

Fishermen Stereotypes: Sources and Symbols

Janet Gilmore

Volume 12, numéro 2, 1990

Identité maritime
Maritime Identity

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081669ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081669ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Gilmore, J. (1990). Fishermen Stereotypes: Sources and Symbols. *Ethnologies*, 12(2), 17–38. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081669ar>

FISHERMAN STEREOTYPES: SOURCES AND SYMBOLS¹

Janet C. GILMORE

Wisconsin Folk Museum

Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, U.S.A.

In talking to Great Lakes, Upper Mississippi River, and Pacific Northwest commercial fishers in the United States about their working skills and implements during the late 1970s and 1980s, I have been struck by a common concern for their professional image and the effect it has on their social standing and political clout, and accordingly on their ability to earn a living. Not only is the recurrent concern with image striking, but so are consistencies in images of fishermen through time, across the United States, and in disparate cultures around the world.

Wherever people fish for a living, they may confront stereotypes—both negative and positive—that inform public perceptions and influence the fisher's ability to market fish.² Negative stereotypes particularly appear to affect shoreside service personnel and fish marketers, game wardens and fisheries biologists, sportsfishers and legislators, in their dealings with commercial fishers and fisheries

-
1. "Sources and Symbols" seems a logical secondary title, but it also recalls Archie Green's article, "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol," *Journal of American Folklore* 78: 309 (1965), 204-228, which treats a similar phenomenon but with different victims.

The original version of this paper was presented as "The Fisherman Stereotype" during the "Maritime Folk Culture" panel held at the 1983 American Folklore Society meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. Since that time, the paper has taken several forms depending on the audience and with new findings in field documentation and scholarly literature. This version remains structurally as read at the 1989 Folklore Studies Association of Canada meeting in Quebec City, with elaborations mostly in examples.

Since the works in which stereotypes of fishing people appear are as diverse as the world's peoples, scholars, and writers, discovery of these gems is more often a matter of chance than of systematic inquiry. The author would be most grateful to learn of any instances that readers may encounter in their literary adventures.

2. Cf. Alan Dundes, "A Study of Ethnic Slurs: The Jew and the Polack in the United States," *Journal of American Folklore* 84: 332 (1971), 187.

legislation. In this presentation, I would like to rough out these stereotypes and illustrate, in part, how their existence relates to the essential nature of the fisher's work, working environment, and social context.

My first conscious encounters with fisherman stereotypes were in the Coos Bay, Oregon, area in the late 1970s, when students claimed that the local fishermen all looked the same, and later when I began interviewing locals about fishing boats and the fishing industry.³ Speaking from years of experience, a Coos Bay fish plant manager characterized the local fishermen thus in 1977:

... when we first came here, so many of the fishermen were just [the] kind of people who didn't want to work steadily, or who couldn't hold down a steady job, or just wanted to fish enough that they could go on a good drunk, or that sort of thing. And they could make enough living to suit them.

But the... fishermen who came with us were family men, and steady, pretty steady men who really made a business of it...

... most of them are very pleasant, very kindly people... they're strong individualists, I've always felt, and they're not going to be told what they can do and what they can't do. Fishermen's organizations have never held together very well because they're just not people... who go in a... group... and of course, by the time they get a boat with gear, they're pretty substantial businessmen. And this is something that lots of... the town people don't realize, how much of an investment they have in their business. And how hard they have to work, and how much good judgment they have to use to make a success of it. I don't think they're given credit for that...

But you see them in their old fishing clothes, and they just look like they probably haven't a dime... when... probably, a good share of them have a pretty substantial bank account, and a good investment that would stack up very favorably with some of the smaller businessmen around the Bay area, and in fact some of them... would be just really well-to-do by a lot of standards and their net income would amaze a lot of... businessmen around. But there've been so many stories about them...

She remarked, further:

...my youngest brother, who was a fisherman, had been at college... and he was an English major, and you wouldn't know it, he cultivated the fisherman's vernacular, and he dressed like them...⁴

These statements fairly well cover the range of negative and positive, esoteric and exoteric characterizations of commercial fisher-

3. See Janet C. Gilmore, *The World of the Oregon Fishboat: A Study in Maritime Folklife*, Ann Arbor, MI, UMI Research Press, 1986, especially pp. 5-13 of the introduction.

4. Interview, Charleston, Oregon, July 1977.

men.⁵ The impression of Coos Bay fishers who pre-dated the manager's arrival as inconsistent, unambitious workers or drunks who may not be able to hold down a regular job or who work only to go on a good drunk, is a classic point of view often found among outsiders with little or no familiarity with fishermen. The idea that distinctive speech and working clothes cause town people to look down upon fishermen as uneducated and poor, expresses another common perspective often held by outsiders with some but not much experience with fishermen. Further, the association of dress with uncleanliness, untidiness, and thus poverty, is one that fishing people think outsiders apply to them, and many take steps to counter the stereotypes by avoiding contact with the public while in working clothes, and by lavishly cleansing, dressing, and even perfuming themselves for public occasions.⁶ Similarly cognizant of their reputation for bibulousness, and often convinced of the ill effects of alcohol consumption on job performance, some fishers avow teetotalism, while others drink only onshore in a manner that will not affect their work.⁷ Finally, the positive portrayal

5. See William Hugh Jansen's classic work, "The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore," *Fabula: Journal of Folktale Studies* 2 (1959), 205-211; reprinted in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1965, pp. 43-51.
6. Of course ethnicity may play a part; cf. Michael K. Orbach, *Hunters, Seamen, and Entrepreneurs: The Tuna Seinermen of San Diego*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977, p. 286. Fishermen's daughters seem to be especially sensitive. Kathy Duccini would avoid fishing with her father on the Mississippi for several days before a social engagement (like a school dance) (Interview, "River Harvest" project, Illinois Arts Council, Chicago, and Dubuque County Historical Society, Dubuque, IA, May 1987). Debra Blom, who cleans her father's Lake Michigan smelt, refuses to be seen in public in her "gutting" clothes. Before delivering custom orders of smelt, she showers and puts on fresh clothes. She washes the work clothes each day she works and throws them away at the end of the season (Interview for Michigan Traditional Arts Program, MSU Museum, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, April 1989).
7. Fritz Gilbertsen of Seattle, who fished Southeast Alaska for decades, articulated a strict policy of no drinking on board and, as proof, told of dismissing two much-needed "hands" who disregarded his orders (Interview, "Puget Sound Celebration" project, Institute of the North-American West, Seattle, WA, September 1988). Alcohol consumption seems to become a topic of conversation with regular frequency in interviews with fishermen. I have encountered teetotalers, moderate drinkers, and alcoholics at every location. Not surprisingly, teetotalers have been especially eager to proclaim their avoidance of alcohol and cast aspersions on colleagues who do drink. But some of the alcoholics and heavy drinkers have been the most successful of fishers and businessmen. Cf. Timothy C. Lloyd and Patrick B. Mullen, *Lake Erie Fishermen: Work, Tradition, and Identity*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1990, pp. 125-130; and James M. Acheson, *The Lobster Gangs of Maine*. Hanover and London, University Press of New England, 1988, p. 52.

of fishermen as pleasant, kindly, steady family men, strong individualists, and well-to-do but misunderstood businessmen whose successes have depended on a lot of hard work and good judgment, closely resembles the positive esoteric stereotype that many fishermen hold of themselves.

Interestingly, while the plant manager sympathetically acknowledges that negative interpretations of fisherman attire and speech create an unflattering, unjust, and unfounded characterization, in the same breath she employs a negative portrayal of the former fishers whom the interloping "good" fishermen displaced. In this respect, she has used the negative stereotype classically and rhetorically to make people of equal humanity seem less worthy of fishing in the area and to justify the takeover of the lower bay by other fishers, an action that put people with legitimate claims out of business.⁸

Negative caricatures of fishermen, descriptions with a veiled negative bias, and scholarly characterizations with potentially negative connotations abound. Prominent are ones that suggest moral depravity. Laziness and connotations of social and moral degradation in the term "river rat" figure largely in stereotypes of commercial fishers and house-boaters of the lower Ohio and upper Mississippi river systems of the midwestern United States.⁹ Drunkenness and liberal consumption of alcohol are prevalently attributed as vices. Peter Anson found that "Not only in Scotland, but also in England, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany and the Scandinavian countries, sailors

-
8. The timely and strategically-located new plant contributed significantly to changing the character of both fishing and the fishing work force in the Bay area. For further elaboration, see Gilmore, *World of the Oregon Fishboat*, pp. 42-43ff. For a similar takeover, "His ordained Prophet" James J. Strang, in his *Ancient and Modern Michilimackinac* (1854), employed the same kind of contrast between the upstanding new and the lowly former fishermen on Beaver Island (Lake Michigan); see Helen Collar, "The Pre-Mormon Settlement on Beaver Island, 1837-1852," *The Journal of Beaver Island History* 2 (1980), 12-13.
 9. Jens Lund uses sources from the Mississippi River as well as the Ohio River areas in discussing the stereotype and term "river rat" in "Fishing as a Folk Occupation in the Lower Ohio Valley," Ph. D. dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, 1983, pp. 770-773, 777-778. Welder John Benson, Sr., related a joke-like story that supports the lazy, easy come, easy go attitude: A fisherman who brought in an item to Benson's shop for repair commented that he had made lots of money that morning on his catch. A farmer also visiting the shop said, "Well, gee, you went right back and got some more, didn't you?" The fisherman said, "Hell no, won't go back 'til the money's gone" (Interview, "River Harvest" project, June 1987). Commercial fisher Arnold Hockema claimed somewhat facetiously that all fishermen are basically lazy (Interview, Charleston, OR, March 1978). Cf. Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, p. 53, and Lloyd and Mullen, p. 131.

and fishermen were often excused for their inability to keep sober on account of the hardness of their life," during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁰ Another common aspersion is sexual deviance or promiscuity, as this Chesapeake Bay area taxicab driver implied in the 1970s about the local fishermen: "Those Crab Reef Island boys come over here, get all drunked up, and get into all kinds of trouble. You better watch them. They would even have sex with their sisters and brag about it."¹¹ Similarly in Hong Kong, especially in the past, the fishing/boat people have often been "regarded as exemplars of loose sexual morality."¹² Their name, "Tanka," like "river rat" in the midwestern United States and "sea-gipsy" on the central coast of

10. Peter F. Anson, *Fisher Folk-Lore*, London, The Faith Press, 1965, pp. 35-38. Some other descriptions of excessive drinking: Collar, pp. 12-13; John B. Gatewood, "Competition for Cultural Images: Fisherman versus Logger in Southeast Alaska," *MAST: Maritime Anthropological Studies* 2, 2 (1989), 94-95; Ruth Kriehn, *The Fisherfolk of Jones Island*, Milwaukee, WI, Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1988, pp. 111-112ff; S. M. Michael, "The Fishermen of India," in *The Fishing Culture of the World*, ed. Bela Gunda, Budapest: Académiai Kiado, 1984, p. 653 (fishermen in general in India) and p. 662 (one west coast fishing caste near Bombay); John Cleary Pearson, *The Fish and Fisheries of Colonial North America*, part 2, Washington, D. C., Department of the Interior, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1972, p. 544; Jeremy Tunstall, *The Fishermen*, London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1969, pp. 135-138. In each area where I have done fieldwork, some fishermen have named colleagues who have problems with alcoholism. Some use these "facts" to explain why a colleague has not succeeded financially as well as he might, thus calling into question the colleague's work ethic; cf. Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 52-53, and Lloyd and Mullen, pp. 131-133.
11. Carolyn Ellis, *Fisher Folk: Two Communities on Chesapeake Bay*, Lexington, KY, University of Kentucky Press, 1986, p. 40. Ellis's documentation of two groups of fishing people on Chesapeake Bay seems unreflectively to support the stereotype. See also, Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 53-54; and Pearson, p. 544. Some sources report sexual customs that, while they make sense in the fisher's social context, might seem deviant to outsiders: Anson, *Fisher Folk-Lore*, p. 55; Tunstall, pp. 138-141. Cf., however, Raoul Andersen and Cato Wadel, "Comparative Problems in Fishing Adaptations," in *North Atlantic Fishermen*, ed. Raoul Andersen and Cato Wadel, Newfoundland Social and Economic Papers, no. 5, St. John's. Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, pp. 144-145, who suggest that maintenance of the appearance of sexual bravado may be an important protective technique for men who work in an isolated all-male context where they could be suspected of homosexuality.
12. Barbara E. Ward, "Varieties of the Conscious Model: The Fishermen of South China," in *The Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology*, ed. Michael Blanton, A.S.A. Monographs 1, London, Tavistock Publications; New York, Frederick A. Prager, Publishers, 1965, pp. 117-118.

Portugal, "is rightly regarded by the boat-people as a term of derision and disrepute."¹³

Consistent with the picture of dissolution are claims of lawlessness—lying, stealing, and fighting particularly. In Maine, James Acheson found that lobstermen are not only caricatured as chronic liars, but that:

Federal and state officials . . . view fishermen as being difficult to deal with . . . prone to violate the law . . . unconcerned with the resources they exploit, and . . . unable to agree on anything, especially possible ways to manage the fisheries . . . The public knows only enough to stereotype the lobsterman as a mean hard fellow, prone to breaking the law.¹⁴

Typically alleged personality traits both confirm and give rise to the imagery. Repeatedly fishermen are described as stubborn (in the sense of willful), taciturn (in the sense of gruff and uncommunicative), conservative or traditional (in the sense of tradition-bound and backwards, even ignorant and superstitious), and unable to cooperate (in the sense of self-serving).¹⁵ Reportedly "tough and violent dispositions, and impulsiveness"—as in the Appalachian hillbilly stereotype—further damn them.¹⁶ This menacing, willfully licentious character is made all the more contemptible, even pitiful, by assertions of his ignorance (or lack of education), callousness, sloppiness, and

13. Ibid., p. 117; see also Octavio Lixa Filgueiras, "Fishing Crafts in Portugal," in *Fishing Culture of the World*, p. 163. In all three of these cases ("Tanka," "river rats," and "sea-gipsies"), the people are nomadic (non-landed) and frequently live on their boats.

14. James M. Acheson, "Fisheries Management and Social Context: The Case of the Maine Lobster Fishery," *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* 104, 4 (October 1975), 653, 658, 661. See also, Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 57, 75-76; George G. Carey, "Watermen: Culture Heroes in Workboats," in *Working the Water: The Commercial Fisheries of Maryland's Patuxent River*, ed. Paula J. Johnson, Charlottesville, The University Press of Virginia, 1988, pp. 21-23, 27; Lloyd and Mullen, p. 125; and Lund, pp. 770-773.

15. See, for example, Acheson, "Fisheries Management," p. 653; Filgueiras, pp. 148-149; Gatewood, p. 101; Francisco Calo Lourido, "The Seafaring Fishing Family as an Economic Community in Porto do Son, Galicia, Spain," in *Fishing Culture of the World*, p. 261.

16. Ellis, p. 15; see also, Gatewood, pp. 95-97; Kriehn, pp. 111-116; Michael, pp. 653, 661; Pearson, pp. 544, 591. Archie Green, "Hillbilly Music," p. 206, relates Fanny Kemble's description of "poor white trash" as: "the most degraded race of human beings claiming an Anglo-Saxon origin that can be found on the face of the earth—filthy, lazy, ignorant, brutal, proud, penniless savages. . . ."

uncleanliness.¹⁷ Fisher folk were so widely considered “a degraded and dirtily-inclined people” in mid-nineteenth century Scotland, that a journalist was surprised to find their houses clean, tidy, and sweet-smelling, the children better educated and more industrious than their landlubber counterparts, and the families extraordinarily interdependent and helpful to one another in time of loss.¹⁸

Like hillbillies and other groups afflicted with similar caricatures, fishing people are generally thought to lead unfortunate lives of misery and poverty. Even in ancient Egypt, a teacher wrote that a professional fisherman’s “. . . life is more wretched than that of men in all other professions. His work is in the middle of the river amongst the crocodiles.”¹⁹ Indigence, of course, can explain the immorality, mean-spiritedness, and inattentiveness to education, etiquette, and personal hygiene. Conversely, however, apparent signs of indigence can also sanction low status and prejudice against a group.

In many parts of the world today, as in the distant past, fishing people hold low status positions not only because of apparent poverty and the dim view of their work, but because of their association with fish. As in the Chesapeake Bay area, where fisher folk are thought to smell like fish, close physical contact associates fishing people with characteristics peculiar to fish, particularly the negatively-perceived, strong, lingering odor that worsens as it ripens—thus uncleanliness.²⁰ As well, in ancient Egypt, contemporary India, and the former Bengal, where fish—certain species particularly—have great religious significance and consumption is restricted by ritual taboos, takers of the fish may thus be considered ritually unclean.²¹ Indeed in India and Bengal, Hindu beliefs relegate fishermen to the lowest castes, not only because they professionally kill sacred animals and take life in general, but also because they have been construed to represent an illegal spiritual union which bars them from the initiation ceremony.²²

17. Ellis, pp. 14-15; Lloyd and Mullen, pp. 98-102, 112, 130-131, 159 (an interesting twist); and Ward, pp. 118, 126. As Dundes has pointed out in “A Study of Ethnic Slurs,” p. 202, the victimized group can enjoy the slurs and use them on themselves; two of the fishermen interviewed for the “River Harvest” project characterized fishermen as “dumb,” particularly because they persist in and enjoy work that they think is a lot of toil for not much compensation.

18. Anson, *Fisher Folk-Lore*, p. 19.

19. Rudolph Kreuzer, “Fish in Religion and Myths of Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt,” in *Fishing Culture of the World*, p. 612.

20. Ellis, pp. 14-15.

21. Kreuzer, p. 612; and Sabita Ranjan Sarkar, “Significance of Fish in Bengalee Hindu Folk Culture,” in *Fishing Culture of the World*, p. 709.

22. Michael, p. 652.

While fish may enjoy high ritual and spiritual status in India and Bengal, as a foodstuff it suffers: "fish-eating is prohibited in many high castes" and people "who eat fish are generally inferior to those who abstain."²³ Fish in many cultures and times has been a low status food—often associated with times of hardship.²⁴ Since fishing people generally eat more fish and more varieties of fish (and low-status types), their fish-eating confirms their low status, and their low status habits serve to color the consumption of fish.²⁵ But further, commercial fishers may be accorded low status because they furnish fish to low status ethnic groups. In India and Bengal, "the lower the castes whom the fishermen serve, the lower is their own social status," while on the upper Mississippi and lower Ohio river systems, the reputation of commercial fishers is intimately tied to the lower status of the African-, Asian-, and Jewish-American groups they serve.²⁶ Moreover, the fisherman's rank can depend on the status of fish he takes. For example, the Tamil Paravan of India, who have specialized for centuries in fishing and related work, divide into thirteen castes according to the type of work accomplished and fish caught: fishers who take edible species rank lower than do fishers who search for coral, pearls, and shells; fishers for tortoise rank above shark fishers and fishers in general, while crab fishers rank lowest.²⁷

23. Ibid.

24. Cf. for example, Peter F. Anson, *Fishermen and Fishing Ways*, Wakefield, Yorkshire, England, E. P. Publishing Ltd., 1975, p. 29; Alexander Fenton, "Notes on Shellfish as Food and Bait in Scotland," in *Fishing Culture of the World*, pp. 122-125; Lund, pp. 350-359, 780; Goran Norsander, "Fishfood among Swedish Countrypeople," in *Fishing Culture of the World*, pp. 369, 371-378.

25. Northern Lake Michigan commercial fishing families consume fish from two to twelve times a month, from what I learned while documenting commercial fishing foodways in Michigan's Upper Peninsula for the Michigan Traditional Arts Program, April and September-October 1989. Craig K. Harris, *A Profile of the Michigan Commercial Fisherman*, Ann Arbor, MI, Michigan Sea Grant, 1982, p. 37, reports an average consumption of nine meals of fish per month. Cookbooks compiled within fishing communities, such as the Commercial Fishermen's Wives Association of the Port of Coosy's *Cook Book Presented by the Fishwives of Charleston, Oregon*, North Bend, OR, Wegford Publications, 1970, generally present a greater abundance of recipes for preparing a greater diversity of fish than do cookbooks compiled in adjacent non-fishing communities.

26. Michael, p. 652, and Lund, pp. 350-359, 780.

27. Michael, p. 673; Sarkar, pp. 709-710, points out the many factors that can influence the status of a particular species of fish; see also, Fenton, pp. 122-125. In the Pacific Northwest, especially when the quarry is the same species, the kind of fishing operation determines status more than the kind of fish. Gatewood, pp. 94-95, compares images of seiners vs. gillnetters and trollers. John Earnest Damron, "The Emergence of Salmon Trolling on the American Northwest Coast: A Maritime Historical Geography," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1971, p. 122,

These examples suggest how pluralistic the composition of fishing communities can be and how complex and varied the manipulation of (negative) stereotypes can get in assigning social standing. They also suggest that, just as visions of cows lend farmers a placid and stolid air, deep-seated attitudes towards fish, and temporally- and culturally-specific hierarchies of species, may critically shape the status and negative stereotypes of fishing peoples. To outline the basic composite negative depiction, and suggest its logic and root: fishing people (and/or groups within fishing/water-oriented communities) are held in low esteem because: 1.) the food they eat and furnish to the public is low in status (and perhaps considered actually or ritually unclean); 2.) their work, the act of handling and cleaning fish, is considered unclean, actually or spiritually, and by extension, not respectable; and 3.) their personal habits and demeanor (reflected most in the stereotypes) suggest immorality and lawlessness and befit lower class standing.

Now let us turn to positive stereotypes. "Independent" is probably the most common term that fishermen use to describe themselves, and documenters have followed suit. In ancient Sumeria during the reign of Sennacherib (704-681 B. C.), some groups of fishing people were depicted as living "in the extensive 'watery' marshes in a state of relative independence and with a simple economy and traditional way of life."²⁸ The professional river fishers of India, who work alone or in small teams, are "independent, carefree, living a healthy, and free life..." in contrast to ocean fishers who work in large teams for wealthy boat owners or fish merchants.²⁹ In the Caribbean, fishing people reputedly make up "an independent and proud subculture."³⁰ In these senses (and descriptions by outsiders), independent means physically separate from another, dominant (sub) culture, and by extension, free of the kinds of societal constraints that most people endure (perhaps needlessly, in the eyes of some fishermen).

reports observations of rivalry between trollers and gillnetters, and between them and seiners, during the early decades of this century. Ethnic specialization in the fisheries further sharpened the conflict, as it still does somewhat today. In the Coos Bay area, trawlers commanded the highest status over crabbers and trollers, and the bottomfishing trawlers greater respect than the shrimper-bottomfishers, even though salmon has greater status than bottomfish, shrimp, or Dungeness crab. See also, Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, p. 3.

28. Kreuzer, p. 601.

29. Michael, p. 653.

30. Richard Price, "Caribbean Fishing and Fishermen: A Historic Sketch," *American Anthropologist* 68, 6 (1966), 1363.

United States fishermen, from the Pacific Northwest to New England and the Great Lakes to the Gulf, explain their sense of independence more specifically, however, as freedom from working for someone else and according to a fixed routine. Maine lobstermen like fishing because "they can be their own boss" (a refrain heard across the country), they could not tolerate working for someone else, and dependence on shoreside merchants and marketers causes them fear and anxiety.³¹ Rhode Island fishermen highly value and mention most often their independence and disdain for regimentation, while "independent and freedom-loving" Texas Gulf fishermen choose "to earn their living by fishing so that they will not be tied down to factory or office jobs."³² Upper Mississippi River and Lake Michigan commercial fishers repeatedly tell stories of forsaking fishing for a more regular job, only to find they can not bear working by the clock and living in the city.³³ They return to fishing because, as their peers say elsewhere on the continent, "it's in the blood," as if "it" were an unchangeable genetic or psychological disposition.³⁴

31. Acheson, "Fisheries Management," p. 663. In particular, Charleston, Oregon, fisher Carl Harrington (Interview, February 1978) and Upper Mississippi River fishers Ron Dickau and John Duccini echoed the "own boss" sentiment ("River Harvest" project, June 1987). Arnold Hockema explained that he was "not a good follower," and that getting away from people trying to restrict your work is what fishing is all about (Interview, Charleston, OR, March 1978). See also, Carey, pp. 32-33.
32. John J. Poggie, Jr., and Carl Gersuny, *Fishermen of Galilee*, University of Rhode Island/Sea Grant Marine Bulletin Series No. 17, Kingston, RI, 1974, pp. 56, 105; Patrick B. Mullen, *I Heard the Old Fishermen Say: Folklore of the Texas Gulf Coast*, London, University of Texas Press, 1978, p. xix.
33. Interviews with John Duccini ("River Harvest" project, June 1987); with Lake Michigan fishers Charlie Nylund and Peter Hermess ("Great Lakes Waterway Culture," Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., August 1986) and Jeff Weborg (Wisconsin Folk Art Survey, John Michael Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan, WI, August 1986). See also Janet C. Gilmore, "Fishing for a Living on the Great Lakes," in *1987 Festival of American Folklife Program Book*, Washington, D. C., Smithsonian Institution and National Parks Service, 1987, p. 64. Cf. Carey, pp. 32-33; Lloyd and Mullen, pp. 136-139, 169-170; and Jake Harlan's biography in Gilmore, *World of the Oregon Fishboat*, p. 207.
34. Interviews with Lake Michigan fisher Jeff Weborg and Upper Mississippi River fisher John Diehl (Wisconsin Folk Art Survey, August 1986); with Upper Mississippi River fishers Ralph Blum and David Putman ("River Harvest" project, April-May 1987). See Leonard Hall's testimony in Gilmore, *World of the Oregon Fishboat*, p. 207. In the Swedish fishing community of Bua, the same motivation is expressed as "a liking for the sea"; see Orvar Lofgren, "The Making of a Fisherman," in *Fishing Culture of the World*, pp. 291-292. Some on the Upper Mississippi River used the expression "I like the river," or "I like it on the river"; cf. Carey, p. 32.

Indeed fishermen and people who have had some experience with them often qualify a kind of personality driven to fish, teaming "independent" with words like "proud," "extroverted," and full of "bravado," "individualistic," "self-sufficient," and "opinionated."³⁵ They are repeatedly characterized as not working together too well, "everyone a character," each of whom has his own opinion of how things should be.³⁶ Poggie and Gersuny, investigating Rhode Island fishers, found that a high degree of self-realization was important to the men, while Acheson, summing up his observations of Maine lobstermen, suggests that "Fishermen as a type may have real trouble with authority."³⁷

While fishing may reputedly require a certain kind of psychological disposition, equally, according to testimony, there is something about the work that "gets in the blood," that converts forever the newly initiated, that forms an everlasting addiction once experienced.³⁸ Fishermen get hooked on the work because they view it as a pleasurable experience, a game actually, that happens to earn them a living.³⁹ Chief among the pleasures is the challenge of it.⁴⁰ Some enjoy the tension of "living by one's wits," while others thrill to "the prospects of high risks and high pay-offs" without which "life seems dull, lifeless, and painfully boring."⁴¹ What sets fishermen apart from "junk bond" financiers, however, is their confessed appreciation for working in the outdoors, and a self-conception as "the last of the great

-
35. For example, Lund, p. 778; Michael, pp. 652-653; Poggie and Gersuny, p. 99; Price, p. 1363. Cf. Andersen and Wadel, p. 144.
 36. Interviews in the Coos Bay, Oregon, area with commercial fisher Leonard Hall (July 1977), machinist Keith Ott (March 1978), and marine supplier Norm Anderson (March 1978); Interview with welder John Benson, Sr. ("River Harvest" project, June 1987). Cf. Filgueiras, p. 149; Michael, pp. 662, 674; and Poggie and Gersuny, p. 104.
 37. Poggie and Gersuny, p. 99; Acheson, "Fisheries Management," p. 663.
 38. Lloyd and Mullen, pp. 134-135; Lund, pp. 784-786; Interviews with Upper Mississippi River commercial fisher Harold Verdon ("River Harvest" project, April 1987) and Charleston, Oregon, fishers Carl Harrington (February 1978) and Mike Lane (January 1978).
 39. Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 54-55; Carey, p. 32; Lund, pp. 784-786; Interview with Dick and Verna Lilienthal (Charleston, OR, September 1977); Verna Lilienthal's testimony in Gilmore, *World of the Oregon Fishboat*, p. 239, n. 23.
 40. Carey, p. 32; Lund, p. 786; Poggie and Gersuny, p. 56; Interview with marine architect Jack Wilskey (Eastside, OR, September 1977).
 41. Lund, p. 786; Acheson, "Fisheries Management," p. 663; Dick Lilienthal's testimony in Gilmore, *World of the Oregon Fishboat*, p. 175.

hunters.⁴² The experience of being on the hunt, of facing the ocean, or of going out on the water alone early in the morning—of sparring with Nature—is compelling, thrilling, and even mystical.⁴³ Some fishers see their job as a more elemental, real occupation than others and they consequently feel more in touch with the forces of the universe than most people are.⁴⁴ Some fancy themselves piercing social critics, revolutionaries and outlaws, who prefer another more genuine order of things, or who have everyone fooled because they are able to epitomize an upstanding member of society while pursuing an eccentric, pleasurable way of making a living.

The American public is vaguely familiar with this composite self-image, only in its basics. Acheson, for instance, conjures up this picture:

Talk of the New England fishing community brings to mind a picture of rustic communities where men carry on a traditional way of life, regulated by the turn of the seasons rather than the office clock. We tend to see the fisherman as being slow to change, taciturn, independent, and certainly free of the kinds of constraints that bind the rest of us. In our minds, he is the last of the rugged individualists, scorning help from the government and adamantly opposed to any kind of control over his life.⁴⁵

Often we see the gruff eccentric, but cleaned up and cast in a life of romance and strange adventure, typically the old salt with the New England accent, graying beard, pipe, and bright yellow foulweather gear or dark pea jacket and watch cap. Advertisers—fast-food promoters especially—television producers, and film makers have bombarded us with this image, even superimposing it on acting crews manning authentic fishing boats in native contexts. One of the most widely viewed, fully developed examples in recent times appeared in Steven Spielberg's movie "Jaws." The late actor Robert Shaw, cast as an eccentric shark hunter, played the archetypical seafarer: a person who by virtue of mysterious experiences at sea dresses, speaks, behaves, and even thinks differently than the majority of people ashore. Soon after the great white shark made several attacks on

42. Lloyd and Mullen, pp. 76, 136-137; Poggie and Gersuny, p. 56; Interviews with Ron Dickau ("River Harvest" project, June 1987), Jake Harlan (Charleston, OR, September 1977 and March 1978), and Carl Harrington (Charleston, OR, February 1978). Most fishermen on the Oregon Coast, Upper Mississippi River, and Michigan's Upper Peninsula are avid game hunters, and some trap fur-bearing animals for income.

43. Lloyd and Mullen, pp. 135, 141; Interviews with John Duccini and David Putman ("River Harvest" project, May-June 1987); and cf. Carey, p. 32.

44. Interview with Jake Harlan (Charleston, OR, September 1977 and March 1978).

45. Acheson, "Fisheries Management," p. 653; cf. Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, p. 2, and Carey, p. 23.

unsuspecting bathers, members of the New England summer-time resort community gathered to ponder the problem. After minutes of unproductive, near-hysterical interchange, Shaw grabbed the group's attention by scraping his fingernails across a blackboard in the meeting room—a rather unconventional way for requesting a hearing. He then proceeded to speak gruffly, solemnly, and deliberately, with a steely glint in his eye and a curious twang, presenting information about sharks and offering a mad scheme for capturing the shark. Here and throughout the movie Shaw plays a "fool on the hill" eccentric who, as keeper of specialized knowledge obtained through hard and unfathomable experience, is one of the few people who can save the community from its predicament.

Back in the real world, however, in spite of the fisherman's seeming self-confidence and willful opposition to "society," in Coos Bay, San Diego, Rhode Island, Maine, Hong Kong, and probably elsewhere, "the fisherman's perception of self, his sense of self worth, and belief in his occupation is reinforced by landbound definitions of success and social status."⁴⁶ Thus in Coos Bay, fishermen decry their lack of political power in influencing fisheries legislation, their bad reputations with banks and financial institutions, and misrepresentations of themselves as poor, uneducated, unskilled indigents.⁴⁷ They would like to be seen as honest, respectable, well-heeled businessmen and professionals, capable of keeping a business solvent, of supporting their families more than adequately, and of voicing intelligent, well-informed opinions regarding the fisheries. Orbach similarly has found that the tuna fishermen of San Diego like an image of themselves as "high-rolling, impulsive, honest, able men with the ability to get what they want and take care of responsibilities. They are very proud of the fact... that they can be counted on to provide more than adequately."⁴⁸ And Hong Kong boat people, in spite of their reviled status, succeed more than many higher status groups in achieving the respected Chinese literati standard of family structure.⁴⁹

46. Poggie and Gersuny, p. 104; see also, Carey, pp. 32-33; and Ward, p. 126.

47. The two most outspoken fishermen on this point were the "highliners" of the Coos Bay, Oregon, trawl fleet, Fred Anderson and Jake Harlan (see Gilmore, *World of the Oregon Fishboat*, pp. 175-176). The trawlers by and large saw themselves as superior fishermen to others using other types of gear.

48. Orbach, p. 286. Cf. Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 56-57.

49. Ward, pp. 117, 120. In the Confucian-inspired ideal, Ward claims "there is a clear correlation between family size and family income; the larger the income the larger the family...there is a strong emphasis upon patrilocality, patriliney, and the advantages of having many sons." She argues that, in the case of the Kau Sai Tanka, the adherence to this model can not be explained entirely by the technical and economic circumstances of the fisherman's life.

Scholars, generally aware of the debased view of fishing peoples, often pointedly note their best landlubberly qualities. Characterizing commercial fishers in India, S. M. Michael claims, "Generally they are hard-working, frugal, . . . generous and loyal to their family and community."⁵⁰ Enrica Delitala notes of a Sardinian fishing village:

The impression which one gets . . . is that of a fairly well-balanced society, and of one which was obliged to be most thrifty and prudent. One arrives at this conclusion by considering that, throughout the 90 years of Stintino's existence there has never been a theft reported, a murder or even a case of drunkenness. All these details contribute to give Stintino a particular physiognomy, a different sort of character compared with the rest of the Sardinian villages.⁵¹

In sum, on the positive side, the fisherman is often romanticized, emulated, envied, and self-described as: 1.) a self-actualized individual—a self-confident, capable, independent person with a strong character who knows and gets what he wants; 2.) someone who is free of the constraints of "mainstream" everyday life, yet who can make a living by getting away from it all and doing something that outsiders consider a pastime; and 3.) someone whose escape from social norms is excusable since he is perhaps more in tune with real values than are people who blindly follow those norms; by the same token, someone who in spite of his eccentric way of making a living is able to typify an upstanding member of society—an honest, dependable, responsible, generous, hard worker, good provider, businessman, and professional.

In both negative and positive views, the fisherman is perceived as an outlaw, on the negative side as a lawless individual, and on the positive side as an outlaw hero who, rejecting common laws, adheres to a greater, juster code.⁵² Indeed, the two composite images appear to be inverses of each other, and the positive one may be a later creation to counter the negative version.⁵³ Like artifacts, these outlaw portrayals seem to have lives of their own. People seem to keep them alive less because they bear any relation to reality than out of a fondness for fantastic or exaggerated bad-guy images and a need to

50. Michael, p. 653.

51. Enrica Delitala, "Lobster Fishing in a Sardinian Fishing Village: Stintino," in *Fishing Culture of the World*, p. 111.

52. See Carey, pp. 21-23; and Lloyd and Mullen, pp. 104-112, 149-150 ff.

53. Lloyd and Mullen's discussions of oppositional and differential identity are relevant to this point: pp. 143, 153-160, 161-162, 169, 171-172, 173.

apply them.⁵⁴ But the stereotypes survive also because they are continually reinforced by observations of actual behavior and a poor understanding of the nature of fishing as an occupation, aggravated by applications of a few experiences and encounters to all the members of a group and by willful ignorance of the diversity that exists within any community.

That both outsiders and insiders see fishermen as outlaws, whatever the sense, illustrates the great gulf that is perceived to exist between the fisherman's life and work and those of other people. Indeed, wherever one finds these stereotypes, positive or negative, the essential nature of the fisherman's work, its shoreside components, and the resulting social and family patterns tend to isolate fishermen and their families into a distinctive, geographically and socially bound fishing community, "sort of a fisher ghetto," Peter Anson calls it, somewhat like a folk society in Redfieldian terms, or as Poggie and Gersuny see it, "an occupational culture distinct from the shoreside world of work in which it is located."⁵⁵

The most visible signs of the separateness of this community are the shoreside accoutrements of the fisherman's work, usually a seemingly self-contained, self-sufficient district of docks, fish plants, bait and tackle shops, grocers, maintenance and repair facilities, cafes, and bars. Often looking weather-beaten and run down, and strewn with the detritus of the fishing industry, this district is distinguished further by its orientation toward the water and away from the business and social centers of adjacent communities. Located as close to the fishing grounds as possible and in fact extending out toward them, the fishing district is actually sited at the edge of land and the local community, symbolically at the margins of society and the known world. In some places, visual access to waterways has become so effectively blocked by downtown development and large-scale shipping operations that the fishing district is essentially invisible. In areas where commercial fishing is practiced on a small scale at scattered locations, as on the Chesapeake Bay and the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, the shoreside

54. Archie Green, "Hillbilly Music," p. 223, notes the curious acceptance of a pejorative term for something liked; Alan Dundes, "A Study of Ethnic Slurs," pp. 187 and 202, notes the existence of stereotypes, regardless of the facts, and the pleasure that some people take in them, even if unfounded. Rayna Green, in a talk given at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, Spring 1986, bemoaned the American public's romance with stereotypes of American Indians and the problems the stereotypes present in getting non-Indians to recognize and treat Indians as real people representing a diversity of ethnic backgrounds.

55. Anson, *Fisher Folk-Lore*, p. 55; Poggie and Gersuny, p. 78.

signs of the fisher's work are not easily detectable, hence they too are invisible.

An air of mystery surrounds the fisherman's work, for it takes him symbolically into the unknown and actually into a realm that by and large is invisible to most of us. We do not see the fisherman at work, we do not see him work hard, exercise good judgment, or practice acute observational skills. Most often we do not even see him, under cover of darkness, leave for work or return with a good catch. Instead we may see him leaving or returning at odd hours for unknown reasons, in practical, dark, loose-fitting clothing that appears disheveled even when new, and that looks and smells even worse when fully anointed with fish slime, guts, algae, mud, and engine grease from a hard day at work.⁵⁶ Or we may see him spending what seem to be good working hours hanging around bars, cafes, fish plants and maintenance and repair facilities, keeping up with business, but looking unoccupied and perhaps even sinful!⁵⁷

The otherworldly nature of the fisherman's work—his use of specialized language, equipment, and observational techniques, and his ability and willingness to traverse an unknown and dangerous territory—also sets the fisherman apart from men in other occupations. It is not easy, pleasant, or even intelligent for him to articulate the highly esoteric details of his occupational existence to people who do not share his experiences—or even to those who do. To protect the productivity of their fishing grounds, to keep them producing only for themselves, most fishermen practice the art of deliberate deception.⁵⁸ Where fishing grounds are technically public domain, fishermen often designate certain spots as their own, especially with the setting of stationary gear such as trap and pound nets, hoop nets, crab and lobster pots.⁵⁹ Their ability to make a living depends on their ability to

56. Cf. Carey, p. 24. John Duccini of Dubuque, Iowa, explained that he purposely wore loose-fitting boots so that he could more easily escape from them if he happened to fall overboard. In addition he protested that my outdoor garb (a white windbreaker) could be seen too easily from a distance on the water, so he had me wear a brown plaid flannel shirt over it when I went out on the water with him in June 1987 ("River Harvest" project).

57. Cf. Gatewood, p. 95.

58. See Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 54, 57-58, 91, 103-104, 148-149; and especially Raoul Andersen, "Hunt and Deceive: Information Management in Newfoundland Deep-Sea Trawler Fishing," in *North Atlantic Fishermen*, pp. 121-126.

59. Cf. James Acheson, "The Lobster Fiefs: Economic and Ecological Effects of Territoriality in the Maine Lobster Industry," *Human Ecology* 3, 3 (1975), 183-207, 190-194 especially; James Acheson, "Territories of the Lobstermen," *Natural History* 81, 4 (1972), 60-69; Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 71-83; Harris, p. 20; and Lund, p. 797.

place their entrapment devices as effectively as possible to obtain the amount of fish that will net the biggest income, knowing that good days, seasons, and years are few.⁶⁰ While inclined to catch every fish and make the most money, most fishermen are aware that if they wish to sustain their way of making a living, they must tend their territory and not take every fish.⁶¹

Most experienced fishermen who stay in business have inherited or established fishing areas to which they return year after year. In some cases they share the same broad areas with peers with whom they are usually on good terms. But all fishers know that grounds that might prove productive one season might not be so next season, or even the next day of the week. They are always under pressure to test new territory, while preserving their own grounds from others. Facing unproductive fishing spots, some fishermen will encroach slightly upon another's territory; and some few, unable to carve out and maintain a territory, will poach fish caught in another's gear, steal gear outright, or more likely, place their gear right along or on top of someone else's.⁶² Poaching is reputedly a way of life for some Mississippi River families: full-time fishermen figure part-timers are the poachers and some part-timers almost admit their guilt by being resentful of the full-timers' grandfather claims.⁶³

On the Mississippi River, partly to mark territory, partly to be able to recognize one's own gear in the more public fishing spots, and partly to be able to identify equipment that gets away or is stolen and later found, fishermen deliberately incorporate "secret" construction details into their hoop nets, in particular. They vary the number of hoops, the number of meshes between hoops, the manner in which the hoops

60. Cf. Lund, p. 797; James Acheson, "Technical Skills and Fishing Success in the Maine Lobster Industry," in *Material Culture: Styles, Organization, and Dynamics of Technology*, 1975 Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society, ed. Heather Lechtman and Robert Merrill, St. Paul, MN, West Publishing Co., 1977, pp. 122-129, 131-133; Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 97-101; Andersen, p. 138; Carey, p. 30; and Poul H. Moustgaard, "The Fishing Community, the Gear and the Environment; An Essay on the Cod Net Fishermen from Two Habitats on the Danish North Seacoast," in *Fishing Culture of the World*, p. 347.

61. John Duccini's behavior on this account borders on superstitiousness and strikes me as similar to Bengali taboos enforced on fish eating and taking to maintain the productivity of fish; see Sarkar, pp. 715-717. See also, Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 151, 153-159.

62. Cf. Lund, pp. 794-799; and Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 74-75, 77-79, 100, 103.

63. Cf. Acheson, "Fisheries Management," p. 661; and Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 54, 67. Examples in the next three paragraphs are from the "River Harvest" project documentation, Spring 1987.

are tied to the net, how the inner throats are shaped and placed, and how the hand-knit knots are formed. So secret is knot technique that 75 year old Iowa fisherman "Ducky" Hartman would not pass on his knowledge until recent years, as his health has failed and he has accepted a younger associate as a pupil. Dubuque, Iowa, fisherman John Duccini, open and loquacious about most fishing lore, would allude to his trick knots and signatures, but would go no further.

In addition, in order to control territory and keep no-goods from tampering with their equipment or catch, Upper Mississippi River fishermen do not visibly mark where their nets are located. Instead, each fisherman uses triangulation with his own privately designated marks on shore to locate each net on the bottom of the river.⁶⁴ Many fishermen run 100 to 150 nets and therefore must remember that many pairs of marks.

Finally, the fisherman's attitude is watchful, suspicious, and devious especially as he leaves for the fishing grounds and returns with his catch, that is, when he is most in the public eye.⁶⁵ I recall one Upper Mississippi River commercial fisher's devious behavior on a trip I took with him in June 1987. John Duccini assumed the demeanor of a hawk as he drove the last half mile to the boat landing, peering this way and that, wondering if anyone living along the road would see him pass, worrying who he might encounter at the landing at 5:30 a.m. as he departed on his daily fishing trip. He was relieved to find no one yet at the landing. Having launched his flatboat and gained a more secluded section of the river, he continued to check the shoreline and the surface of the water for movement as he lined up his landmarks to locate an unmarked hoop net on the river bottom. He took pains to demonstrate the acuteness of his observational skills. He pointed out a camouflaged raccoon in a tree on shore, the appearance of a train so far downstream it was almost unnoticeable. He thought he heard Canadian geese. He crept up on some wood ducks to show how easily spooked they can be.

64. Cf. Moustgaard, p. 344; see also, Jerry Eunson, "The Fair-Isle Fishing Marks," *Scottish Studies* 5 (1961), 181-198; and Tadataka Igarashi, "Locality-Finding in Relation to Fishing Activity at Sea," in *Fishing Culture of the World*, pp. 545-567.

65. One Coos Bay, Oregon, drag/trawl fisherman earned the nickname "Sneaky Dick" during a period when he had discovered a "hot spot" for taking shrimp. To elude competitors who soon got wind of his excellent catches, he left port earlier than anyone expected (under cover of darkness), left his running lights off, and avoided using his radio. He says it still did not take long before competitors caught up with him, following him out to the grounds. (Interview, September 1977). Cf. Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 102-104; and Daniel E. Moerman, "Common Property and the Common Good: Ecological Factors among Peasant and Tribal Fishermen," in *Fishing Culture of the World*, pp. 55-56.

He noted the presence of a school of carp nearby by where and how the fish were jumping. He explained the look of the river bottom by the nature of miniscule wave patterns on the surface of the water. Later in the morning, he tensed with the first appearance of another small open boat, worrying if it was a flatboat (a flat-bottomed boat)—the mark of a local. Finding it a V-bottomed boat, he relaxed a bit, figuring it must be a pleasure boater not particularly interested in his work. Duccini continued to monitor the progress of the boat and backtracked a few times to throw off the might-be intruder. Returning to the landing with the day's catch, he noted the presence of a flatboat and, upon closer scrutiny, that of a clammer, a representative of a group that vies for the same river bottom. He hastily set the motor on idle and covered his catch, trying to disguise half of it. As he pulled his boat to shore, trailered it, and drove off, Duccini carefully ignored the rival. Back at his fish dressing house, his nephew and father looked at the catch and claimed they caught about as much, maybe more—they never would admit they caught less, but left to the imagination how much more.⁶⁶

The habitual attempts to hide actions, whereabouts, and the amount of the catch gives game wardens, sportsfishers, and the public, the impression that commercial fishermen are hiding something and by inference doing something illegal. Some fishers do in fact push the limits of the law, but most are fairly law-abiding and resent the lack of trust extended to them.⁶⁷ Fellow fishers, however, recognize the behavior (and spend tremendous amounts of time monitoring and interpreting each other's actions). Their mutual understanding and their common experience on the water, where they spend so much of their time, coupled often with a feeling of discomfort on land with its different pace and orientation, serve to draw fishermen even closer together on land than they may behave at work. Fishermen thus enhance their isolation by socializing mostly with other fishermen and not with people of other walks of life.⁶⁸ In fact, the young fisherman's contacts with landlubbers may be curtailed as he begins fishing at an early age with his father or another male relative, on weekends, during

66. Cf. Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 54, 57; Acheson, "Technical Skills," p. 119; Lofgren, p. 285.

67. Cf. Lund, pp. 788-794. See also, Lloyd and Mullen, pp. 104-112, 142-160; and Carey, pp. 27-28.

68. Cf. Andersen and Wadel, pp. 145-146; Orbach, pp. 271-288; and Tunstall, pp. 135-175.

vacations and summers, and, to the horror of his school teachers, sometimes during school.⁶⁹

Because of this primary socialization among fishing families, fishermen often marry women from fishing families, further reinforcing the closeness of the occupational group and its separateness from others.⁷⁰ Fishermen's daughters sometimes enlist boyfriends or husbands into the occupation when Dad suddenly needs a new hand. The fisherman's work patterns profoundly influence his family life, and the more familiar the wife is with this pattern, usually the happier the partnership.⁷¹

Fishermen's wives traditionally "wear the pants" in the family, not just when the fisherman is gone: they often exert strong control over the distribution of the fisherman's income; they frequently handle the fishing business's bookkeeping and in addition hold full-time jobs of their own, raise the children, and maintain family and community ties; and they are highly responsible for securing the respectability of the fisherman's land base as well as his personal reputation in terms of landlubber aesthetics.⁷² Many participate in dressing, preserving, packing, and marketing their husband's catch, and in some groups, women build fishing gear, help their husbands fish, or even fish themselves.⁷³ In addition, as in Coos Bay, some women form strong and vocal "fishwives associations" to protect families in times of loss as well as to push for favorable fisheries legislation. Their strong character differentiates them further from women whose husbands have other kinds of jobs.⁷⁴ And their tendency to find support and solace within "ethnic and kinship systems" serves further to isolate fishing families from the surrounding community.⁷⁵ In fact Poggie and

69. Cf. Harris, p. 6; Orbach, p. 217. Several Upper Mississippi River commercial fishers quit grade or high school to help their fathers make a living ("River Harvest" project interviews, Spring 1987).

70. Anson, *Fisher Folk-Lore*, p. 55; Orbach, p. 280; fieldwork in the Coos Bay-Charleston, Oregon, area, July 1977-May 1978, on the Upper Mississippi River ("River Harvest" project, Spring 1987), and on Lake Michigan (Michigan Traditional Arts Program, September-October 1989).

71. Orbach, pp. 280-281; Poggie and Gersuny, p. 86.

72. Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 3-4; Andersen and Wadel, pp. 141-144; Ellis, pp. 17, 19, 56; Raymond Firth, "Roles of Women and Men in a Sea Fishing Economy: Tikopia Compared with Kelantan," in *Fishing Culture of the World*, especially pp. 1163-1165; Harris, pp. 4, 31; Lourido, pp. 272-273.

73. Anson, *Fisher Folk-Lore*, pp. 139-145; Ellis, p. 56; Fenton, pp. 137-139; Firth, pp. 1150-1154, 1158, 1160-1165; Harris, pp. 33, 34; Lofgren, p. 293; Lourido, pp. 264-265; Michael, pp. 657, 662, 665, 668; and Sarkar, p. 709.

74. Anson, *Fisher Folk-Lore*, pp. 139-145; Lourido, pp. 272-273.

75. Orbach, pp. 280-281; Andersen and Wadel, pp. 145-146.

Gersuny "suggest that fishermen's wives are as different from their 'landbound' counterparts as are fishermen themselves."⁷⁶

In short, fishing, particularly as a full-time endeavor, is an "occupation functioning to form an enclave," actually a world of its own, distinctive in its geography, its predominant patterns of work, social and family life, its distant relationship with the "outside" world, and its worldview.⁷⁷ Stereotypes of fishermen are like cultural markers or "red flags." They signal the perceived separateness and distinctiveness of the fisherman's work, demeanor, and way of life. They play upon what is visible of a world turned away from land and "society," where people keenly hone observational skills and, through a kind of theater of the inverse, strive to confound each other's visual clues. Not surprisingly, stereotypes may be all that many outsiders know of these people, and for others, behavior that befits the stereotypes may be all that they see—or want to see. Not surprisingly, fishing people are vastly misread and their opinions regularly overlooked.

Surprisingly, however, the stereotypes, at least in part, may be all that fishing people want outsiders to see. Indeed, as rhetorical devices, the stereotypes may serve to maintain social boundaries and restrict access to the fisheries resource. Noting how ardently fishermen assert their distinctiveness, David Moerman argues:

...insofar as fishermen "set themselves apart from" their neighbors in an aggressive manner, thereby categorizing themselves *exclusively* as fishermen, and insofar as a fisherman's individualism might be, to a farmer, simply bad manners, we can see mechanisms by which the fishing community is kept small, hence regulating local fishing intensity, at least in the long run.⁷⁸

Thus, positive stereotypes appear to acknowledge and justify another world and the particular psychology that is required to operate within it, without giving up any of the mystique of the fisherman's job and working environment. Negative stereotypes, drawing on deep apprehensions in all of us about bodies of water and the creatures that dwell within, promote the inverse, incomprehensible, "uncivilized" character of this other world and the fearsome riskiness of entering a domain of untouchables. Both kinds of stereotypes reinforce the exclusiveness of the fisherman's calling.

76. Poggie and Gersuny, p. 88; cf. Michael, p. 653.

77. Archie Green, "Industrial Lore: A Bibliographic-Semantic Inquiry," in *Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife*, ed. Robert H. Byington, Smithsonian Folklife Studies, no. 3, Los Angeles, California Folklore Society, 1978, p. 76.

78. Moerman, p. 53.

Just as portrayals that reflect the best landlubberly qualities may have arisen to counter the pejorative allegations of negative stereotypes, negative portrayals may represent a response to the assertiveness of positive stereotypes and the threatening arrogance of a subculture that flagrantly maintains its integrity and apparently refuses to comply with a dominant standard. While the stereotypes may reflect traditional mechanisms for limiting entry to the profession and protecting fish, they are also used to negotiate status and power within and across communities, and to battle for control over an increasingly finite and ever more valuable resource. Within their ranks, fishermen use the stereotypes to establish the pre-eminence of specific working philosophies and technologies.⁷⁹ Sports fishers use them persuasively to enhance their share of the resource.⁸⁰ All too often fisheries officials and business leaders heed the stereotypes literally and deny a voice in developing fisheries policies to the people who most frequently and wholistically observe the resource in its natural setting. Fishing people and nonfishing people alike use stereotypes as facts and proof against each other, rather than recognizing them as markers of cultural identity and rhetorical strategies for protecting a valid way of making a living.

More like a marsh filled with life-giving decay than a cultivated garden, field, or lawn, the fishing domain seems rugged, untidy, unclean, and ravaged by excess and uneven tempos. Like the estuaries and marshlands that support fish populations, this microcosm is much more ordered, integral, and fragile than it seems. It deserves our respect, understanding, and protection.

79. Fishermen also use the stereotypes to substantiate class distinctions among themselves; see Acheson, *Lobster Gangs*, pp. 51-57ff.; and Lloyd and Mullen, pp. 166-167.

80. See Lloyd and Mullen, pp. 142-160, for a full discussion of fishermen's attitudes about sportsfishers' opinions of commercial fishers.