform poetry, prose, stories, and songs about their occupation. Fisherman Jon Broderick helped to initiate the first FisherPoets Gathering in Astoria, Oregon with the help of historian Hobe Kytr and college professor Julie Brown (Boorstin). The FisherPoets Gathering is a space created by fishermen for fishermen to share their insights about the occupation through performance. This event exhibits many similarities to the Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, Nevada, though the motivation for the creation of the FisherPoets Gathering was different. The FisherPoets Gathering emphasizes the reunion of members of the commercial fishing industry rather than the entertainment value for an outside audience; Hal Cannon explains that the Cowboy Poetry Gathering was “produced by the Western Folklife Center. [T]he National Cowboy Poetry Gathering was started in 1985 by a small group of folklorists and poets, and has become an annual ritual for thousands of people who value and practice the artistic traditions of the region and are concerned about the present and future of the West” (“The History of the Gathering”).

Jon Broderick, the FisherPoets Gathering founder, noted that “even the first event [in 1998] was surprisingly well-attended, I invited forty folks... and thirty-nine showed up with their friends” (the FisherPoets Gathering 2014). The FisherPoets Gathering continues to be of great importance for the commercial fishermen that attend and participate. Over the years the event has grown in scale:

Today [2015] the Gathering has grown to over eighty performers featured in six venues over two nights, with Saturday morning workshops on everything from writing poetry to knot tying. During the evenings, deckhands, cannery workers, skippers and beach fishermen – men and women of all ages and persuasions who work on fishing boats – seiners, crabbers, gillnetters, trollers, draggers and more – ascend the steps to the stage for fifteen minutes to share their private reflections about their industry. Over a thousand visitors fill the seats to listen, laugh, cry and applaud. (the FisherPoets Gathering 2015)

As the FisherPoets Gathering attracts more participants, the audience also expands. While the organizers maintain that their objective is and has always been to host the event in support of the members of the commercial fishing industry, the recent growth of the event has garnered interest from those outside of the community. The FisherPoets Gathering has begun to attract the attention from national and international media sources, the National Arts Association of America, the Oregon Folklife Network, and other arts agencies. This attention has led to an influx of tourists at the FisherPoets Gathering who are not members of the fishing community.

However, the majority of the audience at the FisherPoets Gatherings is still composed of seasonal workers; the time of year is imperative for the event’s success. Since many Pacific Northwest fishermen work during the summer, the event runs annually in the off-season of winter. The location of the FisherPoets Gathering also helps to attract a receptive audience. Astoria, a small town at the mouth of the Columbia River, was historically the site of one of the largest salmon runs in the Pacific Northwest

(Meengs and Lackey). Although the number of salmon returning to the river has been vastly reduced by the development of dams along the Columbia, as well as by the changing water acidity and temperatures, the river still serves as an important symbolic location for fishermen in the Pacific Northwest.

Most performers and audience members share ties outside of the event. I witnessed the communal nature of the event when I attended my second FisherPoets Gathering in February 2015. Poets I met the previous year greeted me as I walked around Astoria, and I also found myself bumping into fishermen I had met on the fishing grounds. Nearly all of Jon Broderick's crew was in attendance, including his son Max, who performed a song I had heard at a party on Nushagak. Most of Jon's crew only had to drive twenty or thirty minutes from their homes in Cannon Beach to attend, but this did not detract from the feeling of a jovial reunion of "Nushagakers" when Max Broderick broke out his guitar and crooned the lyrics to his song "Pebble Mine is not the kind, no to hell to Pebble Mine!" The late night crowd at the KALA Gallery squeezed into the venue with their beers, stomping their feet against the sticky floors. Nushagak fishermen shouted the lyrics to the chorus, recalling the rowdiness of the Nushagak party as they careened at the back of the crowd in a cluster. It was the last venue open on Friday night, and the sense of community was palpable.

The founders and organizers created the event to allow anyone employed in commercial fishing to perform about their experiences; the event's main function is to provide a community space that serves as an outlet for these experiences. As Kelley Watson told me in our February 22, 2014 interview "It's a nice avenue to have a place to share. It's been really cathartic to be able to come here and share experiences. And this,

in my opinion, is not the normal fishing community here. I mean, this is very fringe community.” Individuals attend the event to share their experiences with sympathetic ears.

Former coordinator of the Southwest Folklore Center, James Griffith, made a similar point about the nature of the Cowboy Poetry Gathering:

[T]he employment of shared experiences, values, and language [which] serve as a bond among members of this occupational subculture... the reciter identifies the common language and experience that separate this occupational group from everyone else. It doesn't matter if the reciter is alone or with other cowboys; this in-group/out-group division is implied anyway. (32-33)

The importance of establishing community based upon the occupation and knowing that the audience is largely people in the industry, are important to the effectiveness of the performances. Because performers are also members of the audience and community, the objectives of the program are geared towards that community. As the audience expands to more outsiders, performers may need to explain more about the occupation to their non-fisher audience members.

The FisherPoets Gathering is especially imperative for women FisherPoets who use the stages to validate their experiences as women in a male-dominated occupation.

Jen Pickett was near tears when she shared in our 2/17/2015 interview:

One thing I love about FisherPoets is that, as a woman, I never felt fully accepted by the fishing community. I'm not a man, so I'm never really fully accepted by the men, and I'm not a fisherman's wife or girlfriend, so I was never fully accepted by the women, either. And FisherPoets is the one place where gender doesn't seem to matter. It was a place where I was finally accepted by the fishing community. It was really important for me to finally find acceptance. It's why I keep coming back, it's not to get on stage, it's to see my friends. It's nice to also have a place to share your stories where they're accepted. Nobody's criticizing your writing like in a classroom setting, nobody's rolling their eyes at you because you're in a bar lamenting that some guy's just taken a piss next to you and you think it's disgusting. It's just a place that you can say whatever it is that you need to say, and somebody, at least one person, will clap.

The women at the FisherPoets Gathering use the stage as an outlet and trust that the FisherPoet community will accept and support their work. Women like Jen can receive the acceptance they may not find in the larger fishing community. Even though there were more men than women performing at the 2014 and 2015 FisherPoets Gathering, women still felt that audiences were receptive (FisherPoets Gathering 2014 & FisherPoets Gathering 2015). The percentage of women performers is greater at the FisherPoets Gathering than in the industry as a whole (about 30-35% women and 65-70% men). Even so, the pressure to prove themselves as competent fishermen is still evident in their performances.

She Tells Sea Tales

She Tells Sea Tales is an event that occurs shortly after the FisherPoets Gathering. Only women participate as performers. Kelley Watson created it in 2014 as a fundraising event for the Port Townsend Girls' Boat Project. Many women fishermen participate in both the FisherPoets Gathering and the She Tells Sea Tales events that were held in 2014 and 2015. The audience at these events was composed of men and women from approximate ages of eight to eighty, mostly from the Port Townsend community, who wanted to support girls and women in their maritime pursuits. Hopefully, it will become an annual event to support future generations of women in the fishing industry.

Participant Observation in Alaska

In the spring of 2014 the Oregon Folklife Network invited two FisherPoets, Jon Broderick and Jay Speakman, to the University of Oregon campus to perform and to

teach a poetry workshop. At this event, I approached Jon to inquire about finding work in the fishing industry. Although Jon did not have any room on his crew, he told me he was willing to recommend me to a captain he knew might be looking for an extra crewmember. Soon after Jon sent me an email with Curt “Ole” Olson’s contact information; he worked from the same beach as Jon’s crew. I called Ole and within five minutes had the job and the bare minimum of information. I was expected to fly into the Dillingham airport in June and then make my way to the Peter Pan cannery where they would radio for somebody to come pick me up. That was the last I heard from Ole until I met him in the summer on Nushagak.

After working two weeks in the summer of 2014, I returned in 2015 and worked for a full season of salmon set-netting with my crew (six weeks). Set-netting is a type of fishing where fishermen set a net perpendicular to the shore to catch fish (see Fig. 6). My two summers spent fishing enabled me to immerse myself in the fishermen’s world, an experience that provided me with insight about their performances. I experienced firsthand what it was like for female set-netters, while I also learned about the occupation and the dynamics of a particular set-netting community.

This immersion allowed me to better understand the issues the FisherPoet women raised in performances and interviews. Laurel Doucette, professor of women’s studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland, emphasized that “a feminist approach to cultural studies will be grounded always in experience- our own and that of the subjects of our study” (24). By following this methodology, I was able to build stronger rapport with the women and better represent their perspectives.



Fig. 6: Set-net in Bristol Bay, AK. 2015.

Development psychologist Mary Field Belenky and her colleagues emphasize the value of using an emic approach in their book *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*:

Those operating within a morality of responsibility and care -primarily women- reject the strategy of blindness and impartiality. Instead, they argue for an understanding of the context for moral choice, claiming that the needs of individuals cannot always be deduced from general rules and principles and that moral choice must be determined inductively from the particular experiences each participant brings to the situation. They believe that dialogue and exchange of views allow each individual to be understood in his or her own terms. (8)

As a female participant in the commercial fishing industry, as well as an ethnographer, I was both prepared to ask FisherPoet women about their occupational experiences as well as about their creative intentions. My experiences in my role as a participant observer appear throughout my research as anecdotes, as seen in the beginning of this chapter. These anecdotes are intended to provide support to the experiences women FisherPoets express in their interviews and performances.

Structure of Research

The second chapter titled “The Successful FisherPoet” defines what makes a successful FisherPoet, arguing that the use of common community themes, occupational terminology, and narrator skill impact the success of a performance. The integration of common themes relevant to the commercial fishing industry demonstrates the extent that performers understand the shared values of the community. Work from folklorist Richard Bauman is integrated into the analysis of the work in this chapter, which primarily focuses on the performative aspects of FisherPoetry.

It should be noted that some of the meaning in FisherPoetry is lost when taken out of the performance context. Elements imperative to the experience of the audience, such as the body language, clothing, facial expressions, and tone of voice of the performer are lost in writing. The written word cannot replicate the experience of watching a young fisherman drunkenly perch on a stool to serenade his raucous crowd of fisherman friends.

Elements of style are imperative to a successful FisherPoet performance, and rely upon FisherPoets’ understanding of audience and community expectations. Folklorists Pauline Greenhill and Roger Renwick engage the stylistic and aesthetic nature of folk poetry, and their theories inform the structure of analysis in this chapter. Folklorist Dell Hymes defines folklore “in terms of the study of communicative behavior with an esthetic, expressive, or stylistic dimension” (133). Applying Hymes definition, FisherPoetry operates as a highly esthetic, expressive, and stylistic mode of communication, experienced through performance. This can be seen through FisherPoets’ adherence to common themes, occupational terminology, and performance skills.

Stylistic skills, while important to all FisherPoet performances, are addressed more in-depth in this chapter's discussion of successful women FisherPoets.

The modes of expression found in FisherPoetry are highly communicative, and reflect the values of the commercial fishing community. Folklorist Dan Ben-Amos emphasizes the importance of cultural context operating in folklore:

Folklore is very much an organic phenomenon in the sense that is an integral part of culture... The social context, the cultural attitude, the rhetorical situation, and the individual aptitude are variables that produce distinct differences in the structure, text, and texture of the ultimate verbal, musical, or plastic product. (4)

FisherPoetry integrates events that occur in the occupation, using these events as vehicles of communication for the values of the community. Ben-Amos argued that these artistic communications occur in small groups such as the FisherPoets' community. FisherPoets' expressive work operates within a set of expectations from the group regarding content, context, style, and tone which help to measure the success of the creative work.

FisherPoetry exists in the nexus of occupational lore, folk poetry, and performance, and therefore can provide insight into the social constructs present in the occupation. Similar to Cowboy Poetry, FisherPoetry addresses issues that are often not shared between members of the occupation in other contexts. Commercial fishermen are often discouraged from sharing their feelings with one another, and the FisherPoets Gathering subverts the stereotype of the stoic fisherman. Both the FisherPoets Gathering and the National Poetry Gathering bring together individuals from similar occupations to share their perspectives through performances. Both cowboy and FisherPoetry foreground the values of occupations historically associated with men.

Sandra Dolby Stahl's work on personal-experience narratives is applied to FisherPoetry, because FisherPoetry is often the stylized performance of personal-experience narratives. Stahl conceptualized the term personal-experience narrative as "personal narratives, stories based on real experiences [that] are usually not perpetuated in tradition much past the lifetime of the stories' main character... Their purpose is... to move us, to excite us, to entertain and teach us" (ix-x). Since the topics of FisherPoetry must contain elements of occupational folklore, FisherPoets often use their own experiences in the industry to bolster their opinions and feelings. FisherPoets share their experiences from the occupation in their poetry through their folk poetry, which Renwick and folklorist Jens Lund argue is common in working-class poetry. Lund addresses this in his work with Cowboy Poets, FisherPoets, and Loggers (*Cows and Logs* and "I Done What I Could"). Renwick addresses this in his volume *English Folk Poetry* in reference to industrial workers.

Performance for both events share common themes that revolve around tragedy, death, man-versus-nature, isolation, and American individualism. Both occupations emphasize hyper-masculine character traits, which revolve around aggression, physical strength, and recklessness (Mosher & Sirkin). The founding director of the Cowboy Poetry Gathering, Hal Cannon, calls cowboy poetry "the poetry of exiles," which describes "loneliness on the trail for loved ones back in civilization" ("Cowboy Poetry: A Poetry of Exiles" 64). Correspondingly, FisherPoetry reflects the solitude of commercial fishing. Poems in both emphasize "masculine" character traits; Jens Lund refers to this as "macho-poetry."

Due to the occupations' preference for male character traits, women are pressured to adhere to these traits in order to prove their competence as fishermen and performers. Women must constantly assert their competence in the occupation, and this pressure is reflected in their performances as they strive to prove their status as fishermen. Women use the same tactics for success as men but use occupational terminology and stress common community themes at a higher frequency in their performances than the men. This is because men do not experience the same pressures to prove their competence as women fishermen. Folklorist Gary Alan Fine argued in his chapter "In the Company of Men: Female Accommodation and the Folk Culture of Male Groups," that:

[W]hether females are accepted into the folk culture of male-dominated groups depends upon their willingness to accept and engage with the sexualized masculine culture of the group. Those women who accept these strictures are likely to succeed, in contrast to those who reject or are unable to fulfill the expectations of their male colleagues. (61)

Women must show that they are prepared to engage in the hypermasculine culture of commercial fishing, and they demonstrate this in their performances through their frequent use of occupational terminology, through their clothing and body language, and through their inclusion of common themes.

Women use additional tactics of coding in their performances to address sensitive topics about the occupation. Performing to audiences that come from a male-dominated occupation requires women to consider how to address sensitive topics their male audience members might react negatively to. Folklorist Joan Newlon Radner defines "coding [as] covert expressions of distributing subversive ideas- [that] are a common phenomenon in the lives of women, who have often been dominated, silenced, and marginalized by men" (vii). FisherPoet women frequently make use of coding in their

performances, using techniques such as metaphor, code names, and humor to relay sensitive messages. Overall, FisherPoet women must balance on the gender line to demonstrate competence as fisherpoets and as fishermen.

The third chapter looks into the ways that women use FisherPoetry to bolster and change the representation of women in the commercial fishing industry. Women use FisherPoetry to critique and bring awareness to double-standards and the gender division of labor. Men lower their expectations for women in the industry and create exceptions in the work, often giving women less physical tasks. Physical tasks are paramount in proving worker competence in commercial fishing, and are valued over less physical tasks such as cooking. By forcing women to take less physical tasks, women are less valued in the occupation. These lower expectations lead women to be pigeon-holed into work tasks deemed “women’s work.”

While commercial fishing does not explicitly exclude females, women have a difficult time breaking into and remaining in the occupation. Women struggle to participate on equal grounds with men. As in many occupations that rely on physical labor and are male dominated, men in the commercial fishing industry often undermine women’s physical and mental capabilities. Instead of being expected to perform the same tasks as their male coworkers, women fishermen are often given less physically demanding jobs, such as cooking or taking tickets. Men in commercial fishing undermine women with offers of assistance with tasks they deem too difficult for women. Exceptions not offered to other men.

Allison’s fieldwork in the Pacific Northwest explores the possible historical and cultural factors that enabled women to enter into fishing. Allison’s work examines non-

native women, explaining that this is because the industry has been dominated by non-native immigrants and much of the data collected concerns non-native fishermen. Allison suggests that the creation of canneries allowed women to begin entering into the fishing industry in greater numbers during WWII and the Depression era. Women first began to find work on boats as early as 1937, though a much greater number of women began to work on boats around the same time as the feminist movement in the 1970's (247-249).

Since Allison's work, increasing numbers of women have entered into the occupation. At the time of Allison's fieldwork in the 1980's, the percentage of women working on boats was only 9-10% of fishermen in Alaska (249). The percentage of women now working on boats has risen to 14% in 2015 (Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development). Some speculations about the increasing numbers include the growing awareness of the need for equality in the workplace in U.S. culture, as well as the impact of the first generation of women fishermen on the industry and on younger generations. Previous generations of women who broke into commercial fishing paved the way for current and future generations.

When FisherPoet women address gender related issues through their creative works, they contribute to shifting attitudes and improving gender equality. Their performances and written pieces open up discussions about the underrepresentation of women in commercial fishing and the struggles they face. Studies about the commercial fishing industry tend to downplay the involvement of women despite women's increasing involvement. Dona Lee Davis and Jane Nadel-Klein draw attention to the underrepresentation in the introduction of their book *To Work and to Weep: Women in Fishing Economies*:

Unfortunately... tantalizing incidents of women's participation [in research] are often relegated to 'remarks in passing' (e.g. Lofgren 1979; Thompson et al. 1983). Women seem to be viewed as interesting only in their non-fishing roles, with little attempt to see the cultural context or theoretical import of such roles. Given the extent to which women participate either on board or on shore in fishing activities around the world, it is tempting to speculate that the prevailing perception of fishing as an exclusively male occupation reflects the western bias of conceiving fishing as an aggressive capture enterprise, or in other words, as hunting. Since the next assumption is that males are to hunting as females are to gathering, fishing is perceived *a priori* as a male endeavor. (30)

Both those involved in research and societal representations of commercial fishing often neglect and downplay the roles of women in the industry. By performing at FisherPoets events and by writing about their experiences in fishing, FisherPoet women disrupt long-held assumptions of the fishing industry as an exclusively male domain.

Davis and Nadel-Klein, whose work focuses on women in fishing economies across the world, emphasize the importance of researching women in fishing economies. They write that "since numerous myths of female passivity or insignificance appear to characterize much of the literature on fishing communities... the subject of women in fishing communities deserves special attention" (18).

In order to upend these expectations and critique the industry, women use their FisherPoetry to emphasize their competence. The creative expressions of women often expose the different tactics and techniques for success they must develop alongside the basic requirements of the job, which sometimes differ from those of their male coworkers. These tactics and techniques encompass the adjustments they must make to meet the physical demands of the job. This creates strong role models for future generations of women to continue challenging the inequality present in the occupation.

The fourth and final chapter addresses the ways that women use FisherPoetry to generate awareness surrounding social interactions. This chapter looks into the ways

women use their performances to subvert expectations of their social interactions in the occupation. Women subvert expectations of motherhood and expected behavior, dispelling the expectation that they should act as nurturers. Women who continue fishing after they have children disrupt the expectation that it is women's duty to be the primary care givers for children. The husbands and partners of women help to challenge standard roles of parenting by taking on equal or more responsibility in the care of their children, thus allowing their wives or partners to continue working. Other women can disprove the notion that they must give up fishing in order to take care of children by proving that they can fish *and* act as the primary caretaker of their children. Finally, women who are not mothers that are expected to care for children or act as nurturers critique the expectation through their poetry.

Women also challenge the presence of sexual exploitation, expectations, and violence in their poetry by disrupting the silence present around such topics. Working in a male-dominated industry, women often struggle to keep their jobs if they are not involved in relationships. Women often find work in the industry through familial or romantic relationships, and those women who chose to enter into the occupation without relationship ties face additional struggles. This is because relationships are made more focal to women's work experiences than they are for men. Men in the occupation occasionally expect women to have sex with them, based solely on the demographics of the occupation. Because there are so few women working among men, women face the threat of sexual exploitation. In addition to this, women must also be ever-vigilant in their activities in the industry because of the looming threat of sexual violence.

This chapter is most important in confronting the social dynamics present in the occupation. The chapter highlights the ways that women challenge and change the expectations for their interactions through their expressive performances.

Concluding Thoughts

In their performances at the FisherPoets Gathering and She Tells Sea Tales, women highlight the differences they encounter through their creative expressions, which they use as a tool for awareness, solidarity, and social change. First and foremost, the participants, male and female, of the FisherPoets Gathering are not representative of the population of commercial fishermen. FisherPoets arrive at the FisherPoets Gathering prepared to tear down the walls they build in the occupation. Fishermen build walls between themselves and other fishermen, infrequently sharing genuine expressions of emotion. The nature of the event is distinctive from the occupation, and generates a cathartic atmosphere for fishermen. FisherPoet Erin Fristad, in an interview on 3/6/2014, sums up how most FisherPoets see themselves in comparison to the rest of the commercial fishing industry, “I would say that the crowd is not representative of the industry as a whole. It’s sort of the cream of the crop in the sense that they’re writing poetry, they’re expressing their feelings, they’re getting together as a community.”

CHAPTER II

THE SUCCESSFUL FISHERPOET

With the stages set and the anchors out, fishermen descend on the FisherPoets Gathering hoping to haul in a catch of a different kind. They come with their poems, songs, and prose, ready to perform to a community they love and who they hope will be accepting of their entertainment and insights about the occupation. Out at sea, fishermen must be familiar with the waters in which they fish and have the right gear to catch the right fish. This type of knowledge comes in handy at the FisherPoets Gathering, where performers must know how to hook their audience. When preparing for the FisherPoets Gathering, performers must know what and where the FisherPoets Gathering is; who attends the FisherPoets Gathering; and what kind of performances the audience will expect.

The location, time of year, number of venues, and background of the FisherPoets Gathering help to focus the event and draw an audience. Audience and event setting inform the decisions competent performers make about the type of material they will present, though succeeding as a performer is not the only concern (Bauman). First and foremost, the FisherPoets Gathering is viewed by participants as a place to find a like-minded and accepting community. Performer competence is secondary to the community, though there are performance expectations.

The successful FisherPoet anticipates how the different event venues, times, and other performers will affect the atmosphere and attitudes of the audience members. Poets inject their performances with themes and terminology relevant to the occupation. The standards for FisherPoet women, however, are different than those for men. FisherPoet

women must pay particular attention to elements of keying through themes and terminology, because they are under greater pressure to prove their competence as FisherPoets *and* as fishermen. With men, few question their status as fishermen and many women FisherPoets are keenly aware of this double-standard both in fishing and onstage. On the fishing grounds, women fishermen are expected to be masculine, but never *too* masculine. At the same time, women fishermen are expected to be feminine, but never *too* feminine. In order to prove their competence as FisherPoets and as fishermen, women must demonstrate their ability to straddle this delicate gender line.

Successful Fisherman, Successful FisherPoet

While finding and supporting community is the primary goal for performers at the FisherPoets Gathering, there are still standards FisherPoets must meet to demonstrate their competence. Skilled FisherPoets pay attention to audience, venue, and performance time.

In her 2015 interview, Jen Pickett described her preparation process:

I try to think about the 15-minute slot and how long the piece is going to take. I try to think about the venue and the time of day I'm going to be there, and what the audience is going to be. If you heard the piece at the Event Center, that same piece wouldn't work at the Wet Dog because it's such a different venue. Or if you're on at six [p.m.] and it's the start, it's not the same as if you're on at nine [p.m.] when people are drunk and things like that. Also, I've learned to read the audience and look at who is on before me, and what kind of attitude the audience is going to have. Because I've made the mistake of having 3 pieces memorized, and then I ended up at the Wet Dog. I had never been on there before, and those 3 pieces didn't work because it was so loud and nobody could hear me! And you also have to think about how long it's going to take the emcee to present you, because that will eat up 30 seconds of your time.

The six venue spaces at the FisherPoets Gathering range in size and space layout, which greatly affects the nature of the performance. The Astoria Event Center was built

for community events. The space is large and open with good sound distribution; during the FisherPoets Gathering, seats and tables are set up facing a raised stage. The Astoria Event Center is the main venue for the Gathering, and thus consistently attracts a large audience. In contrast, the Wet Dog Café is a restaurant and brewery with a full bar and table seating. The stage is towards the back and is off-center, so the sound quality is not as good as at the Astoria Event Center. Quiet, somber performances are not likely to succeed at the Wet Dog Café because it also operates as a regular bar and restaurant, so there is additional noise from servers and individuals eating and drinking. Food and beverage services at the Event Center are peripheral; the focus is more on the performances than on the food.

In addition to the venue, skilled performers consider the time of their performance. As Jen notes, the crowd is likely to be a lot louder later in the evening when audience members have had several hours to drink. Skilled performers also think about the type of tone the previous performer has set. For example, a serious performance piece would not have been successful after Max Broderick's 10:30 p.m. boisterous performance of "Pebble Mine."

Common themes found in performances reflect the values of the community, and FisherPoets demonstrate their adherence to those values through the inclusion of the themes in their poetry. FisherPoetry enables the audience to learn what characteristics make an individual successful as a fisherman.

The rugged, individualistic nature of the occupation is a common theme. FisherPoets often stress the importance of will-power and independence. This toughness is tied to concepts of masculinity, which in turn reflects how the occupation values

masculine character traits over those considered feminine. For example, the words “WARNING: Alaska is no place for Pussy’s” was written in graffiti on the inside of one of the Nushagak crew cabins (see Fig. 7). This graffiti equated the colloquial word for female genitalia with women and weakness. Fishermen who demonstrate qualities of masculinity are considered competent, as are poets who emphasize these in their poems and prose. Donald Mosher and Mark Sirkin link characteristics of hyper-masculinity to heightened stereotypical male behavior relating to aggression, sexuality, and physical strength. These traits associated with hyper-masculinity are common in FisherPoetry. Called “macho-poetry” in his 2015 presentation at the American Folklore Society Conference, Jens Lund shared a poem by Wesley “Geno” Leech that epitomizes this type of masculinity. Leech’s poem, “A Viking Funeral”, tells the story of a fisherman who was “all cargo, not flotsam or jetsam//stood six football four in his gurried Ballard/Stetson,” “...smelled like diesel fuel and stank of albacore,” and “fished like a drunk and drank like a fish.” Leech’s poem follows the story of a fisherman who decided to go down with his boat rather than give it to the bank to settle his debt. The character in Leech’s story left behind a final note:

I’M GONE TO VALHALLA,
I WENT LIKE A MAN.
I DONE WHAT I COULD,
I DID WHAT I CAN.

Popular FisherPoets also stress the importance of protecting the environment for future generations. The environment’s health greatly affects fish populations, which in turn affect the future of fishermen’s livelihood. Max Broderick’s, “Pebble Mine,” explicitly speaks to the point. This song focuses on the controversial digging of an open-pit mineral mine, Pebble Mine, at the headwaters of Bristol Bay. Many fishermen depend

upon the health of the bay for their livelihood, and the Pebble Mine project threatens the large runs of salmon that return to the bay every year. The Pebble Mine’s “dam and 10-square-mile-wide containment pond are intended to hold between 2.5 billion and 10 billion tons of mine waste... Any release of mine waste into the surface or groundwater has the potential to harm Bristol Bay’s salmon runs” (Savebristolbay.org).



Fig. 7: Graffiti written on the wall inside a cabin. Nushagak Beach, Bristol Bay, AK. Photographer: Ben Evans, 2015

FisherPoetry is often steeped in real events that occur in the occupation. Folklorist Roger Renwick explains that the content of folk poetry is rarely “divorced from an actual occurrence (a poem on the topic of nostalgia, say, or the delights of love), or even [about] fictional events,” and that content more often adheres to “real happenings in the immediate cultural contexts of maker and audience are by far the preferred topics of working-class folk poetry (5). In order to demonstrate competence and validate their status within the group, FisherPoets must include occupational elements in their creative expressions. The most successful FisherPoets steep their performances in events they experienced firsthand, and relate them to common community concerns.

As folklorist Pauline Greenhill explains, “Rhythmic and/or rhyming texts, intended for reading, chanting, recitation, and/or singing, including local compositions as well as traditional verse, [are] often highly symbolic and relevant to a community’s knowledge, beliefs, and views, [and] are considered folk poetry” (233). Scott Preston explains that Cowboy Poetry’s “essential underlying function is that of a transmission vehicle for cultural values and instruction... It is the transmitter of practical knowledge that... most clearly serves its audience as an educational tool” (43). Similarly, the creative expressions of FisherPoets transfer, reinforce, or question the values of the occupation. Understanding FisherPoetry as folk poetry enables us to pay attention to the unifying function of the FisherPoets’ event. FisherPoets Geno Leech and Max Broderick are well-received because their materials display an understanding of audience expectations.

According to Lori Hager, community arts “refer to an intrinsically participatory collaborative process and to work that employs art-based methods but emanates from settings other than the art world” (161). But including non-community members (non-fishermen) as audience members places greater pressure on performers. There is some concern about modifying terminology so that non-fishermen can understand. In our 2015 interview, Mary Jacobs explained that her process for including materials in her performances revolved around her assumption that since it was going to FisherPoets, that her audience would “understand something about fishing so [she does not] have to explain everything.” Mary later contrasted this experience to the situation when she presented her work to a group with a majority of non-fishermen with whom she had to define what she felt was even the simplest of terminology, such as the word “skiff.”

FisherPoets use language and experience to distinguish themselves as fishermen from non-fishermen. Bauman states that performers must demonstrate cultural-specific competence for an effective performance. He explains:

Fundamentally, performance as a mode of spoken verbal communication consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of **communicative competence**. This competence rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways. Performance involves on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content... Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expression and gives license to the audience to regard the act of expression and the performer with special intensity (*Verbal Art as Performance* 11)

As members of the speech community, fishermen recognize FisherPoetry through the jargon and common themes that are recognizable from the occupation. These methods of communication are present in the artistry of FisherPoets, and frame the event space as a space created with fishermen in mind. Although the audience is not composed of only fishermen, these communicative keys can still likely be recognized by non-fishermen as being related to the occupation.

Successful Woman Fisherman, Successful Woman FisherPoet

Women must demonstrate the same grasp of occupational knowledge and values as their male counterparts. In fact, women must put forth more effort than men to prove their competence as successful fishermen and FisherPoets. Although men use the language of the occupation in their poetry to demonstrate their competence, the use of occupational language is more important in women's poetry. Women fishermen are constantly under the pressure to prove their competence in the occupation, and they are able to do this through performing the same physical tasks with equal skill as the men.

The pressure to prove themselves in the fishing industry transfers to FisherPoet women's performances. FisherPoet women use the stage at the FisherPoets Gathering to prove their competence as FisherPoets and as fishermen.

The skills of the narrator as a performer are important and valued in addition to their competence in performing relevant material. Successful performers engage their bodies and use appropriate intonation to enhance their performances; they also reflect occupational values of masculinity through their bodies. Folklorist Lisa Gilman expounds upon this point when she explains how certain musical forms are masculinized through performance:

It is not just that it is a majority of male bodies that perform, but it is also what these bodies look like and what the performers display and do with their bodies. The physicality of performers: the musculature of their bodies, gestures, clothing, jewelry, body art, hair styles, postures, facial expressions, movements, manner of handling the microphone, speech, and spatial relationships with one another and the audience all contribute to idealizations of masculinity. (88)

As with the music Gilman writes about, FisherPoets take control of the stage using similar tactics of performance. The FisherPoet men display their masculinity on stage, and they can do this through the aforementioned tactics. For example, a masculine body posture could involve standing up straight with his legs apart. Men also perform their masculinity through the volume of their voices. The louder, the more masculine. Another way FisherPoets successfully contextualize their performances in terms of masculinity is through their outfits. This tactic is especially effective for FisherPoet women who wear XTRATUF boots or work clothes on stage. Wearing occupational clothing on stage creates a connection to the work and can enhance the legitimacy of a performer.

Incorporating occupational terminology enhances the believability of FisherPoet performances. FisherPoet women, especially, use occupational terminology to prove their

competence as fishermen. FisherPoet Erin integrates technical jargon in her performance *Responding to an Attempt to Write a Poem about a Punk-Ass Greenhorn Chauvinist Pig*, in order to establish her legitimate status and authority as a member of the commercial fishing community:

We've nearly wanted out on deck, storing the *chain binders*, hooking up the *tow-lines*, centering the *boom*, covering the *cleats*, adjusting the *deck boards*, securing the *davit*, loosening the *hatches*, centering the *side tow*. What we want is you paying attention when the *skiff* comes alongside, don't drop the pass line, don't get caught in the deck winch, don't let the *Canadian* slam you in the head. Show us that you're a good deckhand, give us a reason to smile.

The highly technical language of this excerpt demonstrates Erin's mastery as she establishes, confirms, and reestablishes her competence as a performer and as a fisherman. Erin immerses the language of the occupation in the appropriate context, describing the everyday tasks required of the average fisherman. Erin shows that she not only knows what a tow-line or a cleat is, but that she also knows what to *do* with the tow-line or the cleat.

In order to prove their competence in the occupation, women must demonstrate that they are capable of exhibiting hypermasculine tendencies, while also maintaining stereotypical feminine traits. Jen Pickett commented upon this double-standard in her 2015 interview:

I kind of joke and say "Well, there's no room for a lady on a fishing boat." I usually try to make a joke about double-standards. Like when a guy snots on the deck, it's totally accepted, but when a girl does it it's not accepted. What am I supposed to do when I have to snot? I mean, my hands are covered in jellyfish, too! I can't just pull out my lace kerchief from my Grundens and properly, quietly blow my nose. It's ridiculous. And if I hurt my toe, I swear too! I just don't think those stereotypes have any place on the boat when I'm just trying to make it through the day, too.

Jen's explanation shows how ridiculous the double-standards are; women work under the same conditions as do men and want to have the same freedom in their bodily functions.

In contrast, Erin critiques the industry's aversion to femininity through her outfits, body language, and tone of voice. One of the outfits I have seen her perform consisted of a tight-fitting black turtleneck, sleek fitting pants, high-heeled boots, and tasteful jewelry, which emphasized her femininity and woman's body (see Fig. 8). Erin also wears makeup and styles her hair for her performances. While she presents a sexualized, female gendered self through her clothing. Erin's performance of "The Fisherman's Dream," about a fisherman's dream of an affair with a mistress aboard his boat, exemplifies her techniques. Erin's recitations demonstrate not just competence but mastery. She takes control of her sexuality and flaunts it with authority and confidence, common traits associated with hyper-masculinity. The commercial fishing community encourages women to behave demurely. Most women fishermen display competence by diminishing character traits alluding to their sexuality, which their community perceives as getting in the way of the work. Erin's performances subvert these behavioral expectations and make clear her disdain for societal mores that dictate "acceptable" behavior. Sexual empowerment is not among the valued character traits for commercial fishing women, and expressing control over their bodies is one way that women begin to challenge limits on their behavior.

Like Jen's observation about limitations placed on her as a woman, Moe Bowstern's prose piece "Subcutaneous Layer of Fat" critiques the double-standard for behavior: "Why must I prove myself every half hour? Why am I alone expected to say 'Please,' 'Thank You?' Why am I denied digestive functions- burping, farting?"



Fig. 8: Erin Fristad performing at She Tells Sea Tales 2014 at the Northwest Maritime Center in Port Townsend, WA.

On February 27th, 2015, I interviewed Tele Aadsen, about her 2014 prose performance of “The Princess and the Sea.” Unlike Erin, Tele wore a pair of baggy canvas pants, boots, a loose black zip-up jacket, and a bandana keeping her hair back from her makeup-less face. With one hand shoved into the pocket of her pants, Tele leaned forward and told her story quietly into the microphone. Tele’s intense and quiet performances are often poised and inspire silence among the sometimes-rowdy audience members.

In this piece, Tele wrote about her existential struggle while working as a deckhand on a friend’s family operated boat. Already uncomfortable with children, Tele was forced to interact with the princess-loving daughter of her skipper. In her performance, Tele told the audience she came to “two silent resolutions. One, that I’ll spend most of my time on deck. And two, that I’ll be the best subversive, anti-princess role model that I can be.” I asked Tele to talk about how she negotiates her gender identity. She responded by telling me about her experiences growing up in the fishing

industry. Tele's parents began fishing when she was seven; after her father quit fishing she continued to fish with her mom. Tele explained that she:

...intentionally turned away from some of the girls who were also boat kids, because at that age I had it in my head that to be really *valid* as this young, burgeoning fisherman, I needed to be one of the boys. And, so it seemed like that was always at the cost of denigrating anything that was traditionally female. And the older I get, and think more about gender stuff, I cringe. There was only ever male or female in my head, there were these rigid binaries. I just completely built these boxes around myself, that I could only be this or only be that, and there was no in between. And as I've gotten older, and I've gotten to engage with transgender folks, I'm just like "Wow, this is not a healthy dynamic that our culture has," but that doesn't mean that I've made much progress on figuring out how to undo it for myself and my own thinking.

Many women in commercial fishing and at the FisherPoets Gathering face this internal conflict, struggling between their individualism and the expectations of their community. While Erin embraces the feminine aspects of her identity, Tele has rejected her feminine characteristics because she worries that she might be seen as less valid.

Erving Goffman theorized that in our everyday lives we constantly perform versions of ourselves, and that there are certain "sign-vehicles" that clue other people to how they can interpret an individual. Goffman explained that "information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him" (1).

When women take on masculine characteristics on the fishing grounds to prove their competence in fishing they expect to elicit a positive response from other fishermen.

Fine explains that:

[T]he mere fact that women have access to a male-dominated setting does not mean they will be fully accepted or treated with respect... Women who wish to be part of male-dominated groups typically must be prepared to accept established patterns of male bonding and must be able successfully to decode male behavior

patterns... These women must be willing to engage in- or at least tolerate- coarse joking and teasing and must accept the male-based informal structure of the group. (61)

Women of the fishing industry must constantly read the “sign-vehicles” of situations, in as much as their coworkers are reading them. At the FisherPoets Gathering, successful women performers must constantly read the event, and key their material. Women include gender issues based on their anticipation of how the audience will react.

Another tactic for success occurs when women utilize coding in their performances to address sensitive topics. Explicit coding occurs when “the fact of the code is usually apparent even to those who cannot decipher it” (Radner 5). Women integrate the use of code names to refer to captains and crewmembers to avoid jeopardizing their jobs. For example, one woman referred to a man who made inappropriate sexual advances as “the Smiler” because he always leered. Her use of a pseudonym made it clear that she was using coding but that she did not want to expose the identity of “the Smiler” to her audience. Women also incorporate metaphors in their FisherPoetry as codes to address difficult topics, such as experiences with sexual violence or exploitation, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Humor is another tactic women use to tackle sensitive topics. The use of humor in performances at the FisherPoets Gathering is also a socially sanctioned mechanism for expressing criticism, partly because it can help prevent individuals from feeling defensive about sensitive topics. Fine addresses this in his chapter on women in male occupations: “Since joking is a traditional way by which unofficial, unstated, but crucial values are expressed, the joking culture of a workplace underlies the gender/status character of the group” (69). Erin Jakubek performed a hilarious piece at She Tells Sea Tales in 2015,

using humor to engage the gender expectations of her skipper, Steve. She told about how her inability to cook became an issue with her skipper:

Seemingly out of the blue, he spun around from his position at the wheel and in an irritated growl, he spat “You know, if you don’t start cooking dinner more often then you’re really of no use to me on this boat.” Pierced to the core as if I were a salmon pierced with a gaff hook, I stood frozen for a moment... Before I began flopping around on deck. I tried to think quickly on my feet, and maintain the balance between standing up for myself and being apologetic all at once. I’d shied away from cooking dinner after... what I considered a proud culinary moment... had earned me *maybe* a one star rating from Steve, with the side comment that I had “Fucking botched the meal.” Maybe a seasoned crewmember could have let that comment roll off her back, but those were fightin’ words in my book!

Erin’s performance had the entire audience at the Northwest Maritime Center laughing throughout, as she navigated sensitive topics with her humor. Humorous performances are better received for their entertainment value, and often are seen as more successful than non-humorous performances.

Tele expressed her concern about not being funny enough for her audience in our interview:

Oh, I’m NOT funny! I am the downer? It’s how I think of myself. That is something I struggled with, coming to FisherPoets. I remember my first year, I was feeling very [self-]conscious [about not being a] funny person! It was a couple of hours before a friend was scheduled to go on, another young woman, and she was scribbling out her piece and second guessing herself for the exact same reason that I was! I went and found Moe who was emceeing that night, and I told her about what we were both feeling, and she was so like “NO! NO! Fuck that! You get up there and you say that, because that’s what you need to say, and that’s what they need to hear!” And so [FisherPoets has taught me] to trust my own voice, and trust my experience. All of our methods are valued, and we need all of those different voices and styles because each one is going to reach somebody different.

The pressure to integrate humor to lighten the message of the poetry is a concern for women, though the support of other members of the community can help women feel validated in their work and concerns.

Concluding Thoughts

Keeping performances and pieces of poetry and prose personal becomes more of a challenge when operating around the need for technical descriptions of the work. The level of skill required to maintain individual voice in performances while using technical jargon is highly impressive. Performers must find ways to successfully illustrate their experiences, while at the same time including a high level of specified language for their in-group audiences.

In the following chapters, it will be important to remember the roles audience, intention, and space play in the creation of FisherPoetry. FisherPoets, and especially the women of FisherPoets, must keep their audience in mind during the creation of their creative pieces, and must consider the event space when preparing for performances. In order to achieve the validation and solidarity from their community, women FisherPoets must understand who their audience members are and what topics and content will successfully relay their messages to the audience.

CHAPTER III

“LET ME PICK THAT UP, THAT’S HEAVY”: SHIFTING THE TIDES OF REPRESENTATION

Women fishermen are often given less physically demanding jobs than their male coworkers. Men in the occupation also often make exceptions for women in the industry. These exceptions occur when men offer assistance to women in completing tasks expected of male workers. Discouraging women from working the more physical tasks of the job undermine women’s capabilities. Physicality is imperative in the occupation, and less physical roles are usually valued less than are more physical roles. Less physical tasks are often associated with women's work, which is less valued than men's work. Limiting women to less physical roles exacerbates the problem of inequality present in the industry. Women’s performances publically critique the misconception that women are less physically able and thus make less competent fishermen. This critique is especially significant because their male coworkers or captains may be in the audience. In their performances, women become role models for other women by providing strong, powerful representations of women in commercial fishing.

Lower Expectations

“Are you sure you have that?”

“Here, let me take that for you.”

“Don’t hurt yourself!”

“Be careful!”

“Don’t worry, you don’t have to do that.”

These innocuous offers of help generated contention between my male crewmates and me. I heard similar phrases and words echoed consistently by my fellow women fishermen. The reactions women have to others questioning their competence range from anger to complicity. Women are so often questioned in the workplace, and it is impossible for anyone to react every time it occurs.

Fortunately for me, even though my first captain was hesitant to hire a woman, he never questioned my ability to complete the work. Because I was the only crewmember, he had to rely on my competence. While he was normally capable of running his boat on his own, a recent knee surgery had forced him to hire someone and thus rely upon me.. By the end of my work on his boat I had gained work skills and proven that I could carry my own weight.

The second season when I fished with Ole, I had to fight for my spot on the boat. Ole made me ride out to the boat on the Argo instead of letting me trudge through the mud with the rest of the crew and asked me to work fewer hours. Argos are vehicles that can traverse the mud during low tide to reach the skiffs (Fig. 9). After a day or two of politely and grudgingly accepting Ole’s exceptions, I began to find ways to participate on equal grounds with my male crewmates. The first way I fought against these exceptions was to mud walk. Mud walking is a term used for the arduous journey some set-netters must make during low-tide (see Fig. 10). Before heading out across the mud, I had to make sure that I was wearing the proper gear. My first season I learned that booted waders do not work in the mud. Instead, I wore waders with attached neoprene socks so that I could wear shoes over them. I wore shoes and not boots, because shoes can lace

tight enough to prevent them from suctioning off in the mud. We had to walk across a long stretch of mud to reach the skiffs, usually at the beginning and the end of shifts. Imagine walking across mud that you can sink into up to your knees, while wearing layers of restrictive gear, and carrying whatever you might need for the day. It is not an easy feat, and having a shorter stature makes the task even more difficult. This was difficult, but not impossible.



Fig. 9: The Argo, a vehicle used to ride across the mudflats during low tide. Nushagak, Bristol Bay, AK in 2015.



Fig. 10: The mudflats. Nushagak, Bristol Bay, AK in June 2014.

The first few mud walks out to the boat, Ole drove up in the Argo and ordered me to “get in.” Ole’s different treatment made me feel embarrassed and frustrated, but I would comply. That is until I decided to rebel. Instead of waiting to leave with the rest of my crew, I headed out to the mud early. When Ole caught up to me halfway through my trip through the mud and ordered me onto the Argo, I refused. He decided, dubiously I imagine, that I was at least capable of mud walking. From that point forward Ole let me walk out with the rest of the crew unassisted.

These exceptions detracted from the respect my crew had for me. In the beginning, Ole’s politeness and concern for my welfare made it difficult for me to refuse the exceptions he was making. Ole, or Big O, who was so well-known on the beach for yelling at his crew, never once raised his voice or reprimanded me for the mistakes I knew I was making. He treated me “like a lady”, and I hated it.

Learning how to say no became a way of life for me when offered help throughout the season, and I also had to say no to men other than Ole. My use of the word became harder, meaner, unapologetic. To the credit of most of my fellow crewmen, most of the time I only needed to politely decline their offers of help. I lost my composure just once during the season at the end of a long shift when a member from another crew got on the boat. He refused to believe that I could accomplish tasks I had been successfully completing without help. After taking lines, buckets, and fish from my hands, I let loose an angry tirade that shocked him into silence for the remainder of the shift. Needless to say, after this incident that crewman did not try to “help” unless I asked. I had proven myself through my assertiveness and use of language as well as work abilities.

FisherPoet Mariah Warren also experienced the type of well-meaning aid from men on her crews, remarking in our 2/27/2015 interview (see Fig. 11):

There are men who are awesome and incredibly well-meaning, but they will absolutely come over and say “let me pick that up, that’s heavy.” And even though they’re not overtly sexist, they feel it’s their responsibility. And most of the time they are bigger than me at least, being a woman of relatively small stature... Even if you’ve never had an overt sexist comment from the crew that you’re working from, it simply is part of the reality that you live within an industry that is primarily big strong men. There’s always a period of showing... And there’s so much that you can make up for with working smart and using proper lifting dynamics, you know it’s possible that if you’re strong for your size and know how to lift something with your knees instead of your back... It’s part of the background that’s always there. That you’re having to prove yourself. Thinking about that, I’m sure that any greenhorn in the industry, anybody that has the high advantage on them, has their eyes on them until they’re competent. There’s a bigger question floating over your head when you’re also a smallish female.

Even well-meaning men in the commercial fishing industry unintentionally express their lack of confidence in the physical strength of women. By only offering assistance to female crewmembers, men show that they have lower expectations of women.

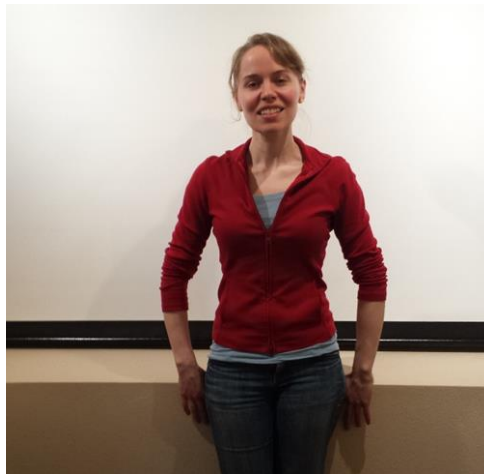


Fig. 11: Mariah Warren at the 2015 FisherPoets Gathering. Astoria, OR.

FisherPoet Moe Bowstern vents about men’s underestimation of her strength in her performances. Moe regularly performs while wearing a flannel shirt and cargo pants. I have also seen Moe perform wearing jewelry and nice more feminine sweaters. Moe’s

performances and her publication of the XTRATUF “zine” are admirable. Moe began publishing her “zine” in 1995 as an outlet for self-expression for herself and other commercial fishermen. One example, The Greenhorn Issue (a greenhorn is somebody new to fishing), covered stories and advice from fishermen’s first experiences in commercial fishing. Another example, Salmon Season ’01, contains Moe’s story about her time spent beach seining (a different term used to refer to set-netting). Moe gave me these zines for free, pointing to the covers, which proudly read “Free to commercial fishing women,” and told me “welcome aboard.”

Moe’s prose published in the FisherPoets anthology, “Subcutaneous Layer of Fat,” expresses her frustration at how others use her gender as a reason to underestimate her physical strength:

Subcutaneous layer of fat. This phrase in my head as I work alongside men on fishing boats, construction job sites. Their forearm muscles ripple. Mine are indistinct, unnoticed. My breasts, a modest handful, always noticed- my biceps never, though they are roughly equal in size...[...]No time on a job site for discussion of gender, examination of woman’s strength and endurance compared to man. No time for humorous comment pointing out how offensive to hear so often, “You sure? That’s really hard. Can you do it?”...[...] There is always time for anger- hard on me, to be always so angry. When they say (again) “This is really heavy.” I pick up my end, say, “Which floor?”

In this piece, she argues that even if her muscles are not as large as her male crewmates’ muscles, they are just as effective in getting the job done. Women fishermen’s ability to complete work tasks is so frequently challenged that they often make the decision to not react at all. There is not enough time or emotional energy for women to effectively complete their jobs while constantly telling men why their offers of help are problematic. Moe suggests that women often prove that they are strong enough through their actions, rather than their words.

Men are also subject to expectations of behavior. While women in the U.S. learn the expectation that they are less physically strong, men learn that they must help women in physical tasks to be polite. Sociologist Tony Coles explained that men must also perform their gender in order to meet societal expectations. Masculine character traits relate to physical strength, aggression, and stoicism. So even though the offers of help challenge women's competence, men would fail to perform their masculinity if they did not offer to help.

In the context of the male-dominated U.S. military, Gilman argues that “men and women have to be manly in order to survive and appropriately serve in their capacities as service men and women” (19). Her research also reveals “that some men suffered abuse because they did not conform to ideals of masculinity, either socially or in their ability to effectively do their jobs” (39). These expectations of behavior for men are also be found in the fishing industry, where men must perform their masculinity in order to succeed at the work. There is likely additional pressure for men to help women working in a male-dominated occupation, because men are pressured to compete with other men to prove the extent of their manliness.

Limited Roles of Women Fishermen

Working as a set-netter, I experienced limits on how I could complete the same work as my male crewmates. The heights of the men on my crew ranged from 6'0-6'4 while I am only 5'4. The differences in heights and physical strength affected how I could work. For example, my height made it harder for me to lift up the heavy power-roller on the boat so I learned to use my shoulder to lift it (see Fig. 12). I also learned to

wait to see how high the water came up on my taller male crewmembers' waders before getting into the water. If the boat was in too deep for my height, I used the net to pull the boat in closer to shore. I did not need the help of my crewmembers, but I did need to adjust my techniques.



Fig. 12: The Viken, the set-netting skiff I worked from on Nushagak, Bristol Bay, AK 2015. The black power-roller, seen at the center of the skiff, was difficult for me to lift in the same way as my taller crewmates.

Cynthia Boyd recognized similar treatment of women by male colleagues in the occupation of taxi-driving. Boyd writes:

As indicated by Sue's boss, and by these other male taxi drivers, men do not feel comfortable having women drive at night, particularly women who they perceive as attractive, small, and quiet. Sue's boss wanted to protect her from any possible victimization she might encounter at night on the job; however, his rationale for not offering a night shift discriminated against her on the basis of her appearance and personality, not on the basis of her driving skills or capability of handling herself in a problematic situation. (219)

Instead of giving Sue work based on her competence as a taxi driver, her boss gave her work based on what work he deemed appropriate and safe for a woman. Boyd's study demonstrated that male coworkers and bosses considered women's physical appearance and personality when deciding how much work a woman could handle. My captain, like

Sue's boss, also made decisions about what sort of work he thought I could handle based on my physical appearance. He assumed that I could not complete the same tasks because I was shorter. He also doubted that I could handle night shifts because they were colder and harder to work than day shifts. Men make assumptions about women's ability to work even before women demonstrate their merit as fishermen.

My research reveals that women working in the fishing industry pride themselves in their ability to work as equals alongside the men. Fishermen adamantly claim that skill and work ethic, not gender, is important. Despite this, women I interviewed often expressed the different treatment they had received. In their work environments, women emphasized their own masculine qualities over feminine ones in order to be accepted. By doing this, women reinforced the value attributed to masculinity, while subverting expectations of femininity. This is important because "the ability of women to become 'one of the boys' demonstrates that these forms of behavior can be learned and are not fixed or immutable. That women can move into male worlds indicates that women are capable of adapting to the behavioral styles practiced by males" (Fine 73).

Women use FisherPoetry as a tool to question and change their misrepresentation and underrepresentation in the occupation. Lower expectations often limit women to work roles considered less valuable than those given to men. Dona Lee Davis and Jane Nadel-Klein describe the underrepresentation of women in fishing economies:

While none would deny the dangers and anxieties of life in a fishing community, the work/weep dichotomy suggests that women's main task lies in waiting and worrying, rather than in doing anything more important (e.g., directly productive). This image of women introduces two popular and misleading conceptualizations of life in fishing communities... First is the idea that women's roles are divorced from direct participation in the fishery. Second is the idea that the so-called 'passive' expressive, and household roles of women in fishing economies are themselves of little import and of even less theoretical significance. (7)

Women are seen as passive participants important only in their supporting roles to men. Many women working on Nushagak worked as cooks, gardeners, child caretakers, and cleaners. These women were also often the wives or girlfriends of the fishermen. Few FisherPoet women address women's supporting roles in their performances, instead they tend to provide examples of their active more "masculine" roles. Women address how their less physically demanding roles occur in tandem and in contrast with their direct participation as fishermen.

In the poem, "Advice to Female Deckhands," Erin Fristad critiques the limits placed on women:

You will be the cook.
In addition to wheel watches, working
On deck, unloading fish, fueling up,
Filling fresh water, mending nets,
Grocery shopping whenever you come to town,
You also will prepare three meals a day
And two hearty snacks to go with coffee.
...[...]
As a woman and cook
You will be expected to have a special bond
With the skipper's daughter
...[...]
I set out to give you advise for taking care
Of yourself, now it's about taking care of a girl
You're related to by circumstance.
This is exactly what will happen.
You'll notice a hum
More penetrating than the engine.

Erin's poem comments upon some of the roles given to women, in addition to or in lieu of the roles given to men. During her performance, Erin quickly lists off the tasks the cook has to complete *in addition* to their work as deckhands. The pace Erin lists the duties of the cook emphasizes the difficulty of the job. Erin critiques the expectation that

a woman must cook and subverts the devaluing of the cook's duties. Erin's poem also questions the expectation that women care for the children. While Erin clearly critiques her skipper's expectation, her tone softens when she addresses her interactions with the skipper's daughter. Erin's bond with the girl highlights that she values positive interactions with younger generations of women.

Susan Lanser critiques the lesser values often associated with gender division of labor:

A 'real' woman does women's work and not men's work, just as a 'real' man does men's and not women's work... But a woman who cannot do men's work is 'only' a woman while a man who cannot do women's work is not 'only' a man because in such a system there is nothing better than being a man. (39)

Lanser also explains that even when men do women's work their work is usually still valued more. Erin's poem "Advice to Female Deckhands" and her prose "Dear Kelley" show how she feels guilty for devaluing "women's work." Although cooking sustains the energy of the crew, fishing roles are more valued than are cooking roles. Work roles directly related to fishing contribute to crew shares, while food costs are often subtracted from crew shares.

Kelley Watson shared a similar story about how her friend worked as a ticket-taker. The job of the ticket-taker is one of the few non-physical tasks on the boat. Ticket-takers work on tenders, a boat that acts as a go-between fishermen and the canneries. Kelley told a story about a friend that she worked with on a farm, who had proven her ability to do manual labor and asked Kelley to find her a job tendering. Kelley confessed in her prose, "The Toughness of a Ticket Girl":

I had specifically hoped that Emily would land a job working on the back deck. On fish boats, it's easy for women to get pigeon-holed into the cook's job. On tenders, that hole becomes the "ticket girl" spot. The ticket girl stays inside the

galley, is the maritime accountant, and writes the fish and game tickets... But I wanted to help my friend Emily find a place on a boat that matched her grit on land... Her first two jobs were writing tickets. (45)

Kelley critiques the unequal gender division of labor, voicing her disappointment about how her friend was given work as a ticket taker.

Role Models in FisherPoetry

Women use the FisherPoets Gathering to draw attention to unequal expectations they encounter. The FisherPoets Gathering allows women to share their experiences with other women and their male peers. Many women fishermen rarely have opportunities to bond with other women in the occupation. My only interactions with women during the fishing season were with the wives of the captains on Nushagak who cooked; even though there were other women fishing, I was the only woman on my crew. While there are crews with multiple women or only women, many women fishermen experience isolation from other women.

Erin Fristad's poem, "Advice to Female Deckhands," evoked disagreement from a fellow woman. Kelley Watson argued that Erin's poem drew unwanted attention to the unequal work distribution of work. Kelley's disagreement opened up a dialogue, which continued in Erin's published response "Dear Kelley" in the FisherPoets Anthology *Anchored in Deep Water: Making Waves*:

You tell me you can't get past the first line: You will be the cook. I'm glad this is no longer true, but it's taken us a long time to get here. You see Kelley, the first time I approached a boat asking for a job it was assumed I would cook. In fact, the promise of cooking was the only thing that might get me on board...[...] Kelley, my point isn't to convince you to cook on boats...[...] Initially, my conflict with cooking was that it was seen as women's work and women's work is considered less valuable than men's. I bought into that. Truth is, good food is good fuel... Cooking is an important contribution...[...] Kelley, I want my stories,

poems, and experiences to offer insight. I want you to know our history. I want you to know where you're coming from, who came before you... It was showing up and working hard for 15 years that contributed to the notion and general acceptance that women belong on fishing boats. (38-41)

Erin emphasized the importance of acknowledging the hard work and time women have dedicated to change the perceptions of women in the occupation. According to Erin, "Advice to Female Deckhands" was meant to highlight women's progress in the occupation. She explained that her work as a cook, and the work of other women as cooks, helped women find work on boats, and that the presence of women in any capacity was and is imperative to progress in the occupation. "Dear Kelley" allowed Erin to directly critique the perception that cooking is "women's work" and is less valuable.

One of the most common themes of group identity between women at the FisherPoets Gathering is that of competence. Performances often provide women with the opportunity to retaliate against lower expectations. The performance space allows women to defend their competence and address taboo topics from the occupation. Framed performances at public venues have a greater impact on the community than personal interactions.

Jessica Senehi and David Samper address the significance of women's personal-experience narratives in social settings:

When women's personal-experience narratives are shared in a social context, individual experiences may come to represent a group's shared experience, and in this way it gains value. This process occurs in spaces where women's voices are dominant (that is, no longer silenced) and where they are free to analyze their social situation. As personal stories begin to shape a group narrative, individual stories gain power. The personal becomes political. The new group narrative becomes a new framework for thought and a blueprint for action. (460)

The FisherPoets Gathering becomes a place for subversion and political action. The event enhances solidarity between women through their shared experiences. Women's narratives of inequality shape group identity and encourage group action for social change.

Some women think it is unproductive to share their struggles, and emphasize the importance of work ethic. One woman in particular, Kelley, believes that sharing negative stories only reinforces inequality (see Fig. 13). Kelley created She Tells Sea Tales as a funding event for the Port Townsend, WA, Girls' Boat Project, "a high school program that provides young women with the opportunity to learn hands-on skills to work in the marine trades" (She Tells Sea Tales Event Pamphlet).



Fig. 13: Kelley Watson at She Tells Sea Tales 2014 at the Northwest Maritime Center in Port Townsend, WA.

She created She Tells Sea Tales to celebrate women in fishing and encourage younger women to consider it as an occupation. The event allows women FisherPoets to share their experiences with younger generations. Watson thought the performances at

the first She Tells Sea Tales were too negative about the experiences faced by women in the industry, so she asked for more positive FisherPoetry at the second event. Tele spoke about the stricter guidelines for the second She Tells Sea Tales:

At She Tells Sea Tales I do want it to be an empowerment piece, it's a fundraiser for the Girls Boat Project, and a lot of the students will be in the audience, and a lot of families will bring their daughters, and their sons, and I just want to think about that! I got to talk to Kelley Watson, the organizer, and I was like "Do you have a theme? A direction about what you want us to do here?" And that was really helpful because she was like "You know, all of us have our bitter stories and we have every right to own them and tell those stories," but that she was hoping that this time would be more of our broader stories, about how our journey went, and so I'm going to try for something more optimistic.

Kelley put herself and the event in conflict with an underlying expectation for FisherPoets events. Fishpoetry is an outlet for fishermen to address issues. Placing limits on topics restricted the atmosphere of She Tells Sea Tales. Kelley's primary motive was to encourage young women and girls to pursue work in the commercial fishing industry. However, silencing women at an event intended as an outlet takes away their power.

The pressure to prove themselves capable fishermen affects the interactions between women fishermen. Emily Monson performance at 2014 She Tells Sea Tales was about her experience working with a legendary woman captain. Emily listed off her duties on a passenger vessel, confiding how excited she was to work alongside the legendary Captain Susan. In her performance, Emily characterized her captain by saying:

Here's the thing about Captain Susan. She wasn't just vegan, she was a legend in her own time. This woman, she had climbed up a backstage, she walked right up it, she had, with her toes, and aligned it and climbed right back down it on deck. She had docked the boat perfectly in fog so thick you could not see the bow of the ship where we were steering. And I was so excited for this opportunity to be able to learn from her!

Emily expressed how she felt that she disappointed her captain. Instead of going easy on Emily, Captain Susan required Emily to perform harder tasks than her male crew.

Although at first Emily believed Susan hated her, she realized later that her captain wanted to prepare her for the struggles she would likely face as a woman in the occupation.

Families can impact girls and women, either discouraging or encouraging future generations. The fishing industry is often generational and passed down the male line, and some families discourage their daughters from fishing. Tele addressed this issue in “The Princess and the Sea” at 2014 She Tells Sea Tales:

I think about the graying of fishing fleets everywhere. Carla and Joshua are fourth generation fishermen. Their grandfather built the Marilyn Marie. Dave grew up on this boat, the baby boy following two big sisters. Traditionally, family boats are passed on to the eldest child. Did neither of Dave’s sisters want to fish? Did they have the option? I wonder what will happen if both Carla and Joshua want to continue their legacy.

The socialization of children can discourage them from pursuing occupations associated with the opposite gender. If girls are not encouraged to fish or to value strength as an admirable attribute, they are unlikely to pursue occupations like fishing. In the same prose piece, Tele spoke about how she wanted to be a “subversive, anti-princess role model” for Carla. Tele did this by completing tasks and showing how strong she was as a woman.

Tele was fortunate enough to be a part of a mother-daughter team and did not have to contend with male siblings for the family fishing business. Tele’s mother was her role model when she was growing up, even though they did not often get along. Tele shared in her interview:

I grew up fishing with both my parents, but when I was about 13 my dad just didn’t see that there was much of a future in fishing. There were some hard years, and he didn’t think we could support a family on it. And he and my mom split up, but she wanted to keep fishing. And so she kept the boat and she ran it... There, you know there are women running boats, but to my knowledge we were the only

ones that ran a 54-foot freezer troller, so it was a big boat, and it was one woman and her teenage daughter at sea for weeks at a time. Which was not a good time, but it's pretty remarkable in retrospect.

Tele expressed how her mother never saw her gender as being problematic in the work.

Tele's mother became a role model for her daughter, setting an example for Tele to follow in the future.

Concluding Thoughts

FisherPoetry is important in providing role models for women, though women take different stances on what makes a good role model. For Erin, being a role model means that she shares her struggles with her audience so that they can see how much progress women have made in the occupation, while also critiquing the present. This acknowledgment of the past creates hope for future progress in the occupation. Kelley Watson believes that it is her responsibility to prevent the discouragement of future generations of women fishermen by sheltering them from hearing about negative experiences at She Tells Sea Tales. Emily Monson's captain, Sue, believed that making Emily tougher would prepare her to work in a male-dominated occupation. Tele's mother encouraged her daughter by showing her that gender had nothing to do with her ability to fish. Tele reaffirmed this lesson by passing it on to her captain's daughter, Carla.

Women counteract the misrepresentation, undervaluing, and underrepresentation of women in the occupation through their performances. Performances highlighting the competence of women generate role models for women and girls in the audience. These role models encourage women to continue breaking into the industry, which disrupts the structures of inequality present.

CHAPTER IV

“YOU OUGHT TO MARRY A FISHERMAN SINCE YOU LIKE FISHING SO MUCH”: QUESTIONING SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS AT SEA

“Do you have a boyfriend?”

This is the question that my captain, Ole, has made both seasons I have called him to ask for a job. My relationship status was always a topic of interest and I wondered if he asked his male crew the same question. If anything, he does not make the same quips about marriage and relationships with them. He preferred to share jokes like, “You wanna know the best way to get over a woman? It’s to get between the legs of another.”

My captain liked to joke about my marital potential. Once he joked that I would never find a man to marry me because he thought that I was too tough. Then again, he constantly insisted that I needed to find a fisherman to marry, since I liked fishing so much. These advisory lectures from my captain revolved around whom I might possibly marry. The range of my marital prospects included members of our crew, other fishermen in our set-netting community, or a rich rancher that I was somehow going to come across in the next year.

While more women fish in Bristol Bay than some might expect, I found that most are in some way related to men in the occupation. Most of my fellow women fishermen are the daughters, girlfriends, wives, or sisters of the men also fishing in the bay. Allison adds to this, stating “although these women are working in an occupation considered nontraditional for women, most of them are on board in customary male-female

relationships” (255). Many women interviewed by Allison found their way into the industry through their boyfriends and husbands. More women also enter the industry through their family ties. Women without relationship ties to family or men often struggle to find work, and remaining outside of a relationship can make it difficult to remain in the industry.

Women use their performances to address the ways that relationship dynamics shape their interactions. Women in the industry interact and form bonds differently than men because romantic relationships are more central to their position in the occupation. FisherPoet women use their creative expressions to address the ways relationships impact their work. In “Dear Kelley,” Erin wrote “I wasn’t the wife, sister or daughter of the skipper. What was radical at the time is that I didn’t become the skipper’s girlfriend. And despite many generous offers, I never slept in his bunk nor took a shower with him” (38).

Women use FisherPoetry to critique different social dynamics persistent in the occupation. Women challenge the concepts of motherhood, and disrupt the views of women as being nurturing or motherly. By sharing their experiences in leadership roles women disrupt the power structures between men and women in the industry. Finally, women use FisherPoetry to grapple with the sexual dynamics present in their work in a male-dominated industry. Women use their expressive art to disrupt the silence around sexual expectations, exploitation, and violence in the occupation.

Redefining Expectations of “Woman the Nurturer”

Women are often expected to behave in roles as nurturers and mothers, and this same expectation carries into the commercial fishing industry. Women fishermen who

have children are often forced to give up fishing because they are expected to take care of children, while their husbands are allowed to continue working. Even women who are not mothers are expected to care for any children present. FisherPoet women question concepts of motherhood and expectations of their social interactions as nurturers through their performances.

Many women's fishing careers end once they have children. Mary Jacobs's career continued with her husband's support. Many of the women working as cooks for their husbands on Nushagak used to fish before having children. Mary wrote about her decision not to follow this pattern and to return to fishing in her prose piece "Women's Work:"

"I miss salmon fishing," I said.

"I don't. The competition is too stressful," John said. He tipped his wooden chair back and put his slippered feet on the table. "I'm looking forward to gardening and welding crab pots."

I handed John a cup of tea and sat across the table from him, inhaling the blend of sweet peppermint and medicinal comfrey. "What would you think of me going without you?"

"Go," he said without looking up from his book. "I'll watch the kids."

"Could Mary Relyea and Viki leave their kids here?" He pushed his tangled copper hair away from his Van Gogh eyes.

"I guess, as long as it isn't for the whole summer." (26)

Mary's husband was unconventional in comparison to other men, because he took care of their children and the children of her all-women crew. Mary's experiences in fishing are inspirational, and constantly disrupt the social expectations of motherhood and leadership found in the commercial fishing industry (Allison).

Tele Aadsen's mother is another woman who subverted expectations of motherhood. When Tele's father quit fishing, her mother continued to fish and brought Tele along. Tele's mother proved that women could be mothers *and* fishermen at the

same time, without sacrificing either. Although Tele's mother is not a FisherPoet, her impact on her daughter surfaces in Tele's performances.

While the previous two examples highlight *actual* mothers challenging concepts of motherhood, there is often the expectation that women will act as nurturers or motherly types on boats regardless of their relationships to others. Women are often expected to be friendly and take care of crewmembers, and even take care of children. The attitudes of women are critiqued if they do not behave kindly and politely. This can be seen in the previous excerpts from Jen's interview about being able to "snot," the excerpt of Moe's prose work about being denied bodily functions and expectations of politeness, as well as Erin F.'s performance piece *Responding to an Attempt to Write a Poem about a Punk-Ass Greenhorn Chauvinist Pig* about men's expectations for her to smile. Tele also addressed the expectations of child care in her performance of "The Princess and the Sea" mentioned in the previous chapter. Erin Fristad's poem "Advice to Female Deckhands" illustrates how women are expected to take on the role as the nurturer and caretaker for children (36-37). Women are expected to balance their behavior between societal expectations of domesticity and the occupational expectations of resilience.

From Cannery Gals to Captains: Women of Authority

Women in the industry are not expected to hold positions of leadership or power and often orders given by women are unheeded by their male coworkers. Many women first found work in canneries, and then found subsequent jobs in "women's roles" on boats. Women use FisherPoetry to question the power structure inherent in the social

dynamics of the occupation, displacing the view that only men hold positions of authority in the occupation. This section describes Mary's journey, who climbed the social ladder from work in the canneries to being the owner and skipper of an all-women fishing operation (see Fig. 14 for a photo of Mary). Mary's early entrance into the occupation paved the way for future generations.



Fig. 14: Mary Jacobs in Astoria, OR, during the 2015 FisherPoets Gathering.

In our 2014 interview, Erin Fristad immediately recommended Mary when I asked about other women who might want to share their thoughts on FisherPoetry and the industry. According to Erin, Mary was one of the first women to own and operate an all-women crew in the Pacific Northwest. When she was a student at Berkeley from 1967-1969 one of her professors encouraged her to go to Alaska. Mary approached her boyfriend with the idea of going to Alaska, and he suggested they consider fishing.

When Mary first moved to Petersburg, Alaska, with her boyfriend she originally worked in a cannery. Mary laughed about this in our 2015 interview, explaining the revelation she had about cannery work:

I figured out the guys were going out and seeing the world and making a lot more money, and I was stuck in this noisy cannery with a bunch of bitchy women. You know it just didn't seem [fair]... Why [shouldn't I just get a job on a boat]? And [my boyfriend and I] got a job on a fishing boat for the first time. He eventually got fired [and left] (laughs), and I stayed fishing with the same guy for quite a few

years. We stayed together, had kids, and we fished all the time, most of the time with the kids on the boat. Then he quit [summer] fishing, and I took over the summer/spring fishing while he fished in the winter.

From the time she stepped onto the boat until her retirement thirty-eight years later, Mary fished for salmon, herring, halibut, shrimp, and crab. In the summer of 2015 I found Mary cooking for her daughter's all-women set-netting crew on Nushagak. Mary inspired her daughter to work in the occupation.

When I asked Mary in our interview why she started out in cannery work and not on a boat, she replied that "the boats just didn't take women out! You know, unless it was a family member. It was just unheard of." She explained that her boyfriend had to vouch for her to get her first spot on a boat. Mary admitted that her first captain (the man she later married) was unconventional because he often hired women. Though, Mary joked, many of the women that he brought onboard were topless dancers who were not hired for their potential to be good deckhands.

During our 2015 interview, Mary explained that she began thinking about owning her own boat when she decided that she did not want her job to depend on how physically attractive her captains found her. She told me that she "just said 'screw this, I'm going to get my own boat!' And it took me quite a few years to do it, but that was where I got the impetus to do it. It's like, not being at somebody's whim. Finding the prettier gal and leaving me on the beach." Mary bought her own boat to have control over her work, and so that she could give other women the opportunity to fish.

In "Women's Work," Mary narrates events from her first season as the skipper of an all-women crew. I wanted to know why she hired an all-women crew during her first season. Mary explained in her interview 2015 interview:

It was giving them a chance, it was the fact that men don't really like taking orders from women. And I wasn't going to get... any really good crew as a first year skipper, man or woman! So I'd be like, scraping the bottom of the barrel for my crew. Where instead I can have three of the hardest working women on the boat.

Mary hired all women to give them an opportunity to fish that they might not get from men. Her knowledge of how her gender and experience as a captain would affect the caliber of crew that would work for her also influenced her decision.

I experienced this lack of respect when I returned to Bristol Bay in 2015. Ole hired an entirely "green" (inexperienced) crew and put me in charge of training them. Instead of respecting my decisions and listening to my orders, some of my crewmates responded to my advice by rolling their eyes and ignoring me. One crewmember in particular, a sixteen-year-old, was extremely combative when I gave directions. I noticed that he would groan or scowl when I asked him to do simple tasks around the boat, but my captain could order him about without this reaction. I thought it was because it made sense for him to listen to the orders of the captain over orders from a fellow crewmember.

Unfortunately, the influence of my gender soon became apparent. One day I had to yell at him to get off a net to keep him from going overboard. He rolled his head to scowl at me and derisively spat "Thanks, *Mom*." The nickname stuck for a good two days, with my crewmates jokingly calling me "Mom" every time I asked them to do something. While my other crewmembers' use of the nickname was in good fun, it made me question if one of them might have gotten a similar nickname. Would a greenhorn dare to call a seasoned deckhand "Dad" when given a direct order?

As a captain, Mary needed to have total control of her crew; without the crew's respect for the captain a fishing boat cannot run smoothly. Mary noted that when she had

men on her crew the women on the boat would often defer to the men to solve mechanical issues. Mary attributed this deference as an issue of confidence, which she solved through showing trust and faith in her crew. She further emphasized the different dynamics on the boat in her 2015 interview:

On a man's boat when something goes wrong... they're all pointing at each other for screwing up. On a woman's boat when something goes wrong every woman on the boat is thinking, "I did it! I did something wrong." It's really weird, you know! They approach it in different ways... But at least we're all looking at improving ourselves and not shedding off the responsibility onto somebody else, or the low man on the boat. But fishing with women can be emotional... I've had somebody on the bow, somebody on the stern, somebody in the skiff, and somebody in the cabin all crying!

All-women crews allow women to perform the job without the constant pressure of proving their competence and without the pressure to defer to men for solutions. In Mary Zeiss Stange's research on female hunters, she pointed out a similar shift in interactions when a woman went on a trip without men. The woman explained, "With men, you have to be one-dimensional. Here, you can be multifaceted. You de-compartmentalize your life. You can talk about babies and bullets in the same conversation" (5).

When working alongside men, women must constantly demonstrate and prove their competence. Women's experience in the occupation has little impact on how often men question their competence. Even greenhorns who believe themselves better workers will challenge experienced female deckhands. All-women crew dynamics allow women to perform without the underestimation of male crewmembers. This allows them to develop the skills and techniques necessary for success in the industry.

A Woman among Men: Sexual Dynamics at Sea

Women working in the occupation are often at risk of sexual expectations from their crewmembers. Apart from the sexual tension experienced with her crew, the independently working woman is at risk of alienating herself from other women if they perceive her as a threat to their relationships.

Erin Fristad's performance piece *Responding to an Attempt to Write a Poem about a Punk-Ass Greenhorn Chauvinist Pig*, highlights the relationship dynamics experienced by women who try to enter into the industry without having any ties to men. Erin performed at She Tells Sea Tales in 2014. She grabbed the microphone, her tone accusatory and firm:

Don't expect us to smile for you. It's not in our job description and you don't deserve it. You write that you resent our neutral faces, from where we stand at the rail, returning from the fishing grounds, exhausted, ready to tie up, take a shower, sleep. You claim we owe you a friendly gesture, then detail how you imagine our bodies under our raingear. The shapes of our firm asses. You continue to plea, in rhyme, that we do a good guy like you a favor, and how can we be so cold? Here's how... We've witnessed our crewmates delight in trading magazines, wondered what it means that they covet Playboy Brazil... We've fended off drunk crewmates with hot frying pans, locked ourselves in stay rooms, fallen asleep to the tapping on the door, demands turning to pleas for affection. The next morning, we've read notes begging forgiveness while they call home to their wives, hangovers pounding behind their eyes. We've been the most experienced deckhands on board, paid the lowest crew shares. We've been expected to care for the skipper's daughter, son, father, high school buddy visiting from Detroit. And accept that we can be fired on the whim of someone's wife who thinks we're too pretty. In truth? No matter how many times you've imagined our sweet asses under our raingear, we've never thought twice about yours.

This performance piece highlights interactions independent working women experience.

Though women working alongside partners or family members may also encounter these issues, based on my research, it seems to occur at a higher rate for women who enter into the occupation without any relationship ties. Erin performs with confidence and zeal.

Issues other women might lighten with humor, Erin approaches by expressing anger and frustration. There is no doubt that Erin intends to expose and oppose the sexism present in commercial fishing.

There was a mixed gender audience at the She Tells Sea Tales when she performed this piece. Over a hundred people crammed into the performance space at the Northwest Maritime Center. Women and men laughed at Erin's declaration of "No matter how many times you've imagined our sweet asses under our raingear, we've never thought twice about yours." Even though Erin's audience was receptive at She Tells Sea Tales, women are still at risk at these performance events of presenting to an unreceptive audience. Women are still performing in a space created for the workers of a predominantly male occupation. Even though the performers at She Tells Sea Tales are all women, the audience has an equal distribution of men and women in attendance. Most members of the audience are fishermen who see issues of sexism and sexual violence as taboo topics. Sharing narratives about these issues might incite hostility from the audience.

Women with no relationship ties are ostracized more frequently by other women. The wives and girlfriends of fishermen may harbor resentment towards single women working alongside their husbands and boyfriends, especially due to the nature of the work. In fishing, men and women must work with their crew over long periods of time, often in close quarters. Fishing strains relationships because it detracts from the time couples spend together. Adding a single woman to a crew creates the possibility of affairs occurring during the fishing season. So single women are often neither accepted fully by the men or by other women.

Erin's experience shows that the relationship status of women fishermen is taken into greater consideration than the relationship status of male crewmates. Allison also addresses this issue as it occurs for independently working women wishing to enter into the industry:

One woman we met went to the docks in Ketchikan, Alaska, and was hired on a seine boat. Although she enjoyed fishing and would do it again, she fished for only one reason. The second season, the skipper's wife complained- this is apparently common- and the skipper could not hire her back even though he wished to. The third season, her boyfriend told her that if she went fishing, he would not be waiting for her when she returned to Seattle. His objection was that she would be the only woman on board with a number of men and she was forced to make a choice between her boyfriend and fishing. (255)

With luck, a woman might be able to find her way onto a boat without having a pre-existing relationship. With even greater luck and less probability, that same woman might be able to continue to find work despite her independent status.

Sexual orientation, personality, and age also factor into interactions. If a woman is single, young, and pretty, she is perceived as a greater threat. If a woman is not heterosexual, she also runs the risk of being alienated. Moe Bowstern wrote about this in her prose work, "Things That Will Be Difficult," explaining that "It will be hard, if you are queer and a woman, to keep it to yourself lest you scare away the few women around you, and bring closer the men who have rented a specific video they think you might have starred in." This excerpt comments on the difficulties homosexual women face in the industry, because they run the risk of becoming a part of their male coworker's fantasies about lesbians, while also facing the homophobic reactions of their coworkers.

Erin's performance highlights the issue of potential job loss when she addresses how frequently the wives or girlfriends of boat captains demand that their male partners fire women. The stages at FisherPoet events allow women to expose and question the

difficulties of keeping their jobs for these unfair reasons. Erin's narrative identifies "shared social conditions that affect their [women in the fishing industry] lives, to form community, and to empower themselves and others to promote social change" (Greenhill 459). Erin's focus on the reaction of other women towards working women in the commercial fishing industry allows her to bring awareness to recurring conflicts between women. Women are also guilty of creating inequality in the occupation.

Women outside of relationships present a threat to the status quo of the boat by disrupting the distribution of power. Allison explains:

The core issue seems to be introducing women into a crew introduces sexuality into the work place. Kanter points out that "sexuality has for a long time been considered the enemy of work discipline"(1977:9). The work place attempts to exclude the element of sexuality and all lines of authority and allegiance which might compete with the organization. To many male fishermen, having one woman on board among the many men introduces the element of sexuality into their work place and thereby, in their view, causes disruption. If that woman is allied with the captain, the usual vertical line of authority remains intact. If she is allied with a crew member, then the allegiance becomes horizontal and interferes with the vertical line of authority from captain to each individual crew member. This, perhaps, explains the feelings of the Maine fisherman who said that a woman should be on board only as the wife of the man running the boat. (254).

The isolation of fishing creates more sexual tension than average 9-5 jobs because workers are together all day and night.

Cynthia Boyd discusses the tactics of dealing with inequality in the occupation of taxi-driving. One of the topics discussed by Boyd is how women in relationships with men in the business use their connections to become more successful (214-215). Mary spoke about this in her interview in 2015, explaining that she used her relationship with her boyfriend to find work on a boat. Mary described how other women working on her crew were topless dancers who had used their sexuality to their advantage to get onto the boat. This subject is rather controversial, and is rare or non-existent in women's

FisherPoetry. Women using their bodies to gain traction in the occupation, though often exploited by men anyways, are often perceived as unscrupulous.

Adding a sexual element to a workplace which is predominantly male often raises additional issues of exploitation, especially when a woman is single. Women attempting to break into a male-dominated space understand that their “attitudes and understandings cannot always be openly acknowledged because of their social, economic, and emotional dependence on the goodwill of men” (Radner & Lanser 2). When women enter the occupation, their reactions to situations are often limited to those that will allow them to continue forward in the work, which can in turn prevent them from speaking out against injustice when working. The FisherPoets Gathering creates a space where women can broach these topics that are still taboo in the occupation.

Women are placed in vulnerable positions because men so often hold positions of power, which can lead to sexual exploitation and violence. Even those men who do not explicitly hold positions of power can still restrict women’s power. While both men and women are expected to work under any conditions without complaining, this expectation becomes problematic as it often also applies to women’s experiences of sexual exploitation and violence in the occupation. Women are encouraged to ignore or downplay their experiences of sexual exploitation and/or violence, and those who cannot are often criticized and deemed incapable of the work. Women fishermen who are the victims of sexual exploitation cannot speak out about their experiences for fear of having their competence as fishermen questioned.

Tele’s blog prose piece, “Being Female: An Unwelcome Reminder”, was published just before the 2015 FisherPoets Gathering. This piece is Tele’s way of

shedding light on the prevalence of sexual violence in the fishing industry. While Erin Fristad's performance piece expressed her anger and outrage at the sexual advances and expectations of men, Tele's writing delves deeper into the level of awareness women must maintain while working. Tele wrote:

Carl shattered that illusion when I saw myself as he saw me: not as a crewmate, but an obligatory sex partner. Fifteen years later, he'd done it again. In cornering me on the dock, Carl effectively cracked that measuring stick over his knee and tossed it into the drink. He forced me to remember that in a culture where gender, power, and violence are all connected, even the strongest fisherman's vulnerability is never as distant as she'd like to imagine. ("Being Female")

Tele's prose piece addresses several issues faced by women in the occupation. The first of these issues is that women are sometimes seen by their male crewmates as "obligatory sex partners". Sometimes the men in the industry expect that being the only woman on the boat implies that the woman will be sexually available. Tele's prose is also significant because it brings awareness to the issue. No matter how strong a woman is or how much she wishes to be seen as equal to her male colleagues, she must still be ever-vigilant and ever-aware of her vulnerability as a woman in an occupation which encourages hypermasculine, and often violent, behavior.

A year after I read "Being Female: An Unwelcome Reminder on the Docks" on her blog, Tele's piece was picked up by the *Alaska Dispatch News* and published on their online site on February 22nd, 2015. By the time I read the prose piece in March 2015, the post had received 93 responses from the fishing community and beyond, with most of the comments showing support and solidarity with Tele's experience. While most of the responses supported Tele's breaking of the silence on the sexual exploitation of women in the fishing industry, several individuals' comments evidenced the continued need for change. Comments included: "Cry me a river whiner. No one else ever suffered but you.

You whine like a woman. Oooooops!”, “Ah yes, every one is a victim...” and “Quit your whining.” A fellow woman even commented that Tele’s writing was, “Whining puling drivel.” Comments like these make it clear why venues such as the FisherPoets Gathering and the She Tales Sea Tales events are necessary to offer spaces where women like Tele feel safe enough to speak out. Tele’s fellow FisherPoets have shown her support through comments on her blog and through their reactions at the events, speaking of her talent as a writer.

FisherPoet Mariah Warren is one of Tele’s supporters who has emphasized the importance of Tele’s work. Other FisherPoets and other women in the commercial fishing industry have begun to speak out on the matter, though there is still a great deal of discouragement for women who wish to create awareness about the issues. Speaking out against unequal treatment, sexist remarks, inappropriate behavior, and even violence often places women at risk of losing their jobs or losing the respect of their crew. In an interview on 2/27/2015, Mariah responded to my question about what she thought about Tele’s prose work:

It’s a really hard thing to speak up about that kind of thing when in our society it is still too often that blame is still turned on people who were actually the victims in that situation, that were doing everything right. And the perception, because fishing tends to be a “Shut up and get the work done.” You’re partially judged by how well you cannot whine about things. To get along, get things done. And it’s hard to speak up in that environment.

For Mariah, Tele’s piece gave voice to an issue she has not yet felt comfortable enough to share through her poetry in a public forum.

Women in commercial fishing often share their experiences with other women as cautionary advice. One woman I interviewed ended up on a boat where her captain continuously placed pressure on her to have sex with him. She explained that had she

been a part of the fleet, she would have been warned not to work for that particular captain. Fishermen often form close, tight-knit communities that offer protection and help to those considered insiders. Women can ask others in the fleet whether or not certain captains are safe to work for, fostering a support system. Tele's story is illustrative of how women share their experiences to offer tactics to avoid and to handle situations (Wachs). By sharing their experiences with other women, either through individual interactions or through performances and published creative work, the FisherPoet women provide other women with methods and techniques to cope with similar situations they might experience. Their performances can also help raise awareness to discourage men from perpetuating violence.

Unfortunately, women working in the commercial fishing industry expect sexual violence and sexism. They feel they have to learn to deal with these issues and downplay them if they wish to continue to do the work that they love. Through speaking out on the issues, women who share similar work seek validation and create solidarity between themselves and women in the audience. Tele explained in her 2015 interview "That engagement with the audience is really fascinating. And being able to look out and find like the ONE friendly face that is CLEARLY with you, and is getting it and is giving that affirmation back to me is really nice. Because writing is such a solitary thing." This is significant, because sometimes the audience won't be overwhelmingly receptive to a woman's performance about an issue. The audience may include perpetrators of violence and unsympathetic individuals who might blame the victim. Tele's performances highlight her bravery, because she continues to perform controversial material with the

hope that she will reach at least one member of her audience, even if that means facing the hostility from the rest of the audience.

Breaking the silence on issues of sexual violence and sexism in the industry is important for both the performer and the audience. As already expressed by Tele, she finds performance and the sharing of her work as cathartic and validating. Finding other women who relate to her work allows Tele to validate her own experiences, and also to begin engaging other women in opening discourse to discuss the topics. Tele spoke about how she writes with the other women of the industry in mind in her 2015 interview:

Overwhelmingly my target audience is not going to be men! For my book, and for general audiences, it's going to be women who connect with my writing the most. And so the best thing that I can hope for is to write something that resonates with another woman. That's been what's most helpful for me, is reading the things like 'Oh, Ok, I wasn't the only one!'"

For those women in the audience who may have had negative experiences, but who have not yet found the conviction to share them, listening and reading pieces such as Tele's creates room in the community to begin conversations about the issues.

Concluding Thoughts

The occupation of commercial fishing expects women to adhere to social constraints of femininity while performing in a hypermasculine atmosphere. In order to succeed in the occupation, women must balance between the roles expected of women and the work tasks given to them. As women working in a male-dominated industry, they come to anticipate sexual expectations and exploitation in the work, and in turn must be ever-vigilant and prepared to combat sexual violence. The performances at the

FisherPoets Gathering allow women to expose these issues and expectations persistent in the occupation that in turn may lead to awareness and optimistically to social change.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

What impact, if any, can the voices of women FisherPoets have on the industry? Many women FisherPoets confront gender issues present in the occupation through their performances with the hope of creating social change. But to what extent is social change feasible, especially when FisherPoets emphatically proclaim that the FisherPoets are not representative of the rest of the commercial fishing community? The FisherPoets' separation from the rest of the fishing community brings to question the extent of the impact they can have on the rest of the industry. If this distinction does exist, do their more progressive outlooks and values have an impact on audiences not in attendance?

While FisherPoetry might not directly impact individuals outside of the FisherPoets community, it can have an impact on performers and audience members who can potentially take it back into the industry. Significant changes are evident from the creation of role models at the FisherPoets Gathering and She Tells Sea Tales. FisherPoet women become role models for other women in the audience. As role models, FisherPoet women demonstrate ways that women can be successful in the occupation, leading through example by disproving lower expectations and critiquing the presence of a double-standard. FisherPoet women show their audiences through their poetry that they are capable of competing on the same grounds as the men in the occupation. While they may admit to being less physically strong than men, they use their performances to describe the different strategies they use to complete the same tasks as the men. Women are relaying these tactics to women in the audience who can learn from them and subsequently apply them to their work. Perhaps there are women in the audience who

have settled for less physical work roles, such as cooking or ticket taking. These women might watch performances of women who work in more physical roles, and be inspired to go back out into the industry and fight for the more valued roles. This might even lead to greater value being given to “women’s work.” And perhaps men who see these successful, competent women up on stage become more willing to take women onto their crews in more physical roles.

FisherPoet women critique how the double-standards forced upon women in the occupation interfere with the effectiveness of their work. If women must constantly be aware of what bodily functions they are allowed, or whether or not they are being kind enough, they cannot compete on the same grounds as the men. FisherPoet women challenge these standards by subverting them, writing about how they do not accept these expectations. FisherPoet women acknowledge the expectations others have for their gender, but provide their audience members with alternatives by expressing their tactics to subvert them. By drawing attention to the double-standards present, they hope the men and women in the audience might begin to recognize how the double-standards for women limits the effectiveness of their work. Women might find inspiration to ignore and work past the double standard, and men might begin to see the impact of their expectations on women.

I returned from a full season of fishing in Alaska in the summer of 2015. I threw my bags of gear stinking of fish into the back of a shuttle and climbed into the passenger seat beside my male driver, wearing my boots and grimy clothes flecked with mud and fish scales. I apologized for smelling and explained to my driver that I had not found the opportunity to wash my clothes between the end of the fishing season and my flight. My

shuttle driver accused me of lying and told me “Sorry, no offense, but I don’t think that’s a woman’s job.” I found myself frantically sharing stories of my success as a fisherman, earnest in my attempt to prove my competence as a fisherman to a complete stranger. The unwillingness of my shuttle driver to believe that I could possibly work as a fisherman reemphasized the need for women fishermen to find stages like the FisherPoets Gathering to continue solidifying their presence in the occupation. With a love of the sea and of the work, women fishermen will continue to demand that their presence in the occupation be acknowledged and valued.

The FisherPoets Gathering is a place for women to feel validated, and this validation enhances solidarity between women. The issues of sexual exploitation and violence in the occupation is addressed at the event. Disrupting the silence surrounding sexism and sexual violence in the commercial fishing industry builds the impetus for social change and resistance. Taking a stance on the topic through their creative expressions allows women to find their own power. Tele emphasized the importance of the FisherPoets community as it applies to her work as a commercial fisher:

I think being here and having this experience strengthens us to be able to carry this openness and this confidence back into the fleet with us. It gives me more strength to be like “No, I’m going to be a different kind of fisherman,” and I want to be able to express that. I’m not the person that you want to talk THOSE things to, whatever kind of ugliness it is.

The FisherPoets Gathering and the She Tells Sea Tales event, as well as the online presence of women fishermen’s creative writing, allows women the space to begin having conversations about the issues surrounding sexism in commercial fishing. The men are forced to acknowledge the continuing presence of sexual violence and exploitation, and perhaps this awareness brings change in the way they interact with

women in the future. Male audience members can potentially bring this awareness back into the industry and share it with other men, in addition to helping break the silence surrounding sexual violence. The importance of speaking out against sexual violence holds almost as much significance as discouraging individuals from committing sexual violence.

The social impact of FisherPoetry will continue to grow as the event grows, and as FisherPoets begin publishing their work to a wider audience. However, while FisherPoetry does have an impact on the industry, this impact is indirect and dependent upon the ability of audience members and performers to transfer the values instilled in them at the event. FisherPoet women use the stage to effect social change; yet, further change is still necessary. Sexual violence and sexism still persist in the occupation, and the voices of women fishermen are still being silenced. Women are still discouraged from entering into the occupation, and they still face threats of sexual violence when they do work in the occupation. Perceptions about women's roles in the occupation are still skewed, and continued activism is necessary to properly represent women fishermen.

APPENDIX A

FISHERPOETRY

The following appendix contains FisherPoetry referenced in the main body of the thesis.

Aadsen, Tele. "Being Female among Fishermen: An Unwelcome Reminder on the Docks." *Alaska Dispatch News*. Alaska Dispatch Publishing, 22 Feb. 2015. Web. Mar. 2015.

Aadsen, Tele. *The Princess and the Sea*. Northwest Maritime Center, Port Townsend, WA. 8 Mar. 2014. Performance.

Bowstern, Moe. "Subcutaneous Layer of Fat." *Making Waves: Women's Writings on the Commercial Fishing Industry*. Ed. Patrick Dixon. FisherPoets Anthology, 2014. 44. Print. Anchored in Deep Water.

Bowstern, Moe. "Things That Will Be Difficult." *Making Waves: Women's Writings on the Commercial Fishing Industry*. Ed. Patrick Dixon. FisherPoets Anthology, 2014. 42-43. Print. Anchored in Deep Water.

Broderick, Max. *Pebble Mine*. KALA Art Gallery, Astoria, OR. 27 Feb. 2015. Performance.

Fristad, Erin. "Advice to Female Deckhands." *Making Waves: Women's Writings on the Commercial Fishing Industry*. Ed. Patrick Dixon. FisherPoets Anthology, 2014. 36-37. Print. Anchored in Deep Water.

Fristad, Erin. "Dear Kelley." *Making Waves: Women's Writing on the Commercial Fishing Industry*. Ed. Patrick Dixon. FisherPoets Anthology, 2014. 38-41. Print. Anchored in Deep Water.

Fristad, Erin. *Responding to an Attempt to Write a Poem about a Punk-Ass Greenhorn Chauvinist Pig*. Northwest Maritime Center, Port Townsend, WA. 8 Mar. 2014. Performance.

Fristad, Erin. "The Fisherman's Dream." *The Glass Jar*. Port Townsend, WA: Sleeping Dragon Press, 2013. Print.

Jacobs, Mary. "Women's Work." *Making Waves: Women's Writing on the Commercial Fishing Industry*. Ed. Patrick Dixon. FisherPoets Anthology, 2014. 26-32. Print. Anchored in Deep Water.

Jakubek, Erin. Northwest Maritime Center, Port Townsend, WA. Mar. 2015.

Performance.

Leech, Wesley Geno. "A Viking Funeral." Wesley Leech. 1995.

Monson, Emily. Northwest Maritime Center, Port Townsend, WA. 8 Mar. 2014.
Performance.

Watson, Kelley. "The Toughness of a Ticket Girl." *Making Waves: Women's Writing on the Commercial Fishing Industry*. Ed. Patrick Dixon. FisherPoets Anthology, 2014. 45-51. Print. Anchored in Deep Water.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWS

The following appendix contains a list of interviews collected throughout the research process, in addition to more extensive excerpts from select interviews.

Aadsen, Tele. "FisherPoets Gathering Interview." Personal Interview. 27 Feb. 2015.

Fristad, Erin. "She Tells Sea Tales Interview." Personal Interview. 6 Mar. 2014.

Fristad, Erin. "FisherPoets Gathering Interview." Personal Interview. 28 Feb. 2015.

Jacobs, Mary. "FisherPoets Gathering Interview." Personal Interview. 28 Feb. 2015.

King, Marcia. "FisherPoets Gathering Interview." Personal Interview. 28 Feb. 2015.

Olson, Curt. "Nushagak Beach Interview." Personal Interview. July 2015.

Pickett, Jen. "FisherPoets Gathering Interview." Personal Interview. 27 Feb. 2015.

Sutherland-Hanson, Sue. "FisherPoets Gathering Interview." 23 Feb. 2014.

Warren, Mariah. "FisherPoets Gathering Interview." 27 Feb. 2015.

Watson, Kelley. "FisherPoets Gathering Interview." 22 Feb. 2014.

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This appendix contains a script of sample questions used during interviews.

Sample Interview Script- Sample Questions

1. What inspired you to begin creating [poetry, prose, music, oral stories]?
2. How did you decide that you wanted to be a part of the Fisherpoets Gathering?
3. How were you introduced to the Fisherpoets Gathering?
4. What does the Fisherpoets Gathering mean to you? How does it benefit you?
What does it represent?
5. How long have you been attending and/or presenting at the Fisherpoets Gathering?
6. How were/are you involved with the commercial fishing industry?
 - a. How long were you a part of the fishing industry?
 - b. How did you get into the fishing industry? Who introduced you to the industry?
 - c. Where do/did you fish?
 - d. What kind of fishing did you do? [Set-netting? Drift netting? Etc.]
 - e. If you are no longer a part of the fishing industry, why did you leave?
7. Do you consider the Fisherpoets a community?
8. How do you prepare for your performance?
9. What do you consider when you're preparing for your performance?
10. When did you begin creating [music, prose, poetry, oral stories]?
11. Did anyone teach you how to write/tell stories?
12. Are there other scenarios, outside of the Fisherpoets Gathering, that you share your work?
13. Do many fishermen write?
14. Do you consider yourself as different or separate in any way to the rest of the commercial fishing industry?
15. How does storytelling become incorporated into fishing?
16. What sort of people do you think are attracted to the Fisherpoets Gathering?
17. What sort of people do you think are attracted to the fishing industry?
18. How do you think women are seen in the fishing industry?
19. Is the fishing industry dominated by men or women?
20. [For Women Only] As a woman, did you feel you were treated differently in the fishing industry?
 - a. Were you reminded often that you were a woman working amongst men?
 - b. Did you feel you had to behave differently than you would normally?
 - c. Did you feel compelled to "prove yourself"?
 - d. Do you ever address gender in your creative work?

21. [For Men Only] Have you ever worked with women in the fishing industry?
 - a. Do you think they are treated differently?
 - b. What is your opinion about women working in the industry?
 - c. What sort of women work in fishing?
22. Are there certain roles that women are expected to portray in the fishing industry?
23. What kind of jobs do women get in the fishing industry?
24. Is there a stereotype about the men in the fishing industry? Such as how they are expected to behave?

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