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## PERSPECTIVES FROM SELECT WOMEN WORKING IN ALASKAN COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

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PERSPECTIVES FROM SELECT WOMEN WORKING IN  
ALASKAN COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

BY

BERENICE YANG GONZALEZ

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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MASTER OF ARTS IN MARINE AFFAIRS  
OF  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Women have a long history of being actively involved in fisheries worldwide. Despite this fact, the popular image of fishers still assumes a male identity. An understudied yet important factor is women's involvement in the commercial fishing beyond the family unit. This research was exploratory in scope, taking a thematic analysis approach, which allowed for the identification of patterns and themes within the qualitative data. Through eighteen interviews with women who have experience working in various sectors and segments of the Alaskan commercial fisheries, this thesis identifies: some of the women's roles; the unique challenges that women face to break into and within the industry; initiatives in the face of barriers; some successes and recognition gained by women in the industry; some areas of improvement needed to create safer and more inclusive commercial fisheries for everyone; and possible roles for women in the future. Sexism, both internalized and institutionalized, creates barriers for women's participation. Sexism plays out in various ways, from women not being able to get a job because of sexual discrimination to the potential for sexual harassment once they do. Despite these barriers, some women have come together to create support groups and social media networks that help to offset challenging aspects of choosing fishing as a career. Women pointed out areas of improvement that would be beneficial for both men and women—for instance, the need for training programs to gain competitive skills needed to break into the commercial fishing industry. Interestingly, adjusting commercial fishing practices based on women's

perspectives may create a more inviting and inclusive environment for both men and women.

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## INTRODUCTION

Women have a long history of being actively involved and playing a relevant role in fisheries worldwide (Bennett 2005; Fröcklin et al. 2013). Yet, the stereotypical image of a fisher has been a solitary, stoic male figure brashly confronting the vast sea (Davis 2000; Samuel 2007; Williams et al. 2007; Williams 2008; Sze Choo et al. 2008). Much research around fisheries focus on the public practices of harvesting, specifically on stock assessments and fish ecology, excluding the pre- and post-harvest work like, finance, processing, and marketing the catch (Bennett 2005; Weeratunge et al. 2010; Harper et al. 2013; Schwerdtner-Máñez & Pauwelussen 2016). This emphasis on harvesting fails to reflect the actual diversity of people, roles, and jobs that make up the commercial fishing industry from the harvesting sector to producers, processing, professional organizations, public administrations, NGOs, and so forth (Allison et al. 1989; Mercier 2001). Edward H. Allison (2013) argues that the fishing culture and the physical setting around the industry are responsible drivers of masculine stereotypes. A considerable amount of research on women's roles in fisheries is often insufficient and fragmented in the data collection of these activities related to fisheries which are a significant limitation to improve gender equity; in particular, women fishers often remain invisible in statistics (Bennett 2005; Williams 2008; Weeratunge et al. 2010; Harper et al. 2013; Schwerdtner-Máñez & Pauwelussen 2016).

There is a need to understand better the magnitude and nature of the effects gender have on the commercial fishing industry (Mercier 2001; Calhoun et al. 2016,).

In several fishing communities, women provide essential support to make fishing viable by financially contributing income from outside sources of the fishing operations (*Marketisation of Governance: Critical Feminist Perspectives from the South* 2002; Bennett 2005). Because fishers are the public figures of fisheries, the overall perception of fisheries is male-dominated. Women are assumed to have little importance in the industry resulting in the roles of women in marine resource exploitation to remain unseen. A lack of information about women as resource users and their asymmetrical representation in decision-making bodies and managerial positions in the fisheries leads to an underestimation of their role in the social, cultural, and economic context (Medard et al. 2002; Béné 2003). Also, it leads to significantly underestimating fishing pressure on the resource, and partial and counterproductive management strategies and policies, especially in coastal areas (Harper et al. 2013; Schwerdtner-Máñez & Pauwelussen 2016).

In the past few decades, fisheries management has expanded as a discipline to include concerns in addition to fish stock and statistical data. For example, ecosystems, well-being, community sustainability, and livelihoods are subjects fisheries researchers are trying to explore. Although efforts to include ecological concerns and economic considerations, the non-economic social sciences are often disregarded (Conway et al. 2002; Calhoun et al. 2016). Human dimensions were included in an effort to design better management in fisheries by merging humans into the conversation of the management of natural resources. In the fisheries, the human dimension refers to a resource and a component of ecosystem-based management (EBM). EBM primarily emphasizes the social and ecological connections; ecosystem

services, or natural resources, are used while guaranteeing human well-being (Leslie & McLeod 2007). Hall-Arber et al. (1996) highlight the relevance of considering the human dimension because it focuses on the management of men and women rather than the resources. Discounting the roles of women in fisheries ignores one potential way of strengthening the sector.

The inclusion of gender aspects are relevant to research and policy, but, with a few key exceptions in the 1980s, had often been overlooked in fisheries literature until the turn of the twenty-first century (Tietze 1995; Diamond et al. 2003; Fröcklin et al. 2013; Harper et al. 2013). There are comprehensive case studies detailing descriptions of gender roles within fishing communities and their distinction across countries and geographical regions (Vunisea 1997; Lambeth 1999; Gurumayum et al. 2006; Halim & Ahmed 2006; Williams et al. 2007; Kronen 2008; Weeratunge et al. 2010). Williams (2008) and Weeratunge et al. (2010) describe the various gendered division of employment in fishing communities and their involvement and importance in fisheries processing and trade in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Republic of Palau, the east coast peninsular Malaysia and Uganda fishing communities. Two symposiums focused on women and gender, the Global Symposium on Women in Fisheries 2001 and the Asian Fisheries Society's 4<sup>th</sup> Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries in 2013, and show the worldwide interest in women becoming more noticeable in the fisheries and aquaculture.

International literature on women's roles in the fisheries encompasses both women in fisheries and various fisheries-related activities performed by women as an effort to analyze women's roles in small-scale fisheries. Research on gender and

small-scale fisheries and aquaculture in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific concentrates on gender division of labor resulting in women playing active roles in the fisheries (Firth 1984; Pollnac 1984; Nowak 1988; Dela Pena & Marte 2001; Siason 2001; Sotto et al. 2001; Yahaya 2001; Browne 2002; Lambeth et al. 2002; Demmke 2006; Halim & Ahmed 2006; Novaczek & Mitchell 2006; Weeratunge et al. 2010). A paper by Neis et al. (2005) highlights case studies from Africa and Asia that comprises the negative impacts of globalization on the position of women engaged in fishing-related income. In Africa, small-scale fisheries have gained attention due to a decrease in poverty and an increase in food security (Medard et al. 2002; Kébé 2009). Even though women play a fundamental part in subsistence fishing, they are not recognized as participants, resulting in their exclusion from organizations (Williams 2002). In Asia, the increase of aquaculture has changed the role of women. For instance, in Goa, India, women have gained economic independence and empowerment which increase the standard of living for their families (Rubinoff 1999). These are a few examples of the efforts in the past couple of decades that have raised women's profiles in Asian-Pacific and African fisheries.

Women in Europe have had a considerable role in the processing section, especially in the peak time of herring fisheries since the 19th century (Rana & Choo 2002). Women in Europe are more present in roles such as support, marketing, processing, trading and other activities related to fisheries, but the full extent of the contributions of women in supporting fishing operations are not described in detail in many studies (Frangoudes & O'Doherty 2004; Frangoudes 2011). In Germany, fishermen's wives provide supplemental income into the household (Harper et al.

2013). Additionally, in the United Kingdom, women have a significant contribution in terms of their participation in the fishing industry that goes under-recognized and have limited participation in management and policy making (Zhao et al. 2013). It is worth noting that many of these studies highlight the absence of gender disaggregated-data in fisheries. It is relevant to consider these studies to establish a global scope of women's involvements and fisheries management within the fishing industry.

Research on fishing communities in the United States is minimal in comparison to many other regions. Much of the early research on women's roles in industrial fisheries was conducted from the mid-1980s to late-1990s with the focal point of household, family and economic aspect of the fishing business (Danowski 1980; Dixon et al. 1984; Kaplan 1988). Most of the research on the social aspects of fisheries is about men, but it does not address masculine perspectives or concepts directly (Bennett 2005). Several factors explain this shortage of research, the primary one being that the focus of national political agendas is on the predominantly male catch sector (Tietze 1995). Although women have increasingly been employed on the harvesting side of the business, a lack of data collection on women fishers persists due to biased sampling methods and the perception that the industry is mostly composed of men, which may result in the failure to interview women fishers (Williams 2008). Another factor is "gender-neutral" research into the livelihoods of fishery-dependent communities, which typically fails to interview women because male family members or the traditional male head of the household "speak" for them. Although in the past, researchers often overlooked the processing, marketing and management aspects of the industry which is where most females work, this has been remedied in recent

years, as shown above when talking about women in Europe, Asia, and Africa (Bennett 2005; Colburn & Clay 2012; Grimm et al. 2012; Lyons et al. 2016).

Recent literature in fisheries is shifting to a more holistic and adaptive form of management (Pollnac et al. 2006; Clay & Olson 2008; Hall-Arber et al. 2009; Lester et al. 2010; Olson 2011; Norman & Holland 2012; Johnson et al. 2014; Pomeroy et al. 2015; Lyons et al. 2016). Studies have shifted since the late-1990s to develop more depth about communities, especially with the natural resources fluctuating. Women are part of the human dimension of the commercial fisheries that ought to be considered as equal participants even though it is perceived as predominantly male-dominated and those in higher positions are usually male. Most studies related to women in commercial fisheries are about fishers' wives focusing on women as a secondary or background role and disregarding broader gendered patterns.

In response, since the 1980s, scholars have turned to researching women's roles beyond that of the "fishermen's wife" (De Santis 1984; Thompson 1985; Kaplan 1988; Yodanis 2000; Dowling 2011; Lwenya & Yongo 2012; Willson 2014; Kleiber et al. 2015; Kilpatrick et al. 2015; Shaw et al. 2015). A study by Carothers (2013) points out that since quotas in 1995 went into effect in U.S. halibut fishing communities in Alaska, women, who for years have primarily worked in the fishery, often purchased these quotas. This has given them access to the fisheries in the harvesting sector which is where the actual catching of the fish is done. However, it is worth noting that in this study some women stated that they purchased such quotas for their male spouse, resulting in women's ownership of quotas "in name only." On the other hand, the author also highlighted that it could be an indication of social shifts as

women become active participants. Active participation has empowered women within these management programs. It then becomes imperative to look beyond the simplistic view of women as spouses. A study by Calhoun et al. (2016) identifies fishermen's wives in Oregon fisheries as a vital component to community resilience, adaptation, and well-being. Women are perceived to increased resilience in Oregon by being adaptive and contributing to the local knowledge. Calhoun et al. (2016)'s research highlights the importance of including women's experiences in management and policy-making which contributes to stability and thus resilience. Any study of fisheries that ignores gender dynamics ignores shifting power structures within and outside the household. While it is great that they consider women, much of the research is limited to focusing on families, women as fishermen's wives or supportive roles in the industry, which further leaves unanalyzed the masculinity stereotype related to fisheries, even though women had shown income diversity (Manoogian-O'Dell et al. 1998; Gilden 1999; Calhoun et al. 2016).

An analysis of the discrepancy between men's and women's roles, responsibilities, access, and opportunities will provide a holistic picture of how marine environments have been used, governed and changed over time (Bennett 2005; Williams 2008; Schwerdtner-Máñez & Pauwelussen 2016). In order to accomplish the latter a rigorous analysis of the information of, access to, and usage of, fish and other marine resources, distinguished between women and men is required (Schwerdtner-Máñez & Pauwelussen 2016). Women's concerns in the harvesting sector can only be identified and addressed by looking at stereotypes in the sector and recognizing the roles and their impacts in promoting and hindering the involvement of women in

fisheries research, development, and management. The subsequent information could aid to formulate effective interventions to promote participation of women (Medard et al. 2002).

The decline in access to the commercial fisheries in Alaska is not a new issue, and prioritization and improvement of access is always an ongoing process. There have been negative consequences in the fisheries over the years, such as: concentration of wealth, crew job loss, lower wages and leasing quotas (Knapp 2011; Donkersloot & Carothers 2016). These negative consequences have led to the aging of the workforce in the commercial fisheries, hence the need for the recruitment of a workforce for the success of fisheries (Lowe 2015; Donkersloot & Carothers 2016). Little information about women and their roles in the fishery industries in Alaska exists. Beginning to fill in this gap of knowledge, starting with information on women's roles and contributions to the fishing industry, should raise awareness about potential gender issues in the industry (Mercier 2001). With the shifting approach to studying women/gender in fishing the purpose of this study is to: (1) gather information about the current roles of women in the fishery industry in Alaska; and, (2) broadly sketch women's perspectives about their current and future roles. Through this small-scale preliminary research, this project brings to light some women's perspectives in order to begin to reveal a more holistic picture of the fishing industry in Alaska.

This research provides a broad overview of aspects related to women's roles in fisheries. This information reveals some actions taken by women to equalize the field and some factors that might hinder women's involvement in the fisheries. Focusing on women in commercial fisheries will help fill a gap in social understanding of the



issues related to commercial fisheries in the state of Alaska. This study explores the context of women in the Alaskan fisheries explicitly by asking: (1) What are the current roles women have in fisheries and why do they occupy such roles?; (2) What factors have influenced the presence or absence of women in the fishing industry?; (3) What are the barriers and responses to some of the barriers that women face in commercial fisheries? Scant attention has been paid to women's roles in Alaskan fisheries; this thesis seeks to begin to document the relevant information necessary to understand women's participation in the fisheries beyond the supportive role of fishermen's wives.

This research does not include a comprehensive review of women within the Alaskan commercial fishing industry. Instead, it serves as a pilot study and should be viewed as preliminary. It suggests future researchers should conduct a more comprehensive research agenda to thoroughly investigate women in various fisheries and their perspectives across Alaska. Also, decision-making bodies should integrate such knowledge in the management, politics, and policy of the commercial fisheries for more effective management. This study, as well as future research, may be used to build an in-depth examination of women's roles and bring an understanding of the changes and challenges faced by women in commercial fisheries. One way to achieve the purpose of this study is through the use of interviews, which contributes to the social science interest in the Alaskan commercial fisheries.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews were the primary method in the study to obtain different perceptions regarding the current and future women's roles and what incentivizes and inhibits women's roles in the commercial fishing industry in Alaska. In total, eighteen semi-structured interviews were conducted. The participants were involved in various communities in Alaska at some point or another. These are the following communities in Alaska that the participants were involved in: Anchorage, Bearing Sea, Bristol Bay, Copper River, Dillingham, Dutch Harbor, Gulf of Alaska, Juneau, Kodiak, Petersburg, Prince William Sound, Sitka, and Yukon River. Some interviewees were involved in more than one community, and some participants did not identify a particular community where they were involved in the fishery.

Fourteen out of the eighteen of the participants were involved in the harvesting sector. The fishing methods the participants were involved are: gillnetting, seining, trolling, longlining, freezing trolling and hook and line. Additionally, within the harvesting sector tendering was included since the tender maximize the efficiency of commercial fisheries in Alaska by being the conduit between the fishing boats and the fish processor. The species fished by the participants were: halibut, salmon (i.e., Coho, and Sockeye), herring, crab, and black cod. Nine out eighteen of the participants were involved in the marketing, management, policy, and politics sector. Some of the organizations are Trade Associations, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Vessel's Owner Association and Seafood

Marketing. Five out of eighteen worked in seafood processors. However, it is worth noting that two out of the five did not provide much information about women's experience in processing plants due to their minimal experience in that sector. The participants' backgrounds are summarized in Table 1. Note that just under half of the participants were involved in more than one sector.

Table 1. Background of Participants Interviewed

	Harvesting Sector	Processing Plants/ Canneries	Marketing, Management, Policy and Politics Sector
1	X		
2	X	X	
3	X	X	
4	X		
5	X		
6	X		X
7			X
8	X		X
9			X
10	X		
11	X	X	
12	X	X	X
13	X		X
14	X	X	
15			X
16	X		
17	X		X
18			X

## **Participant Recruitment, Ethical Issues in Data Gathering**

Recruitment criteria for the participants were that participants must be women currently or previously employed in the commercial fisheries in Alaska. A convenience sample was made from accessibility, availability at a given time, willingness to participate, and publicly available contact information on sites related to commercial fisheries in Alaska which may have excluded some of the potential subjects and could have biased the sampling (Dörnyei 2007; Miles et al. 2014; Etikan et al. 2016). With the use of a convenience sample other subjects who might not have access to the internet or whose information was not public might be excluded during the selection process (Explorable.com; Miles et al. 2014; Etikan et al. 2016). Following with a snowball sample where participants were asked to refer other people with similar characteristics essential to the research design who might be willing to participate, and it was continued until potential subjects' willingness to participate during the study's research period were not found (Trotter II 2012).

All participants, but one, were interviewed by phone. Although phone interviews increased the coverage of different places in Alaska, they reduce the ability to bond with the participants which may hinder the quality of the interviews (Irvine 2010). The interviews were scheduled at the participants' most convenient time and date. The interviews were recorded with the use of a phone app, TapeACallPro by the principal researcher. Seventeen interviews were phone recorded interviews and varied from 30 minutes to 70 minutes in length. Only one participant was interviewed via email. An exception was made to accommodate the participant's needs to enable her best participation and response in the research. Due to the participation and interaction with

human subjects a standard verification protocol was used to ensure acceptance by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The consent form was read and signed by all the participants before the interviews.

Interview questions were initially developed to help answer the overarching research questions. Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, conversations could take any direction the participant chose to go. Not all the questions were answered in each interview. Also, participants were free to develop as much as they desired on the questions or to choose not to answer if they did not want to or felt uncomfortable sharing information. Standardized open-ended interview questions for all participants made this study more reliable because the variation of answers should result from the different backgrounds rather than how the question is asked for each participant (Louise Barriball & While 1994). Qualitative semi-structured interviews allowed a different insight into the social phenomenon as participants were allowed to reflect and reason on their own experiences (Folkestad 2008). Since the interviews were the primary technique of data collection, it is essential to be cautious of the type of data analysis in the earlier stages.

All transcriptions were completed verbatim by the principal researcher to ensure consistency and allow for analysis. To verify the accuracy of the transcripts, the principal researcher re-listened to the recordings while reading the transcripts. Participants had the right to amend, verify, or omit information after the interview was conducted as a form of “member checking” accurateness of interviews (Ridder 2014). Transcripts were sent to participants that signed the consent form for their interview. To ensure internal validity of the codebook data, another social scientist (inter-coded

reliability) coded three transcripts chosen at random independently and created a sample code-book to cross-check and compare with the original analysis (Mays & Pope 1995; Armstrong et al. 1997). The overlap between the original analysis and the independent analysis indicated the confidence of the codebook and reduced the error and bias generated by the principal researcher (Ryan & Bernard 2003).

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis (TA) was the chosen method of analysis, and it is extensively used to analyze interviews (Boyatzis 1998; Holloway & Les Todres 2003; Roulston 2001). The conceptual framework of TA is based on Clarke and Braun (2017) and is a method used for “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (2017, p.297). In other words, this method is an inductive method where a “rigorous thematic approach can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions” (Braun & Clarke 2006, p.97). TA has been shown to be a valuable method for probing different perspectives from participants, highlighting parallels and differences, and producing unsuspected understandings (King 2004; Braun & Clarke 2006).

The following relevant consideration is to identify the themes in the data. A theme captures something relevant between the data and the research questions that represents a level of a patterned response or meaning within the dataset (Clarke & Braun 2017). Clarke and Braun (2017) provide a six-phase guide which is a handy framework for conducting this kind of analysis, and it was used for this research. (1) Become familiar with the data which involves transcribing the data and reading and re-reading the data and noting initial ideas along the way. (2) Generate initial codes

across the data. The coding should be systematic highlighting interesting features to the analyst. The codes categorize a feature of the data that appears stimulating to the researcher. (3) Search for themes: organizing the codes in different potential themes. The process of coding is part of the analysis, as the data is organized into meaningful groups (Miles & Huberman 1994; Tuckett 2005). The analysis should be refocused on a broader level. (4) Review themes: checking themes within the coded extracts and the entire data set. This step should create a cohesive thematic “map” of analysis. (5) Define themes: this step generates clear definitions and names for each theme in a detailed analysis. (6) Write-up the results being sure to provide appropriate evidence for the themes identified within the data. This qualitative approach is inductive (Frith et al. 2004). Themes identified strongly are linked with the data collected, in this case, the interviews (Patton 1990).

TA is advantageous due to the flexibility, the relatively fast and easy way to learn the method and the little or no experience required for the researcher to perform TA. The research becomes well-organized when handling the data which helps to produce a clear and systematized final report (King 2004). Even though there are many benefits to using TA, it is relevant to recognize the shortcomings of TA. The lack of significant literature may cause researchers to feel hesitant about the degree of rigorousness of TA. The simpler TA is detrimental because it does not allow the researcher to make claims about linguistic use (Braun & Clarke 2006). The flexibility of TA also allows for irregularity and the absence of rationality when developing themes derived from the data.

## FINDINGS

This study identified several challenges women face in the commercial fisheries which may discourage participation. Traditional gender roles for women in Alaskan fishing communities describe women on boats as taboo and often depicts them in a nurturing role. Such traditional social ascriptions affect the roles and career opportunities for women in Alaskan commercial fisheries. Sexism, both internalized and institutionalized, creates barriers for women's participation. Internalized sexism is when women themselves or other women reinforce sexist behaviors they have learned in society (Capodilupo 2017b). Institutionalized sexism refers to when an organization, like public or private institutions, or government agencies, have biased practices based on sex. The practices are a result of the idea that women are inferior to men (Capodilupo 2017a). Harassment also discourages women's participation in certain sectors of Alaskan commercial fisheries. Women have faced sexual assault, hostile environments, and intimidation.

Despite these barriers, women and some men have come together to create support groups to help offset and resist some of the more challenging aspects of fishing as a career. Interestingly, looking at the commercial fisheries in Alaska through women's eyes may point to ways to create a more inviting and inclusive environment for both men and women.



## **Challenges Faced by Women in the Commercial Fisheries**

### *Barriers to Entry:*

#### **Cultural Norms**

Countless women face barriers in securing their first job in the commercial fisheries. Perhaps the biggest obstacle is that “some men don’t feel that women belong [o]n the boat.” Women also stated that the lack of opportunity to receive the necessary training hindered their entry into the industry. From a young age, boys are encouraged to enter into the fisheries by learning many of the skills needed to do so (Yodanis 2000). A participant noted that “[w]omen are not often educated by their families or [do not] have the opportunity to get educated by society or their families on roles ... [P]robably the ... biggest setback is ... not ... [being] cultured into a lot of this knowledge and work.” Before women even attempt to enter into the industry traditional norms of women’s roles in society affects their chances to get into the industry. Everything from subtle messages that discourage women from seeking training in certain vocational skills to outright hostility toward women who fish, limits women’s ability to obtain desirable jobs in the harvesting sector.

The traditional labor market of the commercial fisheries is based on the idea that the potential worker is actively reaching out and advertising themselves to occupy a job in the harvesting sector. “[F]or example, walking the docks is a common way to get a job. You just walk up and down the docks and ask if they need a deckhand.” One potential reason that worsens the severity of sexism against women in commercial fisheries is hiring practices. Hiring practices may be prejudiced as they assess the skills of potential workers (Lambeth & Abraham 2001). The difficulty of breaking into

the industry is not only because of the dynamics of the commercial fisheries, but the bias in society. In an interview with one-woman respondent in this study, she noted that “it was harder to find a job ... because men think that [women] are incapable physically or mentally.” From her statement, it is apparent that at times the traditional ‘female’ and ‘male’ ideals spill over into the commercial fisheries, and later these are normalized and internalized.

### **Women as Sex Objects**

For some men, women are seen as sexual or romantic partners rather than as potential employees. For instance, one subject mentioned that when seeking a job, potential bosses would respond with something like, “so you know I am married, or I am not looking for a deckhand but looking for a girlfriend ... ” She found these statements “insulting.” This experience would not surprise Carini and Jonetta (2017) who write that women are often described by their physical appeal portrayed as sexually desirable. Even before securing jobs in the fishery sectors, women have to deal with gender-based discrimination from potential employers.

### **Women are Enemies to Fellow Women—Internalized Sexism**

From the interviews, it was also noted that women could be the enemies of other women. At times the bias against women is adopted by themselves, thus hindering the recruitment of other women. A woman interviewee noted that “some fishermen's wives do not want other women on the boat, and [this] is an obstacle because not every job is available to you.” The major reason for such negative attitudes is the idea that wives may feel insecure and believe that other women may snatch their husbands (Allison et al. 2012). This implies that some women do not trust each other or their

husbands and do not feel comfortable when their husbands are working with women. Accordingly, Seeley and Allison (2005) and Dowling (2011) wrote that women might exclude other women by persuading their husbands not to hire them. Keeping women from finding their way into the harvesting sector ensures the preservation of a family economy and power within the household (Dowling 2011). However, this action may perpetuate the idea that women do not belong on boats.

### **Lack of Self-Confidence—Internalized Sexism**

Participants pointed out that a lack of self-confidence may influence the attractiveness of the industry for women as well. For instance, one participant noted that

“I think [many] women might look at the industry and be like ‘oh I could not do that’ ... or get themselves down without trying ... I think they would be pleasantly surprised if they express their desire to do something ... [and] they will find people to help them [...] [A] lot of [women] might not try in the first place because of their preconceptions.”

The lack of confidence in women’s competence aggravates low self-esteem (Skaptadóttir 2000). The perception of ineptitude that women feel when thinking about pursuing a career in commercial fisheries leads to the lack of role models because the number of women generally is minuscule.

### **Protecting Women from Harassment**

The desire to protect women from potential harassment can also be a barrier to landing that first job. There is great concern about how new women in the industry will be treated. Some participants in this study stated that they were hesitant to

recommend other women for positions where they were uncertain of how the captain or crew would treat her. They identified women who come from particularly vulnerable groups—i.e., young women who do not have connections to the industry—as having less ability to break into the industry. These young women would normally occupy lower positions with lack of experience and knowledge, and could easily be taken advantage of both verbally, physically and financially by others. Some women also claimed that some captains chose not to hire women because they specifically feared sexual harassment could take place. Captains decided to reduce the risk by keeping women off of the boat rather than by combatting harassing behavior. Thus, the fear of harassment blocks women’s entry onto boats regardless of whether such behavior actually occurs.

*Barriers While in the Industry:*

“Whatever women do they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good.” (“The Quotations Page: Quote from Charlotte Whitton”)

**The Bar is Higher for Women than for Men**

A common sentiment among participants was that “[y]ou have to prove yourself over and over, and that gets frustrating.” One woman explained that at the beginning of every fishing season, she felt she was being retested despite her previous experience. As is the case in many male-dominated industries, the standards that women have to meet are higher than the standards for men, “and there's less room for error,” noted one interviewee.

This lack of respect and the assumption that women are incapable of fulfilling their duties, despite experience, is also seen outside the harvesting sector. The main

difference is that women in marketing, management, politics, and policy sectors may not have to prove themselves each season, but they still have a hard time gaining the respect of their male colleagues. One woman described commercial fishing as “an old-fashioned industry,” meaning, “There's a lot of older male[s] that I deal with.” She admitted, however, that many of the older men “are very respectful [and they] know that I am very capable.” However, she also noted that, some men she had “met more recently ... don't take me seriously [...] I have definitely been talked down to or ... people ... go around [me, as if] I am not in charge.” Another woman expressed similar frustrations, stating that, “[o]ne of my main bosses does not trust women. I have known him on personal levels for a long time ... I am not trusted to do a lot of [the] roles of an executive director [her current position].” The suspicion of women’s capabilities on the part of some men undoubtedly decreases women’s chances of upward mobility in the industry.

### **Internalized Sexism’s Effects on Women in the Industry**

Women themselves may begin to doubt their own capabilities due to this constant questioning. One woman stated that not until she spoke “with other people [did she] realize that ... I am overqualified ... for the job.” Thus, outsiders can be both a source of denigration and uplift. Another participant brought to light a similar example that reflects the internalized sexism among women in the commercial fisheries.

“I remember the first time somebody . . . just out of the blue just said: Hey will you run this boat for me, you know? I was like what? I just never really considered myself as a valid candidate to do anything and then when I told my husband he is like, ‘well, why not? You [have] been working on a boat forever

you know; why shouldn't you be able to [do it?] [Moreover,] ... I never really thought about it, so it is a strange place [of] self-confidence.”

Both quotes above exemplify women’s low self-expectations, negative self-perception, and feelings of unskillfulness. Internalized sexism is also shown in the feeling of incompetence which may result in the form of lower expectations and could be due to the lack of female role models in the industry (Bearman et al. 2009).

### **Institutionalized Sexism in the Industry**

Sexism goes beyond people and seeps into organizations. Women feel unwelcome especially because the ‘design’ of much of the equipment does not suit women’s bodies. For instance, the one-size fits all fishing gear reflects and reinforces a lack of recognition of women as part of the industry. Until two years ago, rain gear was not made to fit women’s bodies. At that time, a women-ran business began producing and selling gear made for women’s bodies (see more below in the section on *Breaking Stereotypes*). Equipment on boats is also designed for the ease of use for a particular body type—i.e., male. Even so, one women participant noted that “I do almost anything the guys can ... except for the roller. I am a little bit shorter, so it is hard for me to reach around the roller for the long-liner . . . but I do everything else.” In another interview, a respondent noted that “my hands are not that big but, I had to figure out how to physically pick ... the fish out of the net rather than just busting them free” In this case, this woman’s method of retrieval was adopted by other crew members because it “is better for the fish [, and] [i]t is better for the net.” Despite the difficulties that women face, many who have jobs in the harvesting sector make do and may even devise new strategies for harvesting.

## Harassment in the Workplace

As with many male-dominated industries being infiltrated by women, harassment exists in the commercial fisheries (Chira; Kleiber et al. 2015). Such behavior may be even more evident given that boats stay out on the water for days at a time, allowing victims no way of getting out of such situations (Lawson; Kleiber et al. 2015). One participant shared her own close call of being confined with a known sexual predator. Luckily for her, “my insurance company [said] that we could not bring him on the boat and then he later got indicted for 26 counts of rape and sodomy ... [It was] very scary to have that so close to happening because ... [I would be] out alone on my boat with this man who was an absolute monster ... ” Bringing attention to such behavior benefits both men and women because, as noted in this case, it makes the work environment safer by not condoning heinous behaviors from such perpetrators.

Government observers on boats also face harassment. Not only are such observers meant to enforce regulations that fishers may disagree with, putting them on the outs with the crew from the get-go, but many observers are women (Eaton). Such behavior could impact the boat’s ability and opportunity to have a great season, potentially affecting the income of the boat. It is worth pointing out that sexual harassment allegations coming from an observer might have more opportunity to be made public because observer programs work with National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration and the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council which give the observers a platform to voice their complaints of harassment.

Unfortunately, along with harassment comes victim blaming. One participant of this study commented that “[A] lot of it is their ... fault ... [because] you do not put

yourself in this situation [;] you are not going to have that situation.” Such sentiments should not come as a surprise, but nevertheless are worth noting given that this kind of thinking will undoubtedly block women from being able to participate fully in the commercial fishing sectors.

### **Response to the Barriers That Women Face in Commercial Fisheries**

Women who are aware of the inadequate resources, biases, and prejudices prevalent in the industry brought up several potential improvements for the workplace. Women are actively communicating their desired roles in the commercial fisheries with captains and crew and demonstrating their desire to be part of the harvesting sector (Lambeth et al. 2002). A woman stated that once she spoke “with the owner of the boat . . . about what I actually wanted to do on the boat . . . issues [revolving around discrimination] disappear[ed] completely because I was able to be a reliable worker.”

#### *Breaking Stereotypes*

Women are trying to work around the masculine stereotypes of fishing by creating ‘feminine’ ways of working in the fisheries. A boat owner participant said that “on my boat, we strive to embrace our femininity . . . [T]here are mirrors and blow dryers and girly stuff everywhere . . . [F]or me, it is a job like any other, if you want to look cute, go for it.” This kind of behavior goes hand in hand with creating fishing gear for women. A few participants mentioned the Salmon Sisters, an environmentally friendly clothing company founded by two women fishers with the goal to spread awareness of the sustainability in the fisheries and their love for Alaska (Salmon Sisters). As one interviewee noted, the “Salmon Sisters . . . play with



traditional gender roles” in exciting ways. Women defying and making a niche with the design of proper and better-fitted gear indicates women are making their way into the industry and foresee to stay and make others welcome.

Social media and journalism also play a role in breaking stereotypes about masculinity and boats. There has been a peak in the interest of women in the commercial fisheries by social media with the publication of various articles in nationally popular magazines such as Vogue and Glamour (these articles include: Aadsen; Banse; Heller & Arbugaeva; Lo; Schaeffer; Weingarten). Public recognition of women in various parts of the industry is shedding light on participants who previously were invisible. Additionally, public exposure is giving recognition to women as an essential player that is beyond family ties, or in-land supportive roles in communities.

#### *Men as Allies*

Despite having to endure the challenges and biases in the commercial fisheries, many women have somehow managed to gain recognition from their peers and superiors. Some of the steps taken by women had tremendous resonance and, in many ways, translated into recognition from male colleagues or bosses. A participant mentioned changes to unequal privileges at a cannery where she worked in the same position as a number of male colleagues. The participant worked as a machinist, and for two years she was not given the same housing accommodation as the other workers. Moreover, her supervisor was conflicted about giving her the same housing privileges that others enjoyed while working as a machinist. She noted that “with some help from two male machinist friends, they got me a room in their trailer when it

became vacant.” This shows that some men support women’s access to equal treatment.

Participants felt that things are changing in the harvesting and processing sector, and progress has been made due to women’s earlier participation and paving the way for other women. A volunteer in the processing plant said that

“I think ... some obstacles initially where I had to prove myself and earn the respect of my male peers, and that took a few years just to change people[’s] attitudes and expectations of what a woman can do. . . [T]hey started bringing more women into those core positions, so I think it is getting better.”

The fact that women are gaining entry into positions as harvesters and in some of the previously all-male segments of the processing sectors shows a success. Another participant said that “about 12 years ago I was the first woman hired on the boat, on several of the boats that I have been on, but many men now, even this year, they asked me specifically if I know of any women that are looking for jobs.” Women are paving the way for other women to come into the commercial fisheries by making the concept of a woman on a boat more normal.

#### *Positive Initiatives to Resist Harassment*

Women’s experiences have initiated a ripple effect of positive initiatives to alter the landscape of fisheries and women have been resourceful in the ways to level the playing field, such as using social media as a tool to combat harassment. While there is no official channel or institution to regulate or support women who may be victims of harassment or resources to aid women to break into the industry, social media, especially Facebook, has become a tool for policing and publicizing potential adverse

situations for women. “On one Facebook page ... I see . . . women warn other women not [to] fish on boats because they had bad experiences before...” People can reach out to one another to recommend or dissuade people from going on boats to work. The groups are very welcoming and active thus can help others navigate around the commercial fisheries. These technological advancements create more resources for women trying to break into the industry.

Some people have even gone a step further to try to create safe spaces and resources that women could potentially use before and during the fishing seasons if anything goes awry. The Strength of Tides, also identified as Her Also, is a movement that is just taking off in Alaska. The purpose of the movement is to support, empower and celebrate women in the maritime industry (“Strength of the Tides”). Also, the movement looks for representation, solidarity and accountability, community building and education of women (“Strength of the Tides”). A participant describes in detail some actions taken by the movement including a safe harbor and a steer clear list. She explained that,

“in the safe harbor category, it goes to boats that are safe boats. If [one feels] threatened or you are stuck in a place, or your job that you flew up to Alaska isn't what you thought it was ... [T]his is the place for a woman to go if you are threatened in any way or also a safe working environment so not only that it's safe but also that the skipper wants to actively teach the woman not just send her off to make a sandwich, so that is a list [of] owners or employees ... [T]he steer clear list is a list of fisherman that are known to have had altercations in the past was with women as far as sexual harassment or just abuse or that aren't woman-friendly[.]”

This type of movement and organization are a coping strategy and resource to adjust to the challenges that women could face in the commercial fishing industry. The movement emerged after President Trump was elected 2016 as means of supporting women in the water.

However, the movement faces some challenges. It has been criticized for the lack of male participation which could be misconstrued and create a division between men and women. A participant stated that not enough men were on board.

“Unfortunately, ... [the] movement would be stronger the more [it gets] men ... on board because obviously, those who are suppressed cannot often speak from themselves you know they often need the suppressor to speak for them on their behalves.”

This particular movement is male inclusive, but an active invitation or awareness of such groups might be needed in order to gain more support from men for the movement.

### **Room for improvement: Networks & Services**

Despite the existence of Facebook groups and other women’s networks, some participants did not know about the resources mentioned above. Others only vaguely knew of some groups, including The Women’s Commercial Fisheries Alliance, Strength of the Tides, and Chix Who Fish. Why they did not participate in these efforts was not made clear, but many did express their desire for such centralized women’s networks to exist.

Such a women’s network could promote consciousness of women’s efforts and needs, provide mentoring, and establish outreach and support groups. One woman

pointed out the need for resources for those who faced hostile work environments when they returned to shore. Such actions make the industry safer for everyone. Other participants noted that, “anyone who wants to get into the industry nowadays needs much support regarding financing, training, just connection with new job opportunities and Facebook is great at least in Alaska.” Still, others pointed out the need for more education regarding the physical safety of the boat itself.

### **Changes and Future Women’s Roles in the Fisheries**

Women are present across the various sectors of the fisheries in roles that include catching, marketing, processing, trading and other activities related to fisheries. All the participants mentioned that the number of women is increasing, and they are becoming more visible in the harvesting sector, management, policy, and politics. For instance, a respondent noted that “[w]omen are owning their own boat ... [and] their own businesses. Going out there and catching the product itself. [H]opefully, [there will be] more women in management, decision-making boards, and in policy roles.”

Women seem to have a positive attitude towards women in the industry in the future. The overarching prediction of the future of women's role can be stated as noted by an interviewee

“[We are] going to see the continued growth of women in the deck, women getting permits, women owning boats.” “... [M]ore women are join[ing] the industry[.] ... [Thus, there will be more roles, and] the younger generation has more support of being a woman in the fisheries.”

Women seem optimistic about the increase of women breaking into the industry in all the sectors of the industry regardless of the universal hurdles to get into the commercial fisheries.

## CONCLUSION

The thematic analysis helped deduce themes from the data. Themes should be taken into consideration for the commercial fisheries management and policy to become more holistic. The findings of this small study in Alaska should be considered as one piece of a larger conversation around human dimensions of the commercial fisheries. The results are informative and transferable but not generalizable. Discounting women from the human dimension does actually show to be disadvantageous because it might hinder the potential participation of individuals in fisheries due to the failure to identify different barriers that could discourage women or younger generations to see commercial fisheries as a career. The identification of the roles, responsibilities, access, and opportunity of women could help the management of fisheries be more successful in terms of effective policy and regulations. Examining and recording women's involvement provides an idea of the various areas that could be improved, especially with the consideration of the constant change of Alaskan commercial fisheries that would be beneficial for both male and female.

When entering a male-dominated industry such as commercial fisheries, women face challenges in their occupations due to their gender. They created tactics and initiatives to equalize the field. However, beyond the obstacles faced due to their gender, the participants were able to identify obstacles which are non-gender specific. This study outlines a picture of women in commercial fisheries in Alaska. Women see great potential for the continued growth of their numbers in the industry, but for that to

happen, many changes need to be made. This includes educating people about sexism for all individuals involved in fisheries, creating models of inclusive practices that speak to everyone in the community, and building a more well-established network for women across all stages in the fishing industry (from finding a job, to sexual harassment, to fighting internalized sexism). This thesis is just a small piece on women's roles in the United States, specifically in Alaska, with the intention to bring more attention to more comprehensive and in-depth research of women's experience and perspectives of Alaska's evolving commercial fishing industry.

### **Limitations and Recommendation for Future Research**

Like other research projects, some limitations and improvements can be made. Ideally, more participants and an equal number of the types of participants (i.e., processors, skippers, crewmembers, vessel owners, etc.) would have been interviewed. Also, having a proportionate sample of the various participants across the various communities of Alaska would allow one to develop a more in-depth and better picture of women's roles in Alaskan commercial fisheries. It is relevant to take into consideration that this study was exploratory and was meant as an opening for future research. As fisheries regulations are becoming more complex, the inclusion of women in the human dimension is relevant to include because, as seen in this study, women's roles in Alaska's commercial fisheries are expanding. Integrating women's roles beyond wives into social impact assessments and ensuring the visibility of their contributions, fisheries managers and decision-makers in both state and federal agencies have a better chance of creating policies that truly minimize adverse economic and social impacts to fishing communities.



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