THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN IN THE
BRITISH COLUMBIA FISHERY
DURING A CLIMATE OF CRISIS AND CHANGE

by

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ABSTRACT

The British Columbia fishery is in crisis. Environmental conditions and problems with the management of the fishing resource have led to a significant reduction in stocks and created serious economic problems in the industry. Women's work is central to the fishery yet it is often unpaid, underpaid and undervalued. Policies guiding the restructuring of the industry do not take into account the unique circumstances of women in the industry.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to improve the understanding about the ways fishery policy impacts the lives of women in the fishing communities of BC. The question posed: What is the experience of women in the BC Fisheries during a climate of crisis and change?

A feminist approach is applied to this qualitative study. Unstructured interviews were conducted with a sample of nine women who have worked in the industry and are impacted by closures and cutbacks. Findings reveal a devastating magnitude of loss for these women and their families; a great mistrust of the motives of the Federal government and its policies; and a multitude of strategies used in their struggle for survival.

The critical inequities in the fishing industry make this study particularly relevant to social work. Further research is warranted to develop adjustment programs that address these inequalities and meet the needs of women in the coastal communities of BC. Limitations of this study and suggestions for future research are discussed in the light of these findings.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A transformation is occurring in the economy of many of the Coastal communities of British Columbia. The West Coast fisheries have been in decline since the 1980s. In response to the declining fish stocks of the early to mid 1990s the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) introduced the Mifflin Plan in 1996, which outlined the restructuring of licensing for the BC fisheries. The stated goals of the restructuring plan were to increase the efficiency of the industry while sustaining it over the long-term. The implementation of the Mifflin Plan and the increasing crisis in fish stocks have displaced hundreds of workers from their jobs, ending for many a way of life that has traditionally been passed from generation to generation. The salmon fishery was closed in 1999; when it will open again is uncertain.

Unemployment exacts an enormous toll on those men and women displaced from the fisheries. Policy makers, the media, and the majority of academic researchers, however, have constructed the fisheries, as a male institution. Policy makers reach decisions based on this view of the fisheries as a male domain. The fishery may be seen as a male domain but in fact, “women’s work roles have been and continue to be central to the fishing effort and to the sustainability of the natural resource” (Davis and Gerrard, 2000, p. 282).

The fisheries crisis does not impact men only; it is a human resource crisis that affects men, women, children, families and communities. Whether the fishery crisis is on the West Coast or in the North Atlantic what is, “overlooked is the fact the vast majority of people affected are women and children” (Davis and Gerrard, 2000, p. 281). If adjustment policies are to benefit those affected by the layoffs and cutbacks in the industry, policy
makers will need to expand their perspective of the fishery to adequately reflect the role of women.

My interest in the plight of BC fishers gradually developed after viewing the evening news on a local television station back in 1997. Two or three minutes of the news coverage focused on a programme the federal government was implementing. The newscast showed men who had been displaced from the BC fishery and who were now being retrained to care for streams and waterways used by spawning salmon. The retraining programme would not only provide employment for the unemployed fishery workers, it would also help clean the salmon habitat and thus help with the return of lost fish stocks.

My first impression was that this was a great idea. A little reflection led me to the conclusion that the government would have to be doing a lot more than training a handful of men to clean the streams to replace a multimillion-dollar industry that employed thousands in the province. I was aware that the fishing communities would be faced with a multitude of problems and would be experiencing great hardships. I was also aware that the East Coast fishery crisis had caused great hardship for the people of Atlantic Canada and wondered how people in BC who had spent a good portion of their lives fishing would adjust to their new conditions. Over the next year I gradually began educating myself about the fisheries in BC and found the subject to be very fascinating. I decided to do my research on this topic.

I began reading about the North Atlantic Fishery crisis and learned that there were many problems with the adjustment programmes introduced in the maritime provinces after the moratorium on fishing was introduced in 1992. One complaint was that when policy makers designed adjustment programmes, like the Northern Cod Adjustment and Recovery
Program (NCARP) 1992, they did not take into consideration the unique role of women in the fishery. Women have contributed greatly to the industry through both paid and unpaid work. I wondered if lessons from the East Coast experience would be learned and applied in BC. What would be the experience of women in the West Coast fishery? I decided this would be my topic of exploration.

Chapter I introduces the research topic. Chapter II consists of an historical survey of fishing in BC beginning with a look at the traditional First Nations fishery. It then moves to the modernization of the industry followed by an historical overview of women in the West Coast fishery. Chapter III is a post-modernist critique of the modernized fishery and includes a section on the primacy of reason. Chapter IV is a review of research focusing on the experience of women in the North Atlantic fishery crisis. Chapter V is a detailed discussion of the methodology employed in this study and chapter VI presents the findings of the inquiry. Lastly, the social significance of the results is discussed in chapter VII. This chapter also includes the study’s limitations and the implications for social work. Considerations for future research are also presented.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE BC FISHERIES

This chapter gives an historical overview of the BC fisheries. The chapter begins by looking at the traditional First Nations fishery and how it was managed and sustained for thousands of years. Secondly, it looks at the process of modernization and the major Federal government policies used to manage the modern industry. The chapter ends with an historical overview of women in the West Coast fishery. The presentation of the historical role of women within the BC fisheries includes the role of First Nations women in both the traditional and the modern fishery.

1. First Nations Traditional Fishery

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, First Nations people fished, for thousands of years, the streams and waterways of what we know as British Columbia. Communities that relied on fishing existed not only along the coast of BC but far into the interior of the province as well.

Dianne Newell’s (1993), *Tangled Webs of History, Indians and the Law in Canada’s Pacific Coast Fisheries*, provides a view of the traditional First Nations fisheries. The picture painted is of a complex and sophisticated system of fisheries management. It is an interconnected and efficient system that supplied people of the region with fish for food, trade and ceremonies for thousands of years. The geographical conditions in which people fished varied and are reflected in the differing technologies used in securing and preserving the catch.

Harpoons and traps were most common but there were dozens of specialized designs used in diverse ecological conditions. Technology used in tidal areas varied from
equipment used in fresh water locations, in mountainous areas, in different weather conditions and during different seasons. Equipment included traps, weirs, spears, gaff hooks, reef nets, hand-held nets, long nets, net bags, gill nets, dip nets, dozens of trap types and a variety of harpoons for each kind of ecological condition (Newell, 1993).

The most efficient fishing technologies used by aboriginal fishers were weirs and traps. Weirs for example could be simply designed or they could be complex constructions. They were fence-like barricades that stretched across a river from shore to shore. Some weirs were so large that catwalks were constructed across to allow for fishers to fish from. The barricades had removable sections that were taken out when not in use (Newell, 1993).

The preservation of the catch also included diversified methods of processing. The fish was preserved to ensure food year round for the whole community. Every edible part of the salmon including head, bones, eggs, oil and flesh was preserved. Different preservation methods were used for different species. The fish could be dried using the sun, wind or smoke or it could be boiled or roasted. It was then buried in the ground to be kept for later use (Newell, 1993).

The fishing and preservation of salmon was the basis of First Nations social and economic organization. The effective management of the resource varied from group to group. There were seventeen different language groups and each group had diversified strategies of salmon management. Newell draws on Peter Usher to explain aboriginal property systems. What was common to all groups was the reliance on communal property arrangements. These communal arrangements differ from individual private property and “common property (i.e. open access, state management) systems,” that characterize systems of British origin now used in Canada (Newell, 1993, p.40). The management systems
included varied property arrangements for different groups. For some, harvesting
equipment was owned by the village while in other groups, individuals might own the
harvesting technology but would lease out the equipment for specific periods of time.

Formal individual or group rights and accompanying obligations to control
fishing territories and equipment were an important feature of Northwest
Coast societies. Unlike Europeans, however, aboriginal peoples did not
consider wildlife or land itself something that could become an exclusive
private possession or be alienated (Newell, 1993, p. 41).

Using these technologies and methods of harvesting and preserving salmon, the aboriginal
people were able to provide enough fish for food, trade and ceremonies. The salmon was
the basis of the culture and was used extensively in well-developed trading arrangements, as
a “unit of exchange”, both with internal groups and villages and outside with other cultural
groups.

This sophisticated system provided for the glut years, the years with normal runs and
the lean years, enabling the survival of aboriginal communities. The traditional First Nations
fisheries management sustained stocks for thousands of years. It is only with the
modernization of the fisheries that the possibility of extinction became a reality. The arrival
of Europeans changed this traditional way of life dramatically.

2. The Modernization of the Fishing Industry

With the new arrivals came new ideas, industrialization, and modernization and a
new political system that altered all of life including fishing in British Columbia. In the
early years of settlement, fishing was not regulated and First Nations people continued with
traditional fishing practices. The Fisheries Act of Canada was extended to BC in 1876
through an order in council. The Act was put into force July 1, 1877 and resulted in
regulations requiring the first fishing licenses in 1878. The canning operators, however,
have always seen First Nations traditional fishing practices as a threat to profits for the industrial sector. By 1888 new regulations to license the industrial fishery were introduced. These regulations restricted the use of certain types of gear traditionally used by First Nations. First Nations people could still fish for food but were required to use the same gear types as other fishers in the industrial sector.

Since 1888 the federal government has introduced further regulations concerning gear, fishing times and locations to manage the fisheries. Conservation was cited as a paramount goal in the management of the industry but other considerations often took precedence. Government regulation has been the guiding force in the modernization of the industry. Diane Newell discusses the major policies of the Department of Fisheries over the last century that have shaped the modern fishing industry of British Columbia. She begins with the Duff Commission of 1922 and reviews the major policies up to the Pearce Commission of 1982. The Supreme Court Ruling of 1992 in Sparrow vs Regina continues to impact fisheries policies and is included in her account. Since the writing of Newell’s history of the Pacific Coast Fisheries, the Mifflin Plan of 1996 has been introduced with significant impact on the industry. Below is a brief account of these policies.

Duff Commission 1922

In response to Japan’s new canned-salmon industry, which was proving to be a very tough competitor for the British Columbia industry, restrictions on new cannery licenses were lifted in 1919. In 1922 the Duff Commission looked at BC fishing restrictions. In an attempt to eliminate people of Japanese heritage from the industry, the Duff Commission recommended that unlimited numbers of licenses could be issued to white British subjects or First Nations people. The Duff Commission also allowed for the use of gasoline motor boats
in the northern district; however, Japanese applicants were not allowed to use these motorized boats. The fisheries department reasoned that these boats could now be used, as government agents would be taking new conservation measures. Newell states these conservation measures were presumably the, “elimination of Japanese fishers and strict controls and production caps on the Indian food fishery” thus reducing their share of the catch (1993, p. 100). By 1927 there were 1,253 fewer licences owned by Japanese. This racist policy was ended in 1928.

The period after the Duff Commission saw great changes in gear type. The seiners and to some extent gillnetters and other equipment were larger and more powerful. Boats now could travel greater distances. They carried larger nets that were maneuvered with power rollers and winches and were very efficient. Some restrictions for the seine fleet were introduced. They were, for example, now banned from fishing in certain areas.

The Sinclair Report 1960

Sol Sinclair, an agricultural economist compiled this report with the objective of applying new economic theories to fisheries management. The focus was optimum economic yield. Sinclair thought, “the goal of protecting the livelihood of so many part-time and marginal fishing people and communities is noble but economically inefficient” (Newell, 1993, p.128). He favoured restriction of entry to the fisheries in the name of conservation believing open access to be the tragedy of the commons. Newell points out that research has since shown that greater economic and social problems are created when privatization replaces open access to resources. The Sinclair Report led to the regulations of the Davis Plan in 1968, which incorporated Sinclair’s recommendations of rigid licensing
regulations, phasing out vessels, and promoting centralization and concentration of processing facilities.

**The Davis Plan (Salmon Vessel License Plan) 1968**

Jack Davis, the Minister of Fisheries, was an economist. He announced the plan with the goals of improving economic performance and increasing the incomes of fishers and shore workers by reducing the number of licenses issued. He also wanted to reduce over-capitalization and to have a leaner more efficient processing system. This was to be achieved by the centralization of processing plants.

The results of these policies were reviewed in 1976 and things were found to be worse. Costs had soared while incomes for the fishers and profits for the processors had not kept up. The license limitations had been a disaster for fishers and plant workers. The total number of vessels had been reduced mostly with the elimination of gillnetters and day trollers. Capitalization of the fleet had apparently quadrupled yet the size of the catch had not increased. The centralization of the processing plants benefited the powerful processing conglomerates but did nothing for the men and women who fished and worked in the industry. In addition conservation had not been addressed. Overall the policies had mixed benefits for the salmon stocks. The review led to the introduction of the Salmonoid Enhancement Programme the following year (Meggs, 1991; Newell, 1993).

**The Salmonoid Enhancement Programme 1977**

The goal of this programme was to bolster stocks and to handle the crisis in the salmon stocks caused by over-capitalization in the fleet and damage to the habitat. This programme was a multi-million dollar project that was funded by Ottawa and given technical support from Victoria. Two approaches were taken: the development of
hatcheries, and the introduction of tougher provisions in the Fisheries Act against polluting or contaminating fish habitats.

Salmon stocks remained in crisis leading to the disastrous seasons between 1980 and 1984. By that time there was only one processor BC Packers left in the northern area. Other plants were taken over or closed due to decreased profits that led to bankruptcy. The fishers were left unpaid by the processing companies. Yet they remained indebted and financially obliged to these same companies who had financed the purchase of their boats. In response to the stock crisis Peter Pearse, a resource economist from the University of British Columbia was commissioned by the then Minister of Fisheries Romeo LeBlanc in 1981 to review the Pacific Fisheries Policy.

The Pearse Commission (Turning the Tide) 1982

Pearse traveled the province consulting extensively with those involved in the industry. He drew from both written and oral presentations from aboriginal and non-aboriginal people involved and interested in the future of the fishing industry. The commission resulted in, "Turning the Tide," a document that had sweeping recommendations for licensing the industry, rationalising fleets, and creating ocean ranching leases.

The report addressed fish stock concerns and blamed over-fishing for the reduction of stocks by half since the 1894 – 1913 period. Hatcheries were not seen as a solution, but as threatening wild stocks. The federal and provincial governments were criticized for subsidizing the boat-building industry, fishers and processors. These incentives, according to the report, had increased the threat to fish stocks and had contributed to the overcapitalization of the industry. It was noted that the sports fishery now had huge catches
and yet remained unregulated. Also there was recognition of the diminished control the processors had over the fleet, which was seen as a positive trend in the interests of conserving stocks.

Finally the report noted the special position of First Nations People in the Pacific Coast fishery. The Pearse Report recommended stricter regulation of access to both the commercial and sport fisheries. It also recommended a better deal for First Nations people. On May 31, 1990 the Supreme Court of Canada handed down a ruling that supported this view in the Sparrow vs Regina decision.

The Fisheries experienced period of rapid growth in the 70s and 80s. Fish prices increased dramatically with the demand for fish in the Japanese market. More efficient boats were built and the better catches and higher prices meant more money for fishers. By the 1990s fish prices and reduced catches pained a different picture for the industry (McLaren and Jensen, 2000).


In 1994, the Minister responsible for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) Brian Tobin, appointed an independent review board when a discrepancy estimated at 1.3 million in the number of Fraser River sockeye was discovered in September. This was followed by an additional shortfall in October on the Adams River run.

The Board, was headed by the Hon. John A. Fraser, P.C., Q.C. It is interesting to note that in his preface to the report, Fraser made the point that, “No one owns these fish, even less does any particular interest group. This resource is held in trust by all Canadians for each succeeding generation of peoples” (1995, p. iv).
The review board had three main objectives: first, to identify the reasons for the discrepancies in the expected and the actual return of sockeye; second, to evaluate the method of estimating run sizes and sockeye escapement, and third, to make recommendations on how deficiencies can be corrected.

The Board conducted a review that included meetings, consultations and discussions with a wide range of stakeholders and with the public. Their findings led to thirty-five recommendations for improving the management of the fishery. Included were recommendations for a risk-aversion management plan which became the basis for the Mifflin Plan introduced the following year.

The Mifflin Plan (Pacific Salmon Revitalization Strategy) 1996

The Mifflin Plan was introduced during a time of crisis in the fishing industry. Many operators of small boats and communities were experiencing serious losses in income and jobs. There had been a reduction in salmon prices. The prices were now half the 1988 prices. The reduction was due to competition from fish farms and overseas operations. There had also been a reduction in the harvest particularly in the 1995 season. In addition many coastal communities had recently experienced ongoing forestry layoffs, and closures at military bases, lighthouses, fishery offices and hatcheries.

Fred Mifflin, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, announced the Plan March 29, 1996. The goal of the plan was to allow for the restructuring of the industry, to protect the salmon industry in the long term, and to increase the efficiency of the industry.

The major elements of the Plan included:

- An $80-million federally funded voluntary license retirement programme or "buyback".
- Single-gear licensing which means a single-license holder could fish with only one gear type (gillnet, troll or seine).
• Area licensing which designated the coastal fishing water into areas and a single-license holder could choose a single area in which to fish.
• Stacking. Once a license holder had chosen an area, the Plan allowed him or her to purchase additional licenses or “stack” in order to fish other areas or another gear.
• The Plan was also intended to reflect the DFOs more conservative risk-averse management. (Canada, 1996, p.3)

Beginning in 1969 with the Davis Plan and the introduction of limited entry up to and including the Mifflin Plan, new licenses were increasingly created. In 1969, an A license was designated a commercial fishing license for salmon and all other species of fish. Between 1979 and 1982, eight new licences were created, removing access to the species from commercial A license fishers. These eight included separate licenses for roe herring 1974; spawn on kelp 1975; groundfish trawl 1976; abalone 1977; shrimp trawl 1977; halibut 1979; blackcod 1981 and geoduck 1981. The creation of new licenses continued into the 1990’s with the creation of a further six licenses including: prawn 1990; rockfish 1990; crab 1990; green sea urchin 1991; red sea urchin 1991 and sea cucumber 1991 (UFAWU/CAW, 1997).

In 1996, the Mifflin Plan introduced area licensing with the creation of six new categories of salmon license. Each license holder was entitled to pick one category only. No longer could the fishers travel the whole coast. They were restricted from fishing from one area to another unless they were licensed for that area. The six licenses included Northern gillnet; Central gillnet; Southern gillnet; Northern troll; West Coast troll and Gulf troll. Two licenses for seines were created A-South and B-North (UFAWU/CAW, 1997).

In 1969, an A license was originally issued to fish all species of fish including salmon and was for the entire coast of British Columbia. By 1996, commercial fishers with an A license could only fish for salmon and were required to choose only one area in which
they would fish. An extra $100,000.00 license was required to fish in each additional area. Many fishers were forced to choose the buy-back programme and leave fishing altogether (UFAWU/CAW, 1997).

Coastal Communities Building the Future Forum Series 1995-1996

Simon Fraser University (SFU) organized forums in partnership with the Coastal Community Network. The forums were held in eight BC fishing communities from the fall of 1995 through the spring of 1996. The forum process was community-driven and encouraged as much dialogue as possible. The sessions held in each community included; an evening where issues were identified; and a full day workshop including speakers from other communities. Each session concluded with the preparation of a report of proposed solutions and identified steps to be taken for community action (Gallaugher and Vodden, 1999).

The primary frustration common to all sessions was that communities did not have a voice in decision-making in fisheries management. Three themes emerged regarding the involvement of coastal peoples in fisheries management. The first theme: coastal people have a right to benefit of the resources adjacent to them and a right to participate in the management of the resources. Second, local knowledge must be recognized and considered a useful tool in fisheries management. Third, coastal communities have invaluable stewardship abilities that cannot be matched by government (Gallaugher and Vodden, 1999).

Community members recognized they needed to be organized to have an effective voice. New and existing multi-stakeholder community committees addressed fishing issues. Representatives from regional districts along the coast formed the Coastal Community Net-
work which encouraged the sustainability of coastal communities by spreading information, advising on fisheries policy and organizing annual conferences.

After months of enthusiastic community involvement, the final forum was held in Vancouver in April of 1996. This final session was a two-day workshop and over 50 members of the coastal communities attended. A fisher and director of the Westcoast Sustainability Association described a vision of what communities were working towards. “We have a vision of streams that are now decimated being rebuilt, of stocks being rebuilt, of a healthy community that has an economic connection to those stocks, and that’s what we are working towards” (Gallaugher and Vodden, 1999, p. 294).” The participants adopted a resolution calling for the Prime Minister and the Minister, Fred Mifflin, to postpone implementation of the recently announced Mifflin Plan until its impact on coastal communities and salmon conservation could be assessed.

Only one day before the forum, further evidence that coastal communities were not being listened to was provided. The minister of fisheries and oceans, Fred Mifflin, had stated publicly on CBC radio that in today’s age of modern communication technology, it was not necessary for him to go to British Columbia to discuss the vast changes recommended for the BC salmon fishery. The call to postpone implementation of the plan went unheeded (Gallaugher and Vodden, 1999).

There was a great deal of opposition to the Mifflin Plan and many concerns were raised regarding the management of the fisheries. Premier Glen Clark communicated his concerns to Prime Minister Jean Chretien at the First Ministers Conference held in May 1996. This communication resulted in the formation of a Federal-Provincial Review Panel in September 1996.
The Federal-Provincial Review Panel 1996

The Panel was to review the impacts of the Mifflin Plan and make recommendations. Concerns included: a general mistrust of the intentions of the Mifflin Plan; the fear of increased corporate concentration in the industry; concerns about corporate influence on the political process in centres like Vancouver; environmental concerns; and social concerns for the coastal communities.

Early on in the review process the Panel made a recommendation that a short-term job creation programme be offered as soon as possible as, “The Panel soon realised that immediate short-term financial assistance was required for those who lost their jobs because of the fleet reduction” (Canada, 1996, p. 5). It should be noted here that the body designing the Mifflin Plan, the Pacific Roundtable, an industry advisory group, had recommended the fleet reduction plan be introduced along with an adjustment programme. The DFO apparently discussed this with other federal departments at the time prior to announcement, but the adjustment programme recommendation was rejected. The sweeping reforms of the Mifflin Plan were introduced without an adjustment programme for the citizens and communities that were to be so dramatically impacted. The review Panel very quickly was able to see that early financial assistance was critical to those impacted by the Plan. The federal government chose however, not to address this issue when the Mifflin Plan was initially announced.

With the introduction of the Plan:

- Up to 2,750 crew lost all or part of their income from the fishery (1,173 skippers and 1,577 deckhands).
- Industry expenditures to supplies decreased by an estimated $19.1 million under the Plan’s fleet-reduction component because fewer vessels needed outfitting. This in turn resulted in 145 fewer jobs in the supply sector with an associated wage bill of $2.9 million. (Canada, 1996, p. 7)
After 10 weeks visiting 22 coastal communities, the Federal – Provincial Review Panel concluded with a report making twenty-three recommendations in addition to recommendations for early financial assistance for those affected by the crisis. The recommendations addressed concerns raised by those who presented their views to the panel. The recommendations spoke to the lack of local input in management and conservation matters; to community impacts and adjustment needs; to fleet reform and to the voluntary buyback programme. In addition, it addressed stacking of licenses; access to capital; corporate concentration; allocation of catch; single-gear restrictions; area licensing; partnerships and improved relations; and a marketing vision for value-added products (Canada, 1996).

Since the introduction of the Mifflin Plan in 1996 the situation has worsened. The season of 1996 was very poor and the salmon fishery was closed in 1999, leaving many unable to fish. Prior to the Mifflin Plan, when there was a bad year or two, fishers had been able to have access to other fisheries. With the reduction of the A license to a salmon-only license and a restriction on the fishing areas, the flexibility for fishers has been removed.

The coastal communities have been hard hit during the fishing industry crisis. The hardships they endured have been magnified by the changes in the Unemployment Act that supplemented the income of many workers in the industry on a yearly basis. With the change from Unemployment to Employment Insurance, benefits were often not available as they had been in the past or, if available, the benefits were greatly reduced. For many, this safety net disappeared when it was most needed.
3. Women in the West Coast Fishery

Long before the arrival of immigrant populations First Nations women were involved in the harvesting and preserving of fish. The women fished for clams and other shellfish from boats and from the shore or catwalks on the barricades. These women also used and produced gear types such as weirs and nets. They were the primary preservers of the catch, smoking, roasting, sun and wind drying the fish. Each type of fish had a different method of preserving. In addition to catching and preserving the fish, producing and mending gear types, the women fishmongers traded the preserved food and related items within their own community and with other intertribal groups (Newell, 1993).

The situation for women, however, was not ideal. Cecilia Benoit (2000) describes the circumstances for women in the fishing communities of Canada’s northwest coast during the pre-contact period as less enviable than the circumstances of their female contemporaries in small-scale agricultural societies. The resource-wealthier fishing societies, according to Benoit, experienced more pronounced social and gender inequalities, particularly those living in societies organized around patrilineal lines. In these communities, the multiple roles of women (gathering and preserving fish, domestic duties and child-rearing) were apparently viewed as secondary to men’s roles of boat building and fishing. Moreover, “a substantial minority of women and children in the pre-contact fishing societies of Canada’s northwest coast were slaves taken as trophies” (Donald, 2000, p.149). These women and children were required to do hard labour for little economic or social reward (Benoit, 2000).

The arrival of the Europeans led to the transformation of the economy to a capitalist system that eventually came to dominate the working lives of settlers and First Nations peoples alike. The capitalist system was a “male project” that promoted the interests of men
over women. Under this system distinct divisions in class, race, and gender soon became evident (Benoit, 2000).

The mechanization of the fisheries provided increased opportunity for women to have paid employment in the industry. Technological changes on boats and in plants enabled women to do jobs that previously were too physically demanding for most women. With the modernization of the fishing industry, First Nations women began working in the processing plants as well. The cannery owners relied on First Nations people for both the supply and processing of fish. Whole families would travel to the canneries to work. The men would travel to these areas in spring-time to catch the fish and the women and children would follow in June to process the fish. The early gillnet fishers were First Nations and were hired on a daily basis. The women often were the ones to handle the oars while the men pulled in the nets. Handling the boat oars was a demanding and tiresome function. These women were called boat pullers and made $1.00 a day. The men pulling the nets made $2.25 a day (Newell, 1993).

Women have always played an important and active role in the industry. In the canneries the women washed and packed the fish. They were skilled and the cannery operators relied on them as an efficient and inexpensive part-time labour force to process the fish. The whole family was involved in the industry. In 1883 the majority of the 3,000 people fishing for the canneries were aboriginal.

The families of the Babine Nations harvested and traded fish using the traditional weir system long before the commercial fishery began. The Babine barricades were an intricately designed system that produced enough salmon to supply the needs of Nations far into the Interior. The Babine also worked in the commercial fishery and by 1904 they had
been working in the commercial fishery for over two decades. As early as 1876 Babine families began making the journey from the Queen Charlottes to gillnet and work in the canneries around the area now known as Prince Rupert. In addition to working in the commercial fisheries, the Babine continued to harvest and preserve salmon to meet both their own needs and the needs of other Nations.

When the cannery owners began to see the Babine catch as a threat to commercial profits, a move to destroy the barricades began. In 1905, the Babine Nations agreed to reduce the barricades and use nets supplied by the canneries. In the spring of 1906, the barricades were rebuilt because the nets were inefficient and the Babine people suffered great hardship during the winter following the initial destruction of the barricades. Geoff Meggs recounts the actions of First Nations women as described by a government agent and witness to the event. When the government agent, aided by five additional men, went to make arrests for the rebuilding, they were attacked by the Babine women and were sent packing. The women made a fierce attempt to save the barricades that were critical to the survival of their families. Their courage saved the barricades only temporarily. Later the same year, at the insistence of the processors and with the support of the federal government, the barricades were destroyed (Meggs, 1991).

Women have played a role in other protests. Meggs also describes the job action of 1910 that was organized by the International World Workers (IWW also known as the Wobblies). Women plant workers joined First Nations, European and Japanese fishers and shore workers in a walkout. The female plant workers made financial demands and were not simply supporting increases for men. The women wanted an increase to 25 cents/hour and to be paid time and a half for overtime. The 1910 strike was initially supported by all
and multiracial crews tried to stop scabs from doing the work. The strike did not succeed as some European fishers in New Westminster did continue to work. Then Japanese fishers returned to work. First Nations and the majority of the white fishers remained on strike. In the confusion of the strike organization, the First Nations women returned to work in the plants while the Japanese women remained on strike. The Japanese women lost out when the cannery owners replaced them in the processing plants with East Indian women.

By 1913, First Nations fishers and shore workers were in the minority in the Fraser River district where the majority of fishers were Japanese, followed by Europeans and then First Nations fishers. Further north in the Rivers Inlet region, First Nations fishers dominated with Japanese fishers a close second and many Europeans as well. During the same period, Japanese women began replacing First Nations women in the fishing plants. Apparently the First Nations women would only process fish caught by First Nations men. This action resulted in the plant owners replacing the aboriginal women with Japanese women. The cannery owners served their own interests by using women from one racial group to replace those from another racial group (Newell, 1993).

First Nations women in the northern region and on Vancouver Island predominated in the plants until 1945, holding two thirds of the processing positions. The skilled services of First Nations women in the canneries were highly valued and the cannery owners relied heavily on the women for processing the fish. Many processors continued to use First Nations fishers (predominately male) in order to have access to the labour pool provided by the women and children. Even with the mechanization of the plants, the jobs that were initially lost were those of the male Chinese contract workers. The First Nations women
had special skills for wrapping select choices of fish. Their skills could not be matched by the processing machines of the time (Newell, 1993).

During the Second World War, (WWII) First Nations women took on the technical and supervisory jobs in the plants replacing Japanese workers and European male machine operators and floor supervisors. They were the benefactors of policies that either sent men off to war or moved Japanese men and women to the interior to detention camps.

By 1953, in the northern district only, the First Nations workers dominated the industry. There were many more aboriginal people involved than Europeans. Whites for the most part owned the purse seine fleet. First Nations people were hired to work as skippers and deck hands. The gillnet fleet, however, was owned by First Nations people but the equipment and boats were old and in poor condition (Newell, 1993).

In 1968, the Davis Plan eliminated the older marginal boats and many First Nations communities were left without boats. The Davis Plan also resulted in centralization of processing and the closing of many canneries, particularly in the northern district. The closures resulted in the loss of hundreds of shore workers jobs. In 1969 alone, with the closure of seven plants, 720 shore workers became unemployed. Seventy percent of these jobs were jobs lost to women. By the early 70s the displaced fishers of the northern area were taking the jobs previously done by First Nations women in the plants. This led to fewer and fewer women working in the processing plants (Newell, 1993).

The trend of centralization of fish processing has continued. In the 90’s, two large processing companies, BC Packers and the Canadian Fishing Company, announced a joint venture to consolidate their lower mainland processing facilities. This has resulted in fewer on-shore jobs for men and women.
Women, however, remain involved in industrial fishing in British Columbia in numerous ways. They continue to work in the processing plants and on the fish boats. They work on trolls, gillnetters, seiners, and packers. Women work as cooks and deck hands and some work as skippers for others or on their own boat. The work is dangerous with the unpredictability of the weather, the use of heavy equipment in slippery and unstable conditions, the long hours of work and, at times, with the threat of sexual harassment. Women in the industry have multiple roles, juggling relationships and family obligations (Jensen, 1995).

Not only do they work on the boats and in the plants in paid positions; they are also often working in unpaid positions. The unpaid positions are heavily relied on and include working on the boats in family enterprises, managing the inshore duties such as running households, and managing the sales accounts and marketing strategies of the business. This work is not accounted for and taken for granted. These functions are completed as if done by some invisible magical power.

Although the Federal – Provincial Review Panel did recognize many of the implications of the 1996 Mifflin Plan for communities and groups, like boat owners, crew, shore workers and aboriginal communities affected by the crisis, it did not address concerns specific to women. The special circumstances and needs of women impacted by the crisis were neither identified nor addressed.

The experience of women impacted by the North Atlantic fishing crisis offers us a view into the problems and concerns that British Columbian women face in this climate of economic, social and personal crisis that has been sparked by the crisis in the West Coast
fishery. Literature dealing with the North Atlantic Fishery crisis, presented in chapter IV, will offer some insight.
CHAPTER III
POST-MODERNIST CRITIQUE

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the accumulation of wealth as the primary focus of the modern fishing industry. This discussion is followed with a section on the concept of instrumental reasoning, and its role in management policy.

1. The Accumulation of Wealth

Our fisheries are in decline because they have been sacrificed in the name of profit generation for a few powerful companies. Using scientific reason and blind faith in the idea of progress, the federal government, employing DFO regulations, has made it possible for large private companies to reap maximum financial benefits while stealing the livelihood of fishers and fishing communities of British Columbia. It is apparent that our political and economic systems are too narrowly focused on a model of scientific reason, giving primary attention to the accumulation of wealth that does not benefit the larger society and leaves many suffering the pains of unemployment.

One overriding theme emerges from the history of fishing after the arrival of the Europeans. The accumulation of wealth and the accompanying struggle for power and control is evident in the early years of the fishing industry and is still apparent today. What is also apparent is that the "modern" fishing industry is a flawed and destructive system. In just over one hundred years of industrialization and modernization of the fishing industry many types of fish are either extinct or on the verge of extinction, eco systems have been destroyed, and a way of life for many is drawing to an end.

Where the modern fishing industry pursues the accumulation of wealth for a few large corporations at great human and environmental costs, the traditional First Nations
approach to fisheries promotes sustainability for all. Common sense tells us that sustainability of the fisheries is the logical goal for any system. In fact, sustainability is often proclaimed as a goal of the controlling interests of large fishing companies and the DFO. What they are referring to is not sustainability of the fish stock or of a way of life, but sustainability of growth/profits. Historically, the large canning and fishing companies “fought tooth and nail against any measures that might increase the number of spawners at the expense of the pack” (Meggs, 1991). When the canners or fishing companies claim concern for conservation of the stock, a closer look often reveals some other self-interested motive.

As early as the 1870’s, disguised in the rhetoric of conservation, pressure was placed on the DFO representatives to limit native fishing. This pressure resulted in native people being regulated to fishing for “the purpose of providing food for themselves but not for sale, barter or traffic, by any means other than with drift nets or spearing” (Meggs, 1991, p. 56). The canners wanted the fish the natives were catching and the DFO assisted the canners in their goal using racist policies.

In 1904, with the help of the DFO, the Skeena canners succeeded in banning the “Babine Barricades”, a form of fishing used by the First Nations for several thousands of years. Ironically, the barricades which had served the native peoples for so long were identified by the canners and the DFO as the “major reason for declining salmon runs” who claimed that if the barricades remained “the canning industry of the Skeena will be destroyed” (Meggs, 1991, p. 75). Again, the canners were aided by the DFO in eliminating competition under the guise of conservation.
In July 1996, in *Pacific Currents*, a journal publication put out by the DFO, the number one problem and concern to be addressed by the Pacific Salmon Revitalization programme, also known as Mifflin Plan, is conservation. It is noted that the catching power of the fleet has risen significantly as fishing gear and vessels have become more efficient and mobile and this makes it more difficult for fishery managers to control the harvest. A reduction in catch capacity would seem an obvious possibility but, instead, the DFO chooses to focus on the number of boats in the fishing fleet (Canada).

The Mifflin plan, criticized by Stephen Hume in the *Vancouver Sun*, focuses on the number of boats in the fleet when it should be concerned about the fleets “killing capacity” (1996). The Mifflin plan will reduce the number of boats in the fleet by 50%, but it will not reduce the catch capacity. Hume explains, “the decision looks suspiciously like a strategy to force small independent, labour intensive, small-town operators out of fishing and to concentrate the catching power in the highly capitalized factory fleets of an urban industry” (p. A2). Conservation again is used to justify changes that benefit the larger business interests.

The primary focus is economical and considerations such as environmental and human elements are secondary at best. This may in part be due to what Charles Taylor, in his book, *The Malaise of Modernity*, calls “instrumental reason”, a malaise that affects all aspects of our lives because of its primacy in western thought. Taylor describes instrumental reason as, “the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end”, with a focus on “maximum efficiency the best cost output ration, is its measure of success” (Taylor, 1991, p. 5).
2. The Primacy of Instrumental Reasoning

Because of the primacy of instrumental reason, the focus in our society then is on financial benefits resulting in decisions, in Taylor’s opinion, often being made with economical gains solely in mind when other factors should be taken into consideration. Taylor feels people no longer see themselves in relationship to others in the sense of what they can do to contribute to the larger community. Rather they, “take an instrumental stance to all facets of our life and surroundings: to the past, to nature, as well as to our social arrangements” (Taylor, 1991, p. 59). Some of the fishing examples described above support an instrumental view. These are not isolated incidents; historically, there is a pattern of decisions and actions of this kind that sacrifice the interests of workers in the fisheries to the interests of the big company owners.

The concept of instrumental reason explains what has happened in the fishing industry and may offer a partial explanation for the dreadful state of affairs the fisheries are in. Taylor believes that the traditional roles of many social structures and beliefs in society have been diminished by the increasing influence of instrumental reasoning. He describes an attitude towards nature where “the creatures that surround us”, having lost their “significance that accrued to their place in the chain of being”, are now “open to being treated as raw materials or instrument for our projects” (Taylor, 1991, p. 5).

The words of the late Jack Davis, a former fisheries minister, certainly reflect this attitude. Davis likens the fishing industry to “a copper mine, in which the best ore is taken first before the miner turns to progressively larger volumes of lower grade ore until the vein is exhausted…. The whale, [the minister said] has been virtually wiped out and the tuna and the salmon will be the next to go as man works his way down the pyramid to the plankton”
What is so shocking about Mr. Davis’ comment is the idea that the living creatures of the sea will be taken and used, harvested, until they no longer exist. As shocking as his words of 1968 sound today, and must have sounded to some then, the harvesting of fish to extinction has persisted.

In a *Georgia Straight* (1997), article by Terry Glavin, a long time commercial salmon troller is quoted, as he describes how, over the years, the herring have all but disappeared in certain areas. His records indicate the length of herring spawning grounds in miles and read as: “Joe Cove, Eden Island, 4 to 5 miles, now none, Monday Anchorage, Mars Island, 5 to 6 miles, now none” (p. 7). The list goes on and on. Another situation, like many in the Gulf of Georgia, is described. In 1983, the Herring seiners moved into Scuttle Bay, where the Sliammon people had fished for centuries, and took 3,200 tons. “In 1984, the seiners came back and took 4,000 tons. There has been no herring spawn there of any consequence since” (Glavin, 1997, p.7).

This attitude, of seeing living creatures as a resource is in fact a common and accepted attitude in our society. Fish are not alone in being viewed this way. Cattle, sheep, chickens, to name a few are all viewed as commodities to be produced and used for human consumption. One difference with fish, excepting the products of fish farms, is that they are a resource that reproduce in nature as opposed to being produced in circumstances fully under the control of humans.

The creatures of the sea have been viewed since the beginning of the modern fishing industry purely in economic terms with little to no concern about sustainability. The response of the canners, when confronted with their greed and criticized in 1877 for the waste of fish evident by, “the presence of floating masses of putrefied carcasses which have
been polluting every arm of the river from the city to the Gulf,” and confirmed in investigations to be “as many as 3,000 fish a day” for only two canneries, was to “build hatcheries” (Meggs, 1991, p. 28). The hatcheries would bring the fish stocks under their control thus guaranteeing profits and eliminating the need and cost for conservation of the natural stocks. Sustainability is always looked at in economic terms with an eye to efficiency and increased profits and technology is used to attain this goal.

Taylor discusses how the pre-eminence given instrumental reason is reflected in society’s fascinations with technology and solutions which may not be appropriate (Taylor, 1991). Technology has brought us nets so big they could hold three 747’s and factory ships that can stay out on the seas for months (Glavin, 1996). This irresistible charm that technology seems to hold for people is, “thought to have contributed to the narrowing and flattening of our lives” and to the streamlining of decision-making processes which often result in ignoring valuable and creative input from those who are not seen as experts or technocrats (Taylor, 1991, p.6). This prestige given to technocrats, bureaucrats and experts has resulted in moving decision making from local communities to centres where the so-called experts live. These experts may have no personal experience of the community or its residents yet are making decisions that are crucial to their lives.

The fishing communities of British Columbia have direct experience of this kind of treatment. The Fisherman’s Report (1995) was published in, Vision 2000, a discussion draft of what the Pacific fisheries at the beginning of the 21st century will look like. The Fisherman’s Report, reveals that several communities complained that "management/allocation decisions are being made every day without consulting with, or
even advising, the coastal communities affected by these decisions” (Cruickshank, 1995, p. 99).

In the same report, Cruickshank reports that the Salmon Enhancement Program (SEP) is seen as a “stodgy, banal club for fishery biologists and engineers, too fixed in their academic ways to fight to make the program work” and that political will is also considered to be lacking (Cruickshank, 1995, p. 99). The fishers feel they are not consulted or in the few cases they are, they get no sense that their input makes any difference.

The consequences of our bureaucratic and technocratic society giving ever increasing importance to instrumental reason may, as Taylor points out, lead to situations where, “a manager in spite of her own orientation may be forced by the conditions of the market to adopt a maximizing strategy she feels destructive”. He continues with an example where “a bureaucrat, in spite of his personal insight, may be forced by the rules under which he operates to make a decision he knows to be against humanity and good sense” (Taylor, 1993, p. 7).

Is it this kind of force, working on the staff of the DFO, that leads them to draw conclusions that are so obviously irrational? When Alcan started to proceed with the construction of Kemano II, in BC there was a great deal of debate and public pressure to have the project stopped. The DFO, “despite a decade of research to the contrary”, claimed that, “the hydroelectric project could happily co-exist with the salmon of Nechako River (Meggs, 1991, p. 200).

The Nechako fisheries had been virtually wiped out after the completion of the original Alcan dam. “Between October 1952 and June 1955, no water was released to the Nechako and only trickles were allowed over the dam between July, 1955 and January,
1957. The Nechako's famous Chinook runs staggered and then collapsed, tumbling from several thousand spawners to just fifty for several years" (Meggs, 1991, p. 201). For the DFO to claim hydro dams and the fisheries are compatible seems irrational.

In *The Unconscious Civilization*, John Ralston Saul, makes the point that, when reason is "put out on its own as a flagship for society and for all of our actions it quickly becomes irrational" (1995, p. 103). It should be pointed out here that Saul does not use the term instrumental reason, choosing instead to focus his criticism on the primacy of all reason in our society. Saul feels by focusing criticism on the sub-category, instrumental reason, it somehow leaves reason beyond judgment when the real problem is in our raising reason "to a state of divinity" (1995, p. 105).

Our modern times are defined as the "Age of Reason", with the core idea that "mankind is rational and that if left free, he can create an improved society" and where possible "nature could and should be controlled to serve humanity's physical need". From this concept grew the idea of progress and the "confidence in our ability to improve reality through design" (Wright, 1993, pp. 6,11). Reason and the idea of progress came to permeate every aspect of Western culture.

Robert W. Wright in, *Economics, Enlightenment, and Canadian Nationalism*, discusses the evolution of orthodox economics as part of a superstructure that facilitates the use of reason and supports the idea of progress in Western society. The humanists, Wright states, "are critical of the failure to include moral values in the objective set of scientific inquiry.... And the destructive fragmentation" which results from "restricting analysis to quantifiable variables" (1993, p. xiii). What moral considerations, we may ask, were made when the First Nations people were regulated to discontinue fishing with nets, a practice that
had occurred for thousands of years? Was morality considered when the government funded offshore freezer trawlers that decimated labour-intensive inshore fishing (Meggs, 1991)? Perhaps if morality was a consideration of scientific inquiry and reflected in disciplines such as orthodox economics there would be fewer examples of immoral acts in industry to draw on.

It is quite possible as well that restriction of analysis to quantifiable variables has led to the prestige given technocratic experts and has resulted in the disregard for "local knowledge" available through consultation with fishers and those working and living the fisheries every day. When analysis is restricted in this way, decisions are made with only part of the information that is required to reach comprehensive solutions (Wright, 1993).

The second part of the humanists critique concerning "destructive fragmentation" appears evident in the view political economy has of humans, "political economy deals not with the entire real man.... The abstract man of this science is engrossed with one desire only – the desire of possessing wealth; because it is found convenient to isolate the effect of this force from all others" (Wright, 1993, p. 19). This is a narrow view indeed and is reflected in the concentrated focus in the fishing industry on profit making to the detriment of the environment and human conditions.

The egalitarians argue that the idea of progress and thus orthodox economics is "a creed for the rich". The accumulation of wealth is certainly the goal of controlling interests in the fishing industry and as shown earlier the DFO does its best to assure this goal is reached. Government officials often quite openly support capital interests over the interests of labour as evident by the statement made by cabinet minister Mackenzie Bowell:
"restraint of capital would be unconscionable but restraint of labour simply makes good sense" (Meggs, 1991, p. 31).

To illustrate this point, we need to answer the question, whose needs are met when large-scale fisheries, i.e. high catch capacity fisheries that use the biggest and fastest equipment, are encouraged over small-scale fisheries? Terry Glavin, in a *Vancouver Sun* article March 22, 1990 quotes U.S. scientist John Bardach, advisor to the U.S. president, on the differences between small-scale and large-scale fisheries. Apparently the small-scale fisheries directly employs 12 million people compared to 500,000 jobs in large-scale fisheries. He notes that the small-scale fisheries catch almost as many fish as the larger, more efficient fisheries. If these comparisons are applicable to Canadian fisheries, the question then is: Why would the DFO support a fishery that employs comparatively few people when a greater number of people could find employment in small-scale fisheries? Who benefits from the large-capacity fisheries? The large fishing companies owned by economically and politically powerful people.

The environmentalists, “suggest the consequences of orthodoxy is an exercise concerned with short-run expediency rather than longer-run reality” (Wright, 1993, p. viii). The whole history of the fishing industry gives testimony to this complaint. The short-term and shortsighted goals of profit-making are consistently given prominence over the more long-term goals of sustaining fish stocks.

Finally, the feminists also challenge the concept of the primacy of reason (Grosz, 1988). The specific contributions and concerns of women have been for far too long neglected through the use of traditional male approaches to economic modernization and social welfare. Feminists also assert that patriarchy and capitalism have a reciprocal
relationship. Patriarchy, the structure of male dominance and women's subordination's is shaped by its relationship to the capitalist world system and capitalism is shaped by its relationship to the patriarchal system. The system puts the profits of a few before the human needs of many. This is not a deviation but rather an inherent characteristic of the system.

Women for the most part are disadvantaged by this system and feminists call for the inclusion and recognition of the contributions they make. A review of feminist literature on the adjustment programmes implemented in the North Atlantic fishery crisis in the next chapter will further provide a feminist perspective of the fishing industry in regards to women.
CHAPTER IV

ADJUSTMENT POLICY

This chapter includes a brief overview of the collapse of the North Atlantic cod stocks. It is followed with a review of the literature pertaining to the experience of women in Atlantic Canada in the early 90s.

1. Collapse of the Northern Cod Stocks

The North Atlantic crisis hit full force in the early 90s. Although fears about the state of the northern cod stocks were expressed, by inshore fishers in the mid-1980s, these stated concerns were unheeded. In the 1990s, six cod stocks collapsed and most of the cod and other ground fisheries have been closed to commercial fishing since 1992-1993. The Northern Cod Adjustment and Recovery Program (NCARP) was introduced in 1992 to provide income support and retraining for the fishery workers (Neis, 2000).

In May of 1994, a ground fisheries moratorium was announced, after studies indicated that the collapse was more severe than initially anticipated. Some stocks may never recover to their former abundance and in some areas stocks may never recover sufficiently to sustain a directed commercial fishery. The collapse and resulting moratoria have affected over 50,000 people directly employed in the industry in Atlantic Canada and Quebec. In addition, another 47,000 people involved indirectly in the fishery have also felt the effects of the closures. In Newfoundland and Labrador alone, 12,000 women and 23,000 men lost their jobs. The repercussions of the devastation of fish stocks off the coast of Newfoundland are still being tallied (Neis and Williams, 1996).

The 1994 announcement of the moratorium was accompanied with an announcement of The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS). It was a set of adjustment
programmes replacing NCARP and was supposed to be in place for 5 years. The federal government made a number of adjustments to eligibility times as the cost of the programmes mounted. The final post-TAGS programme was announced in 1998 (Neis, 2000).

2. Women in the North Atlantic Fishery Crisis

There were problems with the adjustment programmes and Neis, a researcher and activist, voiced her concerns regarding the NCARP in 1992 and 1993. Neis has worked since the 1980s, “to make visible the local and global dimensions of the contemporary fisheries crisis with particular emphasis on the impacts of the crisis on women”, (Neis and Williams 1996, 1997; Neis, 2000). She works from a feminist political economy perspective and argues that both NCARP and TAGS treat, “the fishery crisis as if it was a crisis of individuals when it was, in fact, a crisis of households, communities and entire regions” (Neis, 2000). Neis voiced her concerns early on with the prediction,

That women who had worked in fishing enterprises as unpaid spouses, as poorly paid fish processing workers and who had been recent entrants into the inshore fishery would find these sources of marginality and low incomes reproduced in programmes introduced in response to the crisis. Although displaced from the industry along with their fishery husbands unpaid spouses would not be eligible for retraining or mobility assistance. (Neis, 2000, p. 289).

Others have similar concerns. Women are more often assigned less physically demanding jobs, but they are less likely to have full time work. More often, they get seasonal jobs (Ilcan, 1985; Rowe, 1991). The jobs they do have require fewer skills and are less likely to be transferable to jobs outside the fisheries, like the more highly skilled jobs of men (Rowe, 1991; Ennis and Woodrow, 1996). The lower wages combined with shorter working periods resulted in lower unemployment insurance payments and reduced benefits from either the NCARP or TAGS. The NCARP benefits ranged from $225 to $407 per
week with an average of $305 although women, 36% of the total, averaged $270. TAGS replaced NCARP in 1994 when the moratorium was announced. TAGS payments were overall 6% less than NCARP and averaged $288 per week in total, but for women $243 per week (Williams, 1996).

According to Marion Brinkley, a researcher working in the coastal communities of Nova Scotia,

There has been no acceptance of the contributions women made in the unpaid work in their husband's fishing enterprises nor in the loss of employment through secondary economic spin-offs (2000, p. 324).

Many women were adversely affected by the crisis including women who worked unpaid in family fishing enterprises. They often did the bookkeeping, supplied and cooked for crews. Others lost work in "child care and retail sector in fisher-dependent communities" (Neis and Williams, 1996, p.36). There were also fewer jobs for women in education, health and social services with the increased numbers of people leaving the province (Binkley, 2000).

Unless government programmes addressed these gender-based inequities, displaced women would have fewer employment options than men, and would experience increased economic dependency on men and marginal employers as a result of the crisis. (Neis, 2000, p. 289)

There were indications, however, that there was little understanding or consideration given to the role women play in the economic life of rural fishing communities. Decisions regarding adjustment programmes implemented by the federal and provincial governments often were not informed decisions and were based on patriarchal assumptions that proved to be unfounded. Many were made lacking the necessary understanding of the circumstances and the realities of the everyday lives of women working in the fishing industry (Rowe, 1991). The result was adjustment programmes that did not meet the needs of women.
Training opportunities were part of the adjustment programmes. There was a good response and many people took advantage of the opportunity to upgrade their education or get training in a new field (Rowe, 1991). TAGS training programmes, however, got mixed review. Some found the instructors demeaning, and felt that there was little effort to link the programmes to existing job opportunities (Woodrow and Ennis, 1994).

One woman recounted how she and her family had moved from their home to take advantage of training in a large centre only to find that the programme did not provide the living expenses they had been assured by a NCARP counsellor. She says, “it was only her family’s strength that got them through”, and “she feels the training option gave her family a raw deal….She has advised other people in her position to get as much information as they can before opting for training outside their community. She cautions those who might go into training that the might have to face unsympathetic instructors and prejudice. As well as economic hardship” (Woodrow and Ennis, 1994, p. 14).

In a report written for the Newfoundland Women’s Policy Office, it was identified that many of the training programmes were offered at community colleges, which meant the necessity for people to travel to the larger centres. Single women could travel to these centres but this was more difficult for married women with children. Single mothers were not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits if they went to university full time and student loans would be deducted from their social assistance payments. Married women, on the other hand, who applied for student assistance were required to report family income as it was assumed their husbands would pay for their education. The shortcomings of these programmes were the direct result of patriarchal assumptions made at the policy level. These assumptions seeped through and were made visible in inadequate programmes that
perpetuated the gender inequalities of the industry in the adjustment programmes. This report resulted in a call for further research to better understand the realities of women, so that a more appropriate policy response to the reduced employment of women could be developed and implemented (Rowe, 1991).

Neis explains that re-training programmes for individuals and individual income support did not address the needs of “single enterprise” communities and the people that live there. She draws attention to the fact that the programmes did not address many social concerns for fishing households including the needs of young people who had planned to stay in their communities and continue with a fishing way of life. For many families, intergenerational strife added to the stress of their dilemma (Neis, 2000).

The pathway of adjustment to a changed employment status involves many aspects of an individual’s life. The stress and strains of reduced employment in a declining fishery are no less significant for women than they are for men (Taylor, 1988). The assumption always is, however, that earned income for women is supplemental to men’s income, and those responsible for drafting policy and implementing plans work from this premise.

Interestingly, in a 1997 study looking at stress related to fishery closures, results showed that there was a significant difference by gender in the level of distress experienced. Women were more distressed than men were. On a scale measuring levels of distress, women had high scores (60.8%) as compared with (47.6%) men. This finding was consistent with other studies. The significantly higher level of distress experienced by women coping with fish closures may have also been influenced by the many roles women have with families and community (Canning, et al., 1997).
Binkley also looked at the tough times for women and their families during the crisis in Atlantic Canada. Financial well-being had eroded and more and more women were working outside the home. They were taking on the task of breadwinner in many cases as well as continuing to do their traditional duties in the home. The loss in wages and the new role of breadwinner put additional stresses on relationships. Many fishers had eroded self-esteem with increased anxiety and this contributed additional family stress. The families struggled to meet the challenges brought by the fisheries crisis and found old strategies no longer applied to their new circumstances. Their long-term strategies were being replaced with short-term coping mechanisms (Binkley 2000, p. 332).

Binkley notes that households differ from each other and used differing strategies of coping. The study also noted the contributions women make to the industry and yet, it was hard to hear the voices of women in these fishing communities; “their cries cannot rise above the cacophony of voices clamouring to be heard” (Binkley, 2000, p. 324).

The roles and needs of women in the fishery have taken a back seat to the concerns of managing the fish stocks, methods for harvesting, processing and marketing the resources, and economic development of areas hardest hit by the crisis (Binkley, 2000, p. 324).

In a longitudinal study, Donna Davis looked at a Newfoundland community first in the 70s during a prosperous time in the fishery and then again in the 90s at the time of crisis (2000). Davis documented the strategies used by women and men in households where the, “changing nature of a resource in the environment has had pervasive, fast-acting, dramatic, unanticipated and unplanned-for effects” (Davis, 2000, p. 352). Davis makes the point that government decisions that had tremendous implications were made with little understanding of the lives of the people and communities affected.
Policy-makers have little real world understanding of what these women (and men) are up against in terms of the unforeseen repercussions that their commercially inspired rationalisation programs and adjustment have had on entire communities who have been regarded as expendable or redundant (Davis, 2000, p. 352).

Davis saw the crisis as, “situated in transnational or global strategies to privatize the management of natural resources, in this case, access to depleting fish stocks (Davis, 2000, p. 344). The impact experienced by people in communities in transition during the crisis, “calls into question the supposedly rational policies and intent of government and fisheries development planners and challenges their notions of “transition” and “adjustment” costs” (Davis, 2000, p. 343).

It is clear declining fish stocks and the resulting government policies have had a tremendous impact on the lives of men and women in the fishery communities. In 1999 three years after the implementation of the Mifflin Plan, 11 women participated in a quantitative study looking at the social support for unemployed fishers (Pilch, 1999). There is no research focused on the experience of women in the BC fisheries. The industry is in major economic decline. How successful can adjustment programmes be without an understanding of the lives of the people involved? A study investigating the life realities and experiences of women affected by the crisis in the British Columbia fisheries will contribute to the building of the much-needed knowledge.
CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present an overview of the methodology, the sampling, the data collection design, and the data analysis methods used to generate the data, and the rationale behind their use.

1. Feminist Research Methodologies

One shared tenet of feminist research is that women’s lives are important (Reinharz, 1992). The ultimate goal of feminist research is to add to our understanding of how women view and experience the world (Devault, 1990). Feminists assert that this goal cannot be attained using prevailing social theory, as it is gender-blind as well as gender-biased. Traditional social theory was developed by men for men and thus, disregards women’s ways of knowing. Reinharz, (1992) makes the point that feminism is a perspective and not a method. Feminist researchers use a variety of methods. Feminist research methodologies are the principles guiding the research. Therefore, using feminist methodology leaves me free to draw on a multiplicity of research methods.

The principle of feminist methodology most relevant to my study is that power is generated along lines of gender, class, race and sexuality. Further, power is inherent in all social relations, and is responsible for the construction of dominant discourses while silencing others (Ristock and Pennell, 1996). This tenet of feminist methodology guides research practice.

Feminist research acknowledges the researcher as a person and rejects the notion of objectivity. Research using feminist methodologies frequently includes the researchers’ position and perspective up front (Reinharz, 1992).
A feminist perspective supports considering participants' individual personal experiences within their social context. Dorothy Smith (1987), asserts that although women are experts about their personal experiences, our way of knowing is largely constructed by the male-dominated discourses. It is the researcher's responsibility to consider experiences in this socio-political context, as many women do not have a clear view of all the external forces impacting their lives.

Furthermore, feminists understand that because men and women experience the world in a different way, gender is a factor that alters research findings. Consequently, women need to be understood separately from men; therefore, they can be studied separately from men (Smith, 1987).

Feminist research aims to advance women's equality by adding to the body of knowledge on women's issues. Expanding this body of knowledge increases women's visibility and challenges the prevailing discourse which constructs how women are perceived and understood.

In keeping with feminist research practice described above, I present a primary assumption I hold in regards to the overall research. This presumption flows from my feminist view, and belief that, based on our gender, women are exploited as a free or inexpensive labour force.

This study is non-positivist, interpretive and feminist in its approach. The qualitative framework of this study is flexible in design to facilitate understanding the experiences of individual participants. The scheme also recognizes the value in the personal perspective. Because of an assumed power dynamic inherent in the relationships women experience in
their work in the fisheries and my personal feminist perspective, a feminist approach is appropriate for this research design.

2. Sample

The participants for the study conformed to criteria requiring that they be female and had worked in the BC fishing industry for at least two years. No criteria excluded individuals due to age or race. The participants were identified via snowball sampling for a total of nine people participating in the study.

When I first became interested in doing research concerning the BC fisheries and was in the process of learning about the subject, I made a number of contacts in different communities. Each person I spoke to recommended one or two more individuals with whom I should make contact. Consequently, by the time I had decided to look specifically at the issues impacting women, and knew I wanted to do personal interviews with women, I was able to contact a number of people about getting participants for the study. One such contact proved to be very fruitful.

This particular contact had access to a large number of women fishers and agreed to inform them of my study as well as get permission to have me contact them individually. In a matter of a few days I was provided with fourteen names of women I could call. All fourteen of the women responded enthusiastically to the idea of participating in the study. I was delighted. Due to conflicting schedules, however, only nine of the women finally participated.

To assure participation was voluntary I clearly outlined the study purpose and design to each participant. Confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed for the participants, and each was informed of her right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.
Participants signed a form as indication of their informed consent.

3. Data Collection Design

I made arrangements to interview the nine women over a period of four days. In retrospect I would spread the interview process over a greater number of days. I learned that listening to the life stories of women can be very emotionally draining. My feeling now is that when so much information loaded with the emotion of the experiences of the women is heard, the process would be better served by taking greater time between interviews to allow them to resonate fully.

All the interviews were held in a mutually agreed upon location. The format of the interviews was unstructured. They were audio-taped and some written notations were made. After each interview, I made notes on the interview process and my impressions of the experience. However, because the interviews were so closely scheduled, I feel I could not do full justice to this process because I was so emotionally drained.

The interview method was an appropriate choice for this study. As a feminist methodology, interviews are important tools for gathering the subjective experiences’ of participants (Marshal and Rossman, 1995). I found that the face-to-face interaction with the women I interviewed did facilitate a more personal relationship between the women and myself and was important in building comfort and trust. The interview process I believe did promote more open communication, and consequently, more informative data.

Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed word for word and saved on computer files. Interviewing and recording on audio-tape means listening to hours of taped interviews and reading the transcription of the data too. Although very time
consuming, this process provided me with the opportunity to review each participant’s response, which aided me in my analysis of the data.

There were 9 in-depth interviews that were an average of 1 ½ to 2 hours in length. The transcription of approximately 16 hours of audio-taped conversations took place over a period of eight months. A copy of the transcription was sent to each participant in the study to approve accuracy. All transcriptions were approved.

4. Data Analysis

Although personal perspectives influence analysis, I took several steps to ensure integrity of each story and to expand credibility. I stated my relationship to the research, and the interviews were unstructured, to allow for the women’s stories to unfold as the women wanted. The interviews were transcribed verbatim in an attempt to capture every nuance of expression. The participants received a copy of their own to review and or edit.

Anonymity and confidentiality was maintained. The interview tapes were transcribed into separate files for each respondent. The transcriptions were stored on separate computer files. The tapes and hard copies of the transcriptions were stores in a locked filing cabinet. Any identifying information was stored in a separate file. I removed identifying information from the transcriptions and used pseudonyms where appropriate.

The data analysis process began with the transcription of the interviews. The tapes were listened to several times while I read and reread the transcriptions. This gave me the opportunity to familiarize myself with the narrative details of each woman’s story and a chance to sensitize myself to nuances of each woman’s verbal expression of her experience.

Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) constant comparative method of analysis was used to identify themes that are consistent within the discourse and also to identify contradictions in
A constant comparative method gradually develops a category for analysis by putting together various statements that have interesting commonalities (Ristock and Pennell, 1996). Items are added for further comparison to refine the category. To assist with the analysis, I created several versions of the transcriptions.

The first version was the original transcript. I did a line-by-line analysis. Particularly moving statements and issues that recurred were highlighted. As I read the transcriptions I made analytic notations on the left-hand margin, to record my thoughts about the data. The comments of each participant were compared against her whole story to reveal either contradiction or consistency. The same process was done for each interview. The narrative of each participant was then compared with each of the women’s story. Gradually, patterns emerged linking the experiences of the women, while distinguishing them from the others’ at times.

After many readings of the transcripts, and concurrent notations, I identified the recurring themes in the data. I used the word processing function on my computer to copy the coded quotations into new files. These files became the second version of the transcripts. The files were then categorized into three main topics. Each file focused on one of the three themes that emerged which were roughly labeled “loss”, “the system” and “strategies”. The comments of each participant pertaining to a specific theme were identified by speaker and combined in one file. Each of the theme files had all of the pertinent comments in one file. Each file was then in turn analyzed and the comments of each participant were compared to those of the other women.

A third version of the transcript was made including the most appropriate comments made to either illustrate an idea that was common to the individual narratives or showed a
distinguishing idea or view. Again there was a separate file for each of the three themes identified. These files were used as the basis for the presentation of the results; however, the analysis continued throughout the writing process. The data that did not fit within the established themes were studied to see what they might reveal, or for what they contradicted. The analysis continued to evolve as I wrote and as I repeatedly referred to the quotations, my previous examinations of the discourse, notations, and related literature.
CHAPTER VI
FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings of the individual interview analysis. The findings are organized according to major themes consistent with each story. The identified themes are: loss, the system, and strategies. I begin by introducing the nine women as a contextual feature of the research.

1. Participant Introductions

a. Laurie

Laurie is a 32-year-old Caucasian woman. She appeared enthusiastic with a positive outlook on life. She was raised in a fishing family on the West Coast and her father remains involved with the industry. Laurie attended both college and university and is a musician. Laurie continued her family’s long association with the fishing industry and has been the owner operator of a 36’ gillnetter for the past 9 years. She also has worked at times as a deck hand. Her husband was involved in the industry as well.

Laurie used to both troll and gill net when there was the option to do combination fishing. She fished from spring to late fall travelling down the Satellite Channel, including Prince Rupert, the Charlottes, the West Coast of Vancouver Island and the Fraser River. Then, with the restructuring of the industry, the option of combinations fishing was no longer available.

The crisis in the fishing industry and the restructuring mean that she can no longer earn enough to make her living fishing. The increased costs associated with the requirement of additional licenses and equipment and reduced opportunities to fish mean the business is no longer lucrative. Laurie knows she needs to get out. Fortunately, she feels she has the
skills for employment opportunities in other lines of work. Laurie feels fortunate to have other employment opportunities, but is aware others in her community are not so lucky.

Many families in her community are struggling to stay afloat, as the fishing industry isn’t the only industry; in her community, that is hurting. Forestry has had a down turn as well. Laurie, however, remains optimistic that although her community is going through very difficult economic times, it will remain a viable community. She believes the sport fishing industry will become increasingly important economically and that the community economy is diversified enough for it to survive.

b. Anna

Anna is a Caucasian woman in her early forties. She is the mother of two children with a daughter in her early teens and a son a few years younger. Anna is married and began both her married life and her fishing career in 1977. Her husband was already involved in the fishing industry and owned a boat. After their marriage, the couple began fishing together. Anna describes these times as, “humble days” but a really nice way to make a living.

Anna and her husband would fish for months from early spring to late fall in the first ten years. With gradual changes in regulation, the seasons became shortened bit by bit. It was about 5 or 6 years ago that the restrictions started becoming burdensome for them. They feel gradually, little by little, their way of life has been taken from them.

Anna wears many hats. In addition to supplementing the family business with extra work, she is preparing for the future. She returned to school in the hopes of preparing for an alternate line of business to pursue, if fishing proves to be no longer a viable option. She takes pride in her independence and her ability to be versatile in making a living.
c. Betty

Betty is a First Nations woman in her sixties. She is a grandmother of four and is a retired fisher. Betty retired from fishing in 1996 after the death of her husband. The couple began fishing in the early 1950s. They were the first in their village to own a drum seiner. Together along with a crew of five people, they fished the coast, up to the Queen Charlotte’s and on the “big rollers”, west of Vancouver Island. Betty finds fishing great fun and she still gets the urge to be out on the water.

During the summer months, when the salmon were running was the time when Betty did most of her fishing. In the early years, Betty’s mother-in-law cared for the couple’s small daughter and son while Betty and her husband were at sea fishing. Later, when the children were older, they joined their parents on the boat to fish salmon.

This retired grandmother has seen many changes in fishing since she was a young woman. She remembers when the women of the village gathered clams off the beaches and the men fished to supply the entire village with food. There were no licenses required then and yet, the stocks remained viable. Betty wonders if her grandchildren will ever get to fish for salmon. She is also concerned about the Indian Food Fish, and the people in the village who need the fish even more in these strained economic times.

d. Jane

This First Nations woman in her thirties has always been involved with fishing. Her parents and grandparents fished all their lives. Jane and her brother accompanied their parents each summer while they travelled the coast fishing for salmon. When Jane was older her mother “taught her the ropes”. She learned how to work the boat, cook, and work as a
deck hand. Working the boat equipment requires skill for operating the hydraulic winches that lift the nets, and for using the running arm equipment that can be dangerous.

Jane eventually spent seven years fishing with her parents and would often relieve her mother when she needed a break or wanted to take a summer off. Fishing, however, has never been a full time occupation for Jane. She has always combined working at various jobs in the community with her fishing activities. In 1996, she was able to take advantage of a training programme to further develop her computer skills. Jane now works in the local First Nations treaty office. When the season is open, Jane is able to take time from her office work to fish.

She loves the excitement and anticipation of going fishing, the busyness of getting all the gear ready and purchasing the supplies. She remembers the hustle bustle on the roads to and from the supply shops, people getting their nets and locks ready, polishing and cleaning. There was excitement that came every summer. The excitement is gone now.

Although Jane is currently working, she and her family have experienced much hardship like other fishing families. She has encouraged her son to get an education so he can get employment that doesn’t rely on fishing. She hopes he will be able to find employment in the community near his family.

e. Rhoda

This college educated Caucasian woman in her forties has had a very diverse career that includes fishing, driving a forklift, and working in fish processing plants. Rhoda has pursued many different endeavours in her life but always seems to return to fishing. She comes from a fishing family with her grandfather, father and brothers all fishermen. The family has relied on the sea for their livelihood for generations. They have a strong
connection and relationship with their environment and this connection and way of life is now in jeopardy. Rhoda grieves the loss of a way of life that has been passed from generation to generation and wonders what she and her brothers will have to pass to their children.

Rhoda believes the crisis in the fishing industry is threatening the ability of both native and nonnative communities to survive. She is active in encouraging people to work collectively searching for alternative solutions to the crisis.

f. Sylvia

Sylvia, a Caucasian woman in her thirties comes from a fishing family. She was born the year her parent’s fish boat was built. The boat was the family’s home and workplace. They lived together on the boat until Sylvia was four years old when they moved into a house.

Sylvia spent spring breaks and summers months with her parents on the boat fishing. When she was fifteen years old, her father bought her a fish boat of her own. She used that boat until she was eighteen, then took a break from salmon fishing for two years. She did however, continued to work in the prawn fishery during this period.

In 1988, Sylvia met her husband-to-be, John, a logger, who was also from a fishing family. The couple began fishing together making a lucrative living combining work in both the fishing and forestry business. They purchased their first boat together in 1988 and another in 1990.

Sylvia has described herself and John as having had a lot of luck with both of them making a living in fishing and logging. Their luck, however, has been curtailed with the increasing crisis in the fisheries. Not only has fishing stopped but logging has also been
reduced considerably. Macmillan Bloedel, the local logging company, has downsized from three divisions to two in the past year.

Like others in the coastal region of British Columbia, Sylvia and her husband are considering their current options. The uncertainty of the fisheries leaves Sylvia wondering, "do I have a job or don’t I?" Sylvia is like the many men and women who fish. They are independent, may not have a lot of formal education and are not accustomed to the nine-to-five way of life. Like others, Sylvia, too, is resourceful, very experienced and would like to think there is a future for her and her husband in their community.

**g. Janis**

Janis is a 49 year old, Caucasian woman. She is not from a family of fishers but rather married into a fishing family. She and her husband Kevin have been married for seventeen years and have worked together in the fishing industry during this period. Janis has two children from a previous marriage, a son (23) and a daughter (21). Her son spent time on the boats when he was young and enjoyed it; however, he has chosen not to pursue the fishing life. Her daughter has never enjoyed fishing.

Janis and her husband do not own their own boat and have always been employed by others in the industry. They have worked on the packers and have scouted together for herring. More recently, Kevin has worked the drag boats and on fish farms.

The packer, owned by a large corporation, travels as far north as Prince Rupert. It is like a floating barge that produces ice to preserve fish that is brought by the fishing boats. The fish are stored and then transported for processing. When working on a packer, Janis weighs the fish, identifies the species, packs it on ice, writes reports and prepares the meals for the rest of the crew.
There has been little work for Janis since the downturn in the industry. She remains optimistic, however, that fish farming will be very big within the next five to six years and will provide an adequate livelihood.

h. Lorna

Lorna is a First Nations elder, a mother, and a grandmother of four. Fishing has always played a major role in the lives and culture of the people living in Lorna’s village. Her earliest memories include being out on the water. Lorna has spent most of her life fishing. She didn’t go fishing because her husband fished. She fished because she loved it. Fishing was something they did as a family. They took their children out to sea beginning when they were very small.

Lorna and her husband George have retired from fishing now. She continues to work as an activist and counsellor in her community. Lorna has been very outspoken about the injustices endured by First Nations peoples. She has a long history of activism and was instrumental in making public the abuse perpetrated against First Nations children in the residential schools.

Lorna’s primary focus now, however, is raising concerns regarding First Nations people. She has worked with people, from both aboriginal and non-aboriginal cultures around the world, looking at environmental and human rights issues. She is critical of the policies and institutions of the Canadian government, including the DFO, and works to maintain her First Nations culture. She sees fishing rights as central to the continuation of her culture.
i. Karen

Karen has two sons and is expecting her third child. Both Karen and her husband are of First Nations heritage. She is thirty-seven and he is fifty-seven. Karen remembers her grandfather and father fishing from June until September. She remembers the seasons lasting for months; unlike the seasons now that last perhaps for only a day or a few hours or may be closed completely.

Karen did not fish herself until she was married to Bill. Her husband, however, has fished all his life and began working full time in the fisheries when he was sixteen or seventeen years old. Bill does not own his own boat and has always operated a boat for a packing company.

Bill has told Karen that in 1958 there was lots of money to be made and the fish runs were great. He and his friends from those days tell stories of when they were young and “rolling in money because the seasons were so wonderful, you could walk on fish, apparently, back then”. The picture painted is very different from the view now.

Karen began fishing with Bill in 1994. She has not known the good times in fishing that her husband remembers but she has had better times than the last couple years have provided. She was raised within a fishing family and remembers living pretty comfortably. Karen’s father did warn Karen and her brother twenty years ago that fishing was fading out. Although her brother fished for a few years in his teens, he did eventually heed his father’s advice and later chose a career in business.

Like her father, Karen does not want her children to feel they can earn a living fishing. She wants them to focus on getting an education, with the hope they will have
greater opportunities to earn a living. Karen wants to believe fishing will return but doesn’t hold out much hope.

2. Loss

Fishing by its very nature is an activity that requires adaptation to the many rhythmic cycles of season, weather and fish stocks. In addition, the modernization of the fishing industry brings constant change through regulations. The current turning point in the fishing industry has brought further changes to the coastal peoples of British Columbia. These changes have often been devastating and painful and encompass tremendous losses. All the women interviewed had experienced personal losses and were witness to the losses experienced by others in their community. They had all experienced, to a varying degree, loss of a way of life, of income, of a safe food supply, and a loss of security. These losses had impacted their lives in negative ways affecting their relationships, their health and the health of their families, their independence, identity, and their culture. The accumulative loss has far reaching implications for them individually and collectively.

The fishing life meant different things to each woman. There was, however, a strong sense of continuity and connection with previous generations for most of the women interviewed and, especially, for First Nations women. All the First Nations women came from fishing families. All but two of the non-aboriginal women came from families with a tradition of fishing going back at least two generations. Two of the women had married men that fished and had been involved with fishing themselves for many years.

For First Nations people, the arrival of the Europeans and the subsequent modernization of the fishing industry marked the beginning of a process that has increasingly robbed them of their traditional way of life and culture. The modernization of
the industry imposed rules and regulations on First Nations people and instructed them on how to fish something they had done successfully for centuries. The current crisis and the restructuring of the industry are a continuation of that process and the loss experienced then is acknowledged and understood all too well by First Nations women today.

a. Connections

All the participant’s descriptions of the fishing life spoke to their sense of connection to the way of life, past generations, families and the natural world around them. One First Nations women remembered her grandmother and reflected on the changes brought to the traditional way of life.

It’s part of our lifestyle. I mean, you can go back to... way, way back my grandmother used to say, I just want maybe two sea eggs. We don’t go fishing when it’s rough. The ocean demands your respect. You don’t go through the narrows if the tide isn’t right. There are all kinds of things we know. We moved because there was a reason for moving. It was to preserve and conserve what stocks there were at this place. We still did that for the longest time and then all the rules and regulations came from a foreign place. It affected a lifestyle, and it was really confusing. All of a sudden we were being told how to fish, when to fish, where to fish. We knew all that. Why are you coming to tell us these things?

There was a long tradition of association with fishing for the families of the women interviewed. Many of the women spoke of their grandparents fishing and at times there were three generations fishing together. “My grandfather is a fisherman, my father was a fisherman all his life until he died about a year ago, and I started in the fishing industry in 94.”

Fishing was not simply a business for the women, nor was it only about making a living. It was a way of life that included an appreciation of nature and of the bays and inlets of the BC coast. “I was mesmerized with the beauty all around more than I was about the fish”. All the women interviewed spoke of fishing in the distant and recent past with
varying degrees of fondness. All said the work was hard and the rewards were more than financial.

One First Nations woman explained that she fished because she loved the sea and was drawn to the life. She made it clear that she wasn’t fishing simply because her husband was a fisherman.

Ever since I could remember I’ve always had to be on the water. That was second nature. I wouldn’t go fishing just because I married a fisherman. I went fishing because I loved it just as much as he did.

She described a time when she and her husband had a young family. Fishing was a family endeavour and included everyone.

We were never separated from our children; they came with us, because the family was always together. I remember some drawers on the boat being beds and they were little babies. I remember one boat where my husband made a playground up in the cabin for our little 2 year-old. She had a swing up there, her horse was up there, and she was safe. It was like a little playground for her.

Another woman also remembered fishing when she had small children. She recounted the fun and hard work with fondness. She also recounted the co-operation and assistance provided by her mother-in-law.

Oh, it was great. It was fun. I enjoyed it, anyway. We used to fish from Monday to, or Sunday night till Thursday or Friday. We had all those days to fish. My mother-in-law baby-sat for me when the children were little. It was hard work, but it was really interesting to see the fish coming in.

For many of the women the memory of fishing was tied to the memories of their early family life. Life then seemed simpler in some ways. Now, life seemed busy and more complicated.

In the early years I enjoyed being on the boat, when we had the freedom. We had lots of time and choices and we were making a living. It was a real nice way to make a living.
b. Narrowing Options

There was a sense of freedom that is not present in fishing today and that freedom is being threatened increasingly with the introduction of further regulation and bureaucratic demands. One woman described the regulatory demands and claims the fishing life had changed from being a pleasant way of life to being very time consuming. She described her endless labour of record-keeping that was now required on all catches.

It was nice. So, it's changed, it's changed so much. It's just like night and day, and all it is now it seems like, there's so much red tape too, and there's so much reading, there's so much... logs have to be kept for everything and it's just too much. There's so much paper work and bookwork and we're just bogged down with all the stuff. Because the crab fishing too sort of poses as a big burden... we have to report our catches, the statistics, and keep the records for this and do that, and make sure everything is filed.

The regulatory documentation required ate away at her time with hours of tedious bookkeeping.

The regulations had also restricted movement between areas. In the past a commercial fishing license meant that the boat and crew could fish the length of the BC coast the entire fishing season. As the fish travelled down the coast so did the fishers. When the fishing was poor in one area, the crew would move to an area where the catch might be better. With the introduction of the Mifflin Plan, the coast was divided into different licensing areas. One license no longer covers the whole coast. Each area now required a separate commercial license for fishing.

One woman described how the regulations meant she probably would not be fishing in the northern areas again.

Before you were able to travel up and down the coast and fish anywhere with the one license. Next, you know you rarely travel around that much anymore. If you don’t have a license to go up north, you don’t go up north.
And then now, now you’ve got, they have it where you have to have a license for the spouse and that’s worth more, it seems.

Another woman described the freedom of movement that had been enjoyed by fishers prior to the most recent changes in the fishing regulation. This image of life was much more expansive than that of life she now experiences with narrowing physical and economic boundaries.

I used to troll and gill net, used to have the option to, to combinations fish where you caught all different types of fish under the, under the salmon “A” license. You could troll and gill net. So, I did. I started in the spring and I used to end in the late fall down Satellite Channel, and fished Prince Rupert, the Charlotte’s, West Coast Vancouver Island, Fraser River.

She is no longer able to fish for a number of different stock types with one license. The woman now needs another license for each type of fish she wants to catch. Not only is her freedom of movement curtailed, her flexibility and options to earn a living are restricted as well.

A similar sentiment was voiced by another woman. She used to make very good earnings. She used to fish for a number of different kinds of fish using a variety of methods. When one fishery was finished or the fishing wasn’t good she could always fish for other species. There were more options then there are now with the changes.

It was very viable, and of course, now with the Mifflin Plan, we had to abolish the combination fishery. So you had to choose either/or. So, I chose gillnetting because that was my primary interest, or what I was best at, I knew it more about. And, so now I could only gill net.

The loss of these options, to move from area to area and to fish for a variety of species, made the fishery more rigid and restrictive and led to a loss of income.
c. The Gambling Life

The unpredictable nature of regulations governing the length of the season or, in more recent times, requiring the closing of an entire season, meant that large investments of cash were gambled. As one woman puts it, “I’m tired of gambling, right? Cause basically that’s what it is. Putting money on the table and spinning the wheel, right?”

If you’re going to stay in the fishing, you have to be very diversified now, as well, so you’d better have halibut or, I don’t know, have a tug job. You have to have different hold set ups... and freezers, or do you freeze, do you not freeze, do you have slush? Oh, it’s a lot of money, its huge money.

Diversification added additional costs with no guarantee of a return on the investment. When one season finished or if the catch for the salmon fishery wasn’t good, the halibut or crab fishery might have provided the needed income. Each fishery, however, had additional equipment costs along with added licensing costs. Fishing required a large capital commitment up front for a boat, licenses, and equipment. With the unpredictable nature of the business, and the increased investments required, many felt they were being pushed out and could no longer afford to stay. Only the large corporations with access to generous financial backing could afford to stay in.

Many could no longer make a living in the fishing industry. Some women hoped that things would change and they would try to hang on for one more season. They would try to keep fishing open to them as an option. Other women knew that fishing was no longer available as a means of making a living. One woman explained that for a long time she had continued to believe there would be a future in fishing and she had been willing to wait. Things had continued to get worse and she was losing her optimism.

We were making a living, well, fishing is a way of life, and I really don’t think you can count it in dollars and cents. You have to make an income too. But now the way, it’s gone. Up until six months ago, I’d have you know
[said or thought] There's going to be a future for it. Now I'm starting to get really negative on fishing.

Some had always been able to make their living fishing, while others had always needed to supplement their earnings. This woman effectively made her point by describing fishing more as an addiction needing to be financed, rather than a way of life that produced an income.

We haven't been able to live on fishing ever. I look at our books and the way I look at it is how many days do we have to work? How many days does my husband have to slug his butt off in the bush to support his fishing habit? Right? I mean fishing, it's not financially viable for us anymore and I'm 29 and my husband is 33. If it's not financially viable for us and we've got our boat and our house are all paid off, how can it be for...like this young guy that works for us? He's 21. He's an excellent fisherman. He loves fishing. What is there in it for him?

Even those that had been prepared to work at different jobs, to have enough to live on, now felt they had to give up on fishing. Instead of providing an income fishing had become an expense.

It was not simply the declining fish stocks and the resulting licensing regulations that had contributed to the reduced profits for families. The price paid for fish in the market had dropped as well. One woman who had been fishing for close to forty years explained that,

The price of fish has declined where they are at prices offered in the 50's and 60's. You're offered 25 cents a pound for chum, and maybe up to .40 or .50 if you're lucky.

Another woman who had worked as crew on the big boats owned by a large corporation explained how the low prices often mean she couldn't get any work. If the company owners couldn't get a good price for the fish, they didn't go fishing.

Last year it was, it turned into quite a nightmare for the fishing industry. If you worked running your own pilot boat or if you were leasing a boat and
you were running a company boat, well then they wouldn’t allow you to go out and fish because they didn’t want the fish.

When the boats stayed in, the crews didn’t get paid.

The low market prices and the high operational costs to fish made fishing an unprofitable endeavour. As one woman said,

The way I look at it right now is if it’s not financially viable, I can’t face to stay in it. I can’t afford to lose money every year for... for what? Just to say we’re fishermen?

Fishing required a large capital investment and the costs were increasing. No longer did one license cover the entire coast. Now, each additional license required a large financial investment that the smaller independent fishers couldn’t afford.

Oh it’s doom and gloom. There is no way that I could ever make a living at it now with the Mifflin Plan. What they do is divvy up the coast into different areas and you have to now buy that area, you have to buy another license, so if you want three different areas, suddenly you owe a lot more money.

d. Endangered Food

In addition to lost income and increasing costs, the reduced fish stocks and government regulations also threatened the basic supply of food for many women and their families. All the First Nations women were concerned about the loss of the “food fish”.

First Nations communities relied on the food fish for survival and had done so particularly during times of economic hardship.

My biggest concern is they’ve been putting rules on our food fishing. Like we’re only allowed to fish four times, well, it’s only a certain time of the year. You want certain runs anyhow, but they limit you so much especially now. The way the industry is, you don’t have the bucks to go out just to go out and buy your half, or a quarter thing of a cow or a pig to hold you through the winter. I mean, the food fish plays a big part whether you have it smoked or dried or canned or jarred.
In the past, during economic down turns, First Nations people had been able to rely on a supply of fish to feed the community. Dwindling stocks and tougher regulations were encroaching on the aboriginal right to fish for personal food supply. When the food fish was threatened, the very existence of many First Nations communities was threatened.

There were also concerns expressed about health implications of a reduced diet of fish. One non-native woman recognized the health implications for both First Nations and non-native populations.

It's really interesting in the last couple of years I had the capacity to catch millions of tons of fish for the family, and now, no one can have access any more, so we actually don't eat fish which is another huge health implication.

This well informed woman was aware of the increase in diabetes in First Nations populations and made the connection between fish, diet and diabetes. Restrictions in the harvest of the food fish often mean an increase in less nutritional food for many First Nations peoples.

Why is it that probably by the turn of the century there will be half the native people with diabetes? Well, I'm thinking it has a lot to do with the fact that the fish are becoming less and less part of the diet.

She also had grave concerns about eating certain types of seafood, “Like clams, I don’t even touch clams much anymore. My system can’t handle clams anymore. I grew up on clams”. She was aware of the potential serious health risks involved in eating other sea animals and believed it is critical to become informed about the risks.

Seals right now... I mean the studies that we’ve done show us that, as a traditional food, it’s sort of not talked about, but that much is public, you can eat it and those animals pick up more toxins than almost anything. And if you’re not educated you’re going to get sick.
Seals have been a traditional food of First Nations people and these environmental concerns posed an additional threat to the health of those who ate them. First Nations people depend on the food fish to survive. Their survival was threatened when the seafood was threatened.

The same woman, expressed further concerns about the safety of food from fish farms and the possible threat they pose to human health.

This business of the fish farm. That's an open-net cage that’s fed hormones and antibiotics. Finally the European council decided that hormones and antibiotics should not be given to chicken and pigs any longer. North America will catch on to that about 5-6 years from now.

The hormones not only pose a possible health risk to humans, there is also a health risk to the wild salmon. This woman was also concerned about the effect the hormones and antibiotics would have on the wild salmon. She spoke of her experience with the farm fish and the impact hormones have on salmon eggs.

Open net pens are given hormones and I’ve done such changes on fish. It’s easy to do. All you do is mix up a pink freshie and throw the eggs in there for half an hour and you have male fish turning into female fish, and if you put testosterone instead of estrogen in, you get vice versa.

The loss of safe fish as a food source was a very real concern for women in BC coastal communities and was commented on by almost all the women interviewed.

e. Threatened Security

In addition to the loss of fish as a food for people living in coastal communities, other areas of security were threatened. The decline in income and increased costs to maintain fishing licenses meant debt accumulation. One woman talked of how the family’s financial circumstances had changed so drastically. The increasing debt had wiped out their savings and they were at the point where they might have to sell their home. The fear of
losing the security of their home was overwhelming for her and she worried about the implications for her children.

She used the image of the “National debt” and of fear “looming” above them to capture her dread of what the very real possibility of losing the family home meant.

We’ve had to mull around the discussion of maybe having to sell the house too... and the kids are really... it really shakes them up when we get into this discussion. It just looms there. In fact, we had got to the point where our house was almost; we had $15,000 owing. But now, through having... not... we didn’t have enough money to pay our income tax, and we basically had hardly enough even to live on, so we had... um, an account where it was very low interest... the bank gave us this because our house was almost paid off. So anyway, just bit by bit, this ended up becoming what we called the “National debt”. After all of that, you know, and having... you know, it down to $15,000 and then it went up to $90,000 in just a couple of years... of not in excess living, just scrimping by.

The possible loss of her home threatened a basic need for security. Fishing families were faced with this reality.

Fishers were often described as an independent group. One woman described how, some claimed they would rather die than give up their boats. There was an emotional attachment to the boat and the way of life it has provided them. The possibility of losing their boats affected them deeply.

You know? I’m independent and that’s a lot of fisherman’s problems. They are very independent and they are very stubborn. We were at a meeting before Christmas and uh, the guys say that they will die on their boats, “Nobody’s taking it away from me. I’m not selling”. I mean there’s banks repossessing their boats and what do they possess then? Nothing!

Fishing often provided seasonal employment only. Many people who worked in the industry had historically drawn on unemployment insurance benefits to supplement their earnings between fishing seasons. There were those in the industry, however, who had not had to rely on unemployment benefits. Many fishing families often prided themselves on
their independence. For some it had been difficult to find themselves in a position of needing to ask for help.

One woman recounted how she and her husband had worked hard to be independent but now found they could no longer meet the day to day financial demands and were having to use their life savings to pay living expenses.

He didn’t ever use unemployment insurance, and we always prided ourselves on that to be, you know...in the industry and that was sort of one of the...that was common, you know. We always thought...you know, we were always so proud that we were able to get out and we would have other viable industries but unfortunately, at the same time as the fishing got really bad, so did our other industries. We were in the timber industry too and both of our industries were sort of going down the tubes at once. And to be quite honest the only thing that saved us to the point that we’re still okay. We’re still, you know, able to pay our bills, is that we...we saved money all through the times that we were making money....so that we could put money away and we’re really sort of dogmatic about it and not...we just really, really looked after it. But now, we’re having to draw on it.

Unemployment benefits no longer had the same eligibility criteria they had a few years before. Those families who had not drawn on benefits in the past sometimes found they could not qualify for benefits. Ironically, because they had worked so hard to be independent and had not relied on unemployment insurance, they were no longer eligible when they needed financial support most.

I said, you paid into UI for all these years and you know, I know that you have your pride, but I think that this is the time ... so he went and he applied. But, by that time the amount of weeks that the fellows had been able to fish had dwindled down to the point where there wasn't even enough weeks fished to go and put in a claim. After years, [of paying into the plan]...because he hadn’t claimed the previous year, 'cause once you’ve had a claim, then you need a lesser amount of weeks to apply. But because we’ve never had a claim, he needed this big lump of weeks, even though he’s worked in the industry for 25 years...(laughs) oh, it was crazy. So we just shook our head, and just let it go. We didn’t pursue.
This couple who had fished together for years and had paid into the employment insurance plan found they did not qualify for employment support. It should also be noted here that although this woman had fished along side her husband her unpaid work was seen as supplemental to her husband’s work. Even though her work on the boat and on land managing the enterprise was central to the business, her contribution was not officially recognized and she was not eligible to make application for employment benefits.

In addition to the many losses discussed above, the loss of good health was another major experience for women and their families. Women were coping with serious health problems. Many of the fishers were middle age and their bodies were beginning to show the wear and tear of hard work in very demanding conditions. Added to this, was the stress and worry of the current economic climate, and it took its toll on the emotional health of people.

f. Diminished Health

One woman felt overwhelmed by the demands in her life. She was visibly shaken as she spoke of the toll taken on her family’s physical and emotional health. She explained that the emotional toll had been great and that she had had health problems. She described her personal health problems and fought back the tears while she spoke.

I’ve had health problems too, and the emotional toll has been great, you know I just feel like.... I don’t want to start crying. Yeah.... It’s just been...it’s pulling me...just the coping skills not being there...you know, like my coping skills are down because I’m tired all the time too.... And working too long, like we’re both working...you know, he’s never home, so I have to do everything, and we also got...you know, I have taken on extra work. I have an 18-hour day and everyday, so it is, it’s tiring.

There were added worries concerning her husband and she continued by describing his health,

My husband who has always been as healthy as a horse too, last year he started having health problems with.... It was just shocking.... Emotionally,
he was being torn at steady and of course.... He dealt with his emotions in.... In a negative way upon his family, because that’s just the way he handled everything. It did start transgressing into [physical] health problems too for him, and he sort of was just levelled out but....he developed somewhat like an arthritis...in his upper torso, and all his joints and his hands and his shoulders, which was quite devastating because he needs his strength to do his work too.

At a time when families were having to deal with limited ways of earning an income in fishing because of closures, they were also being faced with the possibility that physical health concerns could compromise their ability to work in fishing or other physically demanding fields. Compromised or diminished health limited their ability to earn an income.

Another woman who was also concerned about her husband’s health expressed similar sentiments. She explained that the demanding work in forestry he had always done to supplement their household income was impacting his physical health. She worried that fishing would no longer be there when they need it most.

Ken needs a break. He can’t be in the bush 365 days of the year. I know his knees are shot, and his bush days are getting numbered. His knees really bother him. I think it’s from logging. There’s no cartilage left in his knees, right? So fishing was always....like, we can always go fishing.

The fishing option may not be available in the future for this couple who had managed to supplement their income with logging. Due to health concerns the logging option may not be there either.

One woman who had been working at a secretarial job to supplement the family income had quit her job to go out fishing with her husband when he became ill and could no longer manage the work on his own.

I had a decent job and after he got sick. Of course I’m worried sick about him. He wanted me to go fishing with him to help. I think his age and the
stress all at the same time. He’s worked hard and he’s played hard for all his life, you know. Like I said, when money was no object he vacationed, lived’er up, the whole works, but uh, now all of a sudden, since he’s been in his mid-50’s and the industry, the stress of the industry contributed a lot to it. He came down with Bell’s Palsy. They told us it is a viral infection that goes into the nerves in his face... and he found out about his high blood pressure, and diabetes and everything all at once.

The women spoke of their personal health concerns and those of family members. They also spoke of health concerns experienced by others in the community. As one First Nations woman pointed out, “the rate of alcoholism, drug use, suicide sky rocketed” in the fishing communities. She worried about the people in the village who felt they had no options and she feared for them if they should have to leave the village in search for other kinds of work.

So many of our villagers that were lucrative in the industry in fishing boats, gillnetters, seiners, they’re... they’re just desolate persons. These people are dying and if they are forced to leave the community they are going to get swallowed up.

Health concerns, financial concerns, and the stress and uncertainty of the future all took a toll on relationships.

**g. Family Ties Damaged and Broken**

The women often spoke of the added pressures on their personal relationships. They described the loss of relationships they once would have described as being good. These relationships were strained and compromised because of stresses and changes in their lives.

The stress of uncertainty about the future and loss of income was often apparent by changes in behaviour that added further strains on relationships. One woman explained that her husband’s first reaction to the crisis had been to come home looking for someone to blame.
At first, he had to blame somebody. He wasn't looking in the right directions. He wasn't looking like, oh, the government you know making decisions that are affecting our life. He was sort of looking with, within our house, and trying to find reasons.

This woman felt her husband's response was damaging to her family life and to the well-being of her children. She felt there were other reasons beyond their personal control, that were responsible for the crisis in the fishing industry but, initially, her husband couldn't see this.

So he was coming home and interested in looking for reasons, but looking for reasons with his own family. It was hard and the children... it caused a lot of tension, tension that, that probably can never ever be, you know, it made problems.

She felt family relationships would possibly never be the same again and perhaps would be damaged permanently. This kind of conflict in her family had created additional stress for her. She believed the threat to the fishing way of life had affected her husband's confidence and identity and she and the children had borne the brunt of his emotional crisis.

So, this was sort of a battle that I have on a personal level for a really long time, until he started listening to his friends and listening to the problems that everybody was having, because it was like a blow to his ego and his self-esteem.

The struggle to earn a living had taken a toll on family life. Women and men were working very long hours and were often separated days or weeks at a time. There was very little time left for the family to spend together. As one woman puts it, "So now he's out there doing crab-fishing, but it just keeps him away from home all the time, like he's just gone all the time now". Like other women, she felt the strain of the responsibility of running the home, caring for the children, managing what was left of the fishing business and doing extra work.
Well, it’s affected the kids too, unfortunately. Because especially at the age of our children right now too this is a really important time for the family to be, you know, everybody should be there...It’s been really tough.

She had expressed her frustration to her children. She had wanted things to be different but didn’t see any options. They were doing what they could but she was very much aware of the cost to her family.

You know, I say... do you think that it’s...that this is a normal family life, where you dad is on the boat 28 days out of 30, and or he might be home 3 or 4 days out of the month...But still (laughs), it’s not... it’s not enough to have a family life. Or even to have a life, you know, we don’t have a normal life. It’s not... we just...we just do it because that’s the way that it is.

The participants spoke of the impact on some relationships in the community and of personal relationships that were altered because people moved to look for work elsewhere.

Often these relationships were with family members that had contributed to a support network.

There’s marriages breaking up. People move. My mom and step-dad they moved. They took the buy out and moved to Alberta. My sister moved the year before cause her and her husband couldn’t make it out here. There’s people that want to work, but there’s nothing for them to do.

h. Community Stress

One woman had lost friends who had been depressed and had turned to drinking as a way of coping with their circumstances.

And then there’s people that get depressed, there’s more drinking. We’ve got a couple of friends that they’ve got nothing to do, so they just drink, and then they get depressed and then it’s just like an endless cycle.

As one woman pointed out, “People become ashamed very quickly when they can’t make a living. She felt that the shame often led to violence.

and then they blame somebody for doing that to them, and I think that it’s a cycle of violence that it is absolutely reflected in the fishing industry and the
logging industry in all these small towns, it’s something that on a daily basis I feel in my job.

This same woman had done some work in a nearby community and had been on the board of directors of a women’s society. “It’s scary to imagine what might be going on in these houses.” She described how people in the communities were feeling threatened from the outside and tended to close ranks. Many had never had to deal with issues of violence before they were shamed and were not willing to go for help. At times, she felt they kept the violence a secret and unreported.

it’s so bad in some ways that it’s not being reported, you know, it’s so over the top how much our homes and families and changes have occurred that there’s almost like a huddling in all of the different corners and cliques. The people are really protectionist because they’ve never dealt with the cycles of violence before.

None of the women interviewed claimed to have had personal experience of violence but worried about what others in the community might be experiencing. None of the women discussed in detail those concerns of potential violence they had for their friends or family.

All those interviewed wanted to remain in their community. They were aware that not only had their community been impacted by increased unemployment in the fishery, it had also been affected by the downturn in other industries. They were conscious of the impact of unemployment on all those living in the community.

You know, you can take a bad year, or you can take a couple of bad years, but when it’s 3-4 years in a row it really starts to hurt. You can see it, all the secondary industries and businesses that rely on the fisherman, the gear stores, all the stores, we just don’t spend the money that we used to, it seems like every week there’s a business going down in this town. People have separated because there’s just no money. It’s destroying lives. People are losing their homes. They can’t make the payments. It’s really sad. I’m sure a lot of people are depressed. You know, you have so much money tied up in a business and it’s all you’ve known.
It was one thing to want to stay in the community but finding another area of work was not easy and many may have to leave the community. Finding employment here could be an impossible task.

Um... and I think just try and get into other areas of employment, which is very tough at this time because everyone wants [to] and the community itself is going down with the logging and the pulp mill closures and ...other business. Like, there's not only does it affect the shore workers and the timbermen, along with the fisherman there are grocery stores, there's other, you know, restaurants, everything that would keep people in the community up.

3. The System

It was clear from the interviews that none of the women actually believed the government was making decisions that were in their best interest. Opinions were repeatedly expressed that the government, primarily the federal government including the DFO, and to a lesser extent the provincial government, have a great deal of power and often made decisions that did not meet the needs of those living and working in the fishing communities.

a. Power

Many stated they did not trust the motives of the government. The comments of one woman were representative of that distrust.

We've got a very powerfully mandated, extreme power in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. If they want to call something conservation and do whatever with that word, they can do it...or...do whatever they want with the word "consultation", they can do it no matter how you look at it. I think that most of us believe that we need to have the stance of thinking that we are in trouble. Knowing that we probably are, because if we relax for five minutes there's nothing in the Federal/Provincial government that had led us to think that we can trust them.
In her view, the government had the power to define how language was used. She believed that the government, for example, used the issue of conservation as a reason to promote the restructuring of the fisheries, but that the primary goal had actually been something else, for example privatization of the industry.

This participant said she had heard others in her community express this lack of trust in the government. She quoted a First Nations man, “You know, what we suffer from the most in our communities, especially being Indian, is that we actually believe still that the government will look after us”. These sentiments were also echoed by the comments of other participants.

One First Nations woman explained that historically the government’s actions had not instilled a sense of trust with First Nations people. She didn’t believe the government should be telling First Nations people how to fish. She believed that had been wrong in the past and that it was inappropriate now as well.

I think our people really trusted government. We thought government was taking care of them when in fact government was doing away with them.

She didn’t believe the DFO had the right to impose fishing reforms on First Nations people and she very clearly stated her view.

And I am trying to understand that this change [Mifflin Plan] has been made for my benefit, for the benefit of our children, their children, and the unborn children. What you are doing is not acceptable. David Anderson has no right to tell me how to live. And he needs to hear that.

In one interview, hope was expressed that First Nations people would gain legal rights to counter the powers of the DFO. One Caucasian woman viewed these changes as potentially beneficial to the non-aboriginal fishing community.
My family is in jeopardy as a non-native family, and I see the governance potential of the First Nations as being able to help my family, and so I see my involvement with First Nations as something that in fact will help my native people. But it's not something that well known or understood and there's huge barriers of racism running in the culture... to keep that from being a common knowledge. I think that it's pretty easy to see it in legislation that it... First Nations could drive the bus right now of making some changes. Uh, they have... they have the governance on their side, they might not have the capacity to get there.

She was aware that the majority of the non-natives might not agree with her. She held on to the hope, however, that First Nations organizations would be in a position to counter the destructive course she saw the DFO has taken.

I work in an aboriginal organization. That organization has some potential of legislated power to respond to the... to the uh, tactics that are being used by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the province to annihilate the fishers. And those are words that I use because that is what I see.

She was also aware of the economic rationalisation strategies the government used. She does not see these strategies as beneficial, to the coastal towns, but rather, as leading to decisions that would spell the demise of West Coast fishing communities.

Probably from their perspective, they're looking at a bottom line and saying this... they're looking at an economic perspective only again... And they're saying this used to produce 90 million dollars. Now it produces maybe 25 million dollars. It looks like the future of it is sitting in this 100 million-dollar potential of salmon farming and shellfish farming and tourism. And so if we convert what has been sort of a historical situation for the last 100 years at least, and 10,000 [years] for probably Indian people, we can, just basically change the economic reality around it, and we have the power to do that. And I think that's where it comes from, you know. It's just simple fact of government people sitting down looking at their coffers, getting at the inability to tax...

In her opinion the government was looking solely at revenues and had forgotten about the quality of life for those in the fishing communities.

It's embarrassing actually to be in one of the biggest, strongest, most educated countries in the world and recognize that they are now going to adopt some third-world policy concepts on the basis of collecting taxes, and
walk away from bio-diversity into privatised resource. It is actually a very close example to what they have done in Chile.

She believed this line of thinking had led the government to pursue privatization of the industry and she explained, “We will get money in the short term. In the long term, Africa’s probably the best example, or Indonesia, they have all failed miserably from an environment protection [perspective]. Privatization of the water has the same results as the privatization of land. The outcome is fewer people have access to the resources.” She believed privatization was part of the globalisation strategy for many governments and in her opinion had negative environmental implications.

With the private ownership of land, and what happens then is, if you want a tract of land or water, it becomes worth a certain amount of money and you can sell it to the highest bidder in a global economy literally. It could be Pinochet that comes in and buys it. So, it's a very scary thing. I’m from a fish family it’s bad enough in a non-native body, but I think in a native body it’s just... it's hopeless. It's devastating. The grief is just incredible, and the lack of power.

Other women also expressed concerns that there had been only the appearance of consultation for the planned fisheries restructure. Ultimately, however, they believed the government disregarded the views of the fishers.

When they were trying to get this all devised, because they had consultation meetings with the fishermen on all of this. And the fishermen's defence, those that are pro-Mifflin, they had a lot better set-up, a lot better deal from what I understand. You would have the same areas as now. And you get a certain allocation promised to you, that was the deal.

One woman also expressed concerns about the Mifflin Plan.

Oh, yeah. They took ...they took the negative part of it, like you have to buy all those other licenses now, and you're going to be stuck in this area, but they didn't put the good stuff with it now. Like, you get a certain part of the piece of the pie every year. They never gave us that. They never gave us allocation. Now that was something. That's a big thing, allocation. I mean, that means everything...and...and we were all content with that. I mean,
that was uh, one... the one thing I think that would probably make this whole thing not so bad, but they... they played really hard ball. They haven't promised us anything. They say they are going to.

There was a sense that the government wasn't treating them with fairness, and that the fishers were prepared to make concessions but the government wasn't giving anything in return. They were left waiting.

b. Privileged Friends

There was unanimous agreement among the participants that the large fishing companies had a privileged relationship with the government that the local fishers were not privy to.

A lot of the people say, oh the company has a lot of influence on the fisheries and what rules. And then... of course, the government will say no, they don't have any control over what goes on there. A lot of people do question what really goes on behind the scenes.

The general understanding was that the government was trying to get the smaller fishers out of the industry to leave the larger corporations the business of fishing and processing. "They really don't want us [small fishers] in the fishery. They don't want a commercial fishery."

And we're dwindling. The numbers are dwindling with the Mifflin Plan, you know. There's only 3200 licenses left, and half of those will be bought up supposedly and that's just what they want. They want us to get smaller and smaller, vocally, and that's what's happening.

It was speculated that the government would like to have a streamlined industry with fewer boats fishing and those boats would be the larger company boats. There was pretty much a general consensus of understanding on this issue. They believed, the larger companies wanted to supply the boats to do the fishing, and they didn't want any competition from the small independents.
Well, it's funny. I mean, they want all the fish. Bottom line is, they want all the salmon caught by a few of their seine boats and I think that they do have an in with the Department of Fisheries, right?

One woman claimed that much of the money for the buy-out process did not go to the smaller independents but instead went to the larger companies. This was further proof, in her opinion, that the larger companies have an unfair advantage with the government.

I mean, I think a few of the uh, corporations, such as BC Packers...Jimmy Patterson...and I'm sure...it would be pretty tough to get them out. On the last buyback there were uh, was it 10% of all the seine boats were bought up in the last buyback for $420,000. Like, owned by, it's rumoured that it was BC Packers seine boats. I don't know. They want all their old derelict seine boats bought up so that they have I guess just a few left that are vital that can fish and get all the fish...I see them in bed partners with the fisheries, for sure. Oh, I've always felt that.

c. Buyback Programme

There was great frustration with the buyback plan. The government presented buyback as an option but the process itself was flawed and added to the anxiety people were experiencing. It is difficult enough to come to a decision to go for the buyout option, but the secrecy of the process and the off hand manner in which the fishers seemed to be treated added to their dissatisfaction.

Some felt they had been tricked into supporting the Mifflin Plan.

So that was the other thing. Um, because the Mifflin Plan, the government devised this scheme, um, they...they made us believe that by buying up more licenses, by playing this game, we would in effect have a more prosperous season...future...more viable future. So, now the joke is, uh, they have these buyback rounds happening where they are trying to get people out. They want the fleet cut in half.

Most women felt the goal of the government was to get rid of the small fishers from the industry, not to create a more prosperous industry for these small businesses. The prosperous times would come to the larger companies and not to the local enterprises.
The process was disrespectful. As one-woman states, “They’re shaking the apple tree, right.” to see how many fishers they can get out of the fisheries.

You know they are making us grovel and secretly find how low we can go to get out. Right? So, there’s even more animosity towards the Federal government.

The women felt there seemed to be little respect, for the fact that it was not just a license that is being bought but that it was a way of life that is ending. Once the license was gone, access to the fisheries was gone for most of the fishers and all they were left was a boat that in most cases was next to worthless.

They’re buying your career and then you’re left with a boat that’s worth nothing now because it has no license, and the moorage has tripled on it. Nobody wants it because it’s an old fish boat.

Those trying to decide whether to sell their licenses did not know what the government would offer them for the license ahead of time. The license holders were trying to make good business decisions without appropriate information. “It’s called a reverse bid. It’s sick what they’re doing.”

But it’s getting harder and harder to believe in it and be optimistic. Particularly because the government, I mean, they’re so secretive about their agenda. We don’t even...we can’t even make a proper business decision. We don’t even know whether to sell out is the right thing. We don’t even know what to sell out for, because they’re putting it as a reverse auction, a reverse bid, you compete secretly. The whole set-up for the buyback, you don’t even know what you’re supposed to put your license in for.

The reverse bid was a gamble as there was always the chance that the price asked might be lower than what the government was willing to pay. Some wanting to get out submitted a price but found they weren’t low enough and their application was rejected. One woman explains, “I put in my first one [bid] and they rejected it. So we lowered it $20,000 more because we want it gone you know.” Getting out was a difficult task.
I've got my... my thing back... Sorry! So I can't even get out. I can't even, you have to go low enough, but you don't know you don't want to go rock bottom because what if you could have gone a little higher.

For others, the buyout programme wasn't even an option. Those who were not license holders but who still may have spent their entire working lives in the fishing industry were not eligible. They were not compensated for the loss of their livelihood. These people, however, still had financial responsibilities.

One guy had a packer and he feels that he should get compensation to be bought out of the industry, because his job went when there is not as many boats, right? So they didn't need him anymore. Well, they still have families and they're still people, right?

Commendably, this woman, a license holder herself unhappy with the buyout programme was not solely concerned with her own compensation but also with the welfare of others in her community.

So these people, there's no compensation for them. Not one ounce because he doesn't own a license. Right? But what about all the deck hands, and all the... you know. Look at a seine fleet, like, a seine boat has like five deck hands, what about them? The actual skipper may be getting bought out with his boat, right. So, he's getting compensated, but what about the five guys who've worked for him for the last ten years?

She explained further.

Well, it's like the compensation package this year. I think it was about $10,500 for a seine boat, $6,500 for a troller or gillnetter not to fish. Well, it was the skippers who got that. It was the vessel owner/operator that got that, not the deck hands. But they are not compensating the deck hands.

Many women said they felt the government was making a difficult situation worse. They felt pushed and taken advantage of and their attitudes toward the government reflected this treatment.

Oh, actually uh, I just... I think we personally feel really upset with the government. There's a lot of animosity towards the government. Certainly not towards our counterparts... our fellow fishermen. I think collectively,
we’re um, very ticked off with the [DFO]. fisheries. I mean, we can’t even get out in a respectable way.

d. Divisions/Others

Although the women interviewed felt united with other fishers, there were divisions as well. One participant, a Caucasian woman, told me she believed the government was trying to keep the prices low so they could purchase licenses for First Nations communities as part of the treaty settlements. “They want us out. So they can pay off the land claims with resources.” She said she recently learned that the government began buying up licenses for First Nations fishers in 1994.

Here’s another interesting issue... We just found out, uh... he's [her husband] dealing with a broker in uh, down Island, and through them he's found out uh, who they're dealing with in the government in the Department of Fisheries. There is a sector, a... a department in Fisheries & Oceans in Vancouver. All they deal with since 1994 is buying licenses for the Native Indians. It's been going since 1994. So, they're interested in halibut quota. They don't want any salmon licenses, which I've heard. They don't want to buy any, because it would inflate the price of the "A" license, so they don't want any "A" licenses being bought right now... to keep the market value low so that the buyback price is down. It's... you know... if that's true, which I believe it is, it's just more criminal activity, as far as I'm concerned. The government [is] trying to um, to make it as cheap as possible for the government to buy.

This participant articulated her concerns that negotiations and arrangements were being made to settle claims with First Nations people that jeopardized the smaller non-native fishers. The secretive manner of the government’s negotiations added to a sense of distrust. She was not the only participant to voice this concern. Two other non-native participants made similar comments.

This woman also articulated a fear that, although she believed the government was meeting their own needs in keeping prices low to settle claims there was a part of her that was beginning to resent First Nations people.
They also, the Natives want to have a commercial fishery. You know, they just want to have a regular commercial fishery just like us. Um... I don't know. I don't feel... I have to admit that I am becoming a bit prejudiced. but I'm trying to... to... I'm fighting it because I... I feel that it's more of a government issue than it is the Native issue.

This Caucasian woman was conscious that she was beginning to find blame with local fishers in the First Nations’ community. There was the sense that she was uncomfortable with these feelings but nevertheless they existed.

Similarly, a First Nations woman told me she didn’t trust the government and believed their policies supported big business. She too, however, had feelings of resentment towards immigrant Vietnamese and was critical of their fishing practices.

Another thing that has ruined this industry... there used to be a lot of [crab] grounds up here. They brought in all these Vietnamese people. You go to Port Ed... Port Edward up north and Rupert area it's just loaded with Vietnamese. You can't find one Indian anymore. They are just getting rid of all the Indian fishing and... I don't know how that works when the person first comes to the country, but I think they get a lot of incentives and they get a lot of things. How do they manage to buy boats?

Historically, the First Nations people had been pushed out and often replaced with immigrant workers and this woman felt this was happening again in the northern crab grounds.

Yeah... they get some sort of start. I mean, there's no harm in that and uh, you know, I understand people are migrating to the country all the time, but it's just... it... it affects people... you know, when... yeah. and just wiped out whole crab beds or.... They take everything right from... to, you know, just the small baby ones, and I think people wouldn't mind so, there overboard. It's really bringing in all these people - giving them boats and licenses and whatever. They didn't have to go through the regular channels.

e. Management/Mismanagement

The Federal Government and DFO report card on management received a grim review by the participants. One word was used repeatedly, “mismanagement”. Several
women spoke of how the incompetence of the DFO led to a miscalculation of the stocks the summer before and it was generally believed they had needlessly been prohibited from fishing. They believed the DFO destroyed thousands of returning salmon, in an attempt to cover their error, when they realised their mistake.

Several women spoke of how the DFO had electrocuted returning stocks. “They electrocute them. They put a current ... and then they would put like an electric current in, and just kill the fish.” Others were less sure about the process but believed the DFO had destroyed fish to cover the mismanagement in estimating the returns.

Well I heard with the 400,000 they demolish or you just bulldoze the dirt right over them, over the banks over the fish. Where did our fishing time go? The fish were just pouring through the straits here, and our boats are all tied up at the docks.

In their opinion they should never have had fishing closures the summer before.

The fact that so many women believe the DFO was capable of destroying spawning fish indicates a very high level of distrust of the federal government and the DFO.

And then you get out there... you just had to go fishing, and then you don’t get the fishing time because they use the conservation as the big reason not to um, do all the fishing. And while we realize conservation is important, they were using that as the cover. A lot of fishermen seemed to feel that they were taking advantage of the conservation this year and putting that forth as um, the reason why they weren’t allowed to fish, their hours were cut back.

Most of the comments concerning the death and destruction of fish were based on hearsay and rumour. One account, however, described the death of large numbers of fish related to unknown environmental causes. This account, however, raised further concerns regarding the DFO.

We have thousands of tons of dead fish right now. Pilchards that are dying from a VHS virus. It, it’s you know, I think it’s also symbolic of, I use that metaphor a lot. VHS is a viral haemorrhagic disease and it’s just that you hear these fish are haemorrhaging to death. It’s caused by something that
gets inside the fish that’s dormant for most of the time, but it just breaks out whenever there is a uh, it could be an algae bloom. It could be a huge water change, it could be, the temperature, it could be uh, because of the quality of the water changes. So, here this is happening in inlets all up, there have been a lot of deaths, and there’s like whole inlets where we are seeing this kind of stuff.

So I phoned up Washington State. Washing State says this is really serious. You know and they said this happened in the Prince William Sound oil spill. This is triggered by something. This is triggered by phenomena. You have to go out and take the water from the ocean and sample it and find out what it is, and you have to bring us some fish. We say, well, we don’t have funding for this. So we phone the DFO and say, give us a little bit of funding, like 6,000 bucks or something to go out and find out what these thousands of tons of dead fish... finally we just go and do it anyway.

This participant claimed this was only one example, of how the DFO had not responded to what local people like herself, who worked and lived fishing, felt were very real environmental concerns. Calls to the government, media and environmental organizations apparently had not raised any interest.

The CBC wouldn't interview, Check TV... all these virtually wouldn't interview because the government had gone and done their work ahead of time and said, it's VHS, don't worry about it. It's in the fish. And so, since then, I've done a lot of research and I'm just like blown away that the VHS exists in... in uh. There's several different strains of it, and they haven't determined by the time that they returned all this information which of the strains. One of them would absolutely wipe out everything practically in the Pacific.

Only after a call to Washington State officials had the topic become one of concern for the DFO. “And we phone the Washington State people and they finally motivate our two governments to act.” Only then had the DFO agreed to check the situation out.

and they have very, very cautiously said they would study a few carcasses essentially, .... The scientists would like to study it, but the political frame is so scared that bloom... that it could be from a bloom.
There was a very real risk of an environmental disaster, in the participant's opinion, when political stances and old grievances were allowed to stand in the way of working together.

Where are we stuck? We're stuck in being so stupid to not pay attention to what's sitting out there right in front of us. If we just forgot that we had some kind of a policy or a belief or whatever, if we just walked outside and looked at nature, it would be telling us everything we need to know right now.

This respondent had the opinion that fishers, government agents, environmentalists, business and communities all needed to come together.

We're so mad at the government, we're hurting ourselves. I mean, it's all fine and good to not want the fish farms because they are polluting, but what would be even worse is if there's a huge disease outbreak from them happening and people not paying attention to it. And what if it's nothing to do with them? Well, don't we want to know that? Well, I think people are sick about fish. I mean, it's like the media is inundated and they know that we all out here probably hate the government, so it's kind of like a thing where they just go, well, there's another story from the West coast, you know.... I actually believe that all the enemies have to leave the meeting table together, and if you're starting to separate because we represent different camps, then that's the thing that will kill us the most.

Most felt the closures were not justified in 1998. One woman, however, disagreed. She felt the DFO had done the right thing. Although she was in agreement with the DFO regarding the closures, she voiced many concerns regarding the way the DFO had managed the restructuring and the buyback programme.

There was agreement with all of the women except one that the fish farms were a concern. Some were completely against, "No fish farms. Anything but [fish farms]. Oysters, prawns, anything, but no fish farming. That's a big no-no." Others had concerns about the environmental risks.
On the other hand, one woman hoped the fish farms would thrive and disagreed vehemently with critics of the farms. She believed concerns are unfounded. She described what she saw on one of her visits to a fish farm.

A lot of people have misconceptions about farm fishing. They say the fish are all drugged and antibiotics put into them and that is not the case at all. They get pellets to eat; just like the wild fish get whatever they get. They are not sickly. They go in one circle: There are quite a few of them in a pen, so they get scraped against the mesh and they may scrape their gills off or there might be and eye popped out. They look actually some of them look very ugly. But, they are not what you think they are.

Another participant had concerns regarding the environmental impact, on both humans and wild salmon, because of the use of hormones.

The business of the fish farm, a lot of people, have a real problem with fish in the ocean environment, that’s an open-net cage being fed hormones and antibiotics because you have a sense that there’s some connection to health of locals. It makes sense, right. We’re doing genetic engineering with fish and we don’t think it affects us. It’s common practice for the last 15 years to do that in our waters. There is no connection made between that and dwindling stocks. Why not?

She felt the government supported the fish farms and that eventually fish farms, would predominate in the industry. Although she did not support fish farms she could see herself becoming involved with fish farming in the future if the environmental concerns were addressed appropriately.

I can’t buy into our other options [fish farms]; at this point, it hasn’t offered enough compromises and responsibility around environmental concerns, or... but I would work there. I would work in doing that. I would like to see people working. So, if fish farm could be brought on line to be more appropriate, I would work very hard to get there.

There was very little support for the federal government or the DFO. The list of grievances was unending. People felt betrayed. They looked at the financial support the people on the East Coast supposedly received during the Atlantic crisis and wondered what
support they would receive. This participant expected the government to take a very hard line attitude towards displaced fishers.

So on the National news where they actually said they [the government] were not going to be putting money into BC like they did back east. Because the people there are still asking for more, it wasn't enough, and you know, it just sort of goes on and on and I guess they finally said; you've got what you're getting, now that's it. Now move on.

Many felt the actions of the DFO and the federal government showed a lack of respect for the people living and working in the fishing communities of the West Coast. Symbolic of this attitude was the failure of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to attend a pre-arranged meeting, as described by one of the participants.

What’s his name [Minister of Fisheries & Oceans] Anderson wouldn’t even come and meet with the fishermen. He hasn’t faced one fisherman yet. He isn’t very well liked: I think he’s completely clueless. Why doesn’t he get together with people that know about the fishing? He could have made an effort at least to talk. He didn’t show up because he feared there would be violence. He set it up, he sent us notice. There’s people waiting and waiting to talk to him... waiting forever, waiting to hear what he had to say.

4. Strategies

Fishers have always used a variety of strategies for surviving in the fishing industry. Strategies used in the past continue to be used; some have been modified and others have been discarded. In addition new strategies have been contemplated and tried. The strategies come with problems and barriers, some are new and some are long-standing.

a. Diversity

Fishers are independent and a lot of creative thinking has been directed towards developing businesses that will utilize skills and equipment they have acquired in the fishing business. One woman gave an account of how she and her husband often explored the possibility of various business endeavours.
These business enterprises included taking “hippie” kayakers to various locations or wining and dining “rich Americans” aboard their boat. She doubted kayakers would take a boat rather than use their kayaks and her husband couldn’t quite see himself hanging out with a bunch of “hippies”. Like others in the fishery they were faced with the many changes required in moving from a resource industry to a service industry.

Converting a fishing vessel to one that could be used to transport paying passengers would be no easy undertaking and would involve a whole new set of regulations and a considerable investment. There were safety regulations that needed to be followed when converting a fishing vessel to one that could cater to paying passengers. “But now it’s getting through, what is a passenger? Right? and all the regulations”. Although neither of these ideas was likely to be put in practice, the couple hoped to use their boat in some new enterprise and they were also checking out the possibility of using a fish wheel in Combinations with their boat.

Some of the ideas presented to fishers by the DFO apparently had not seemed practical in the long term,

They had a 24-hour hotline for fishing. They told me to go dogfish fishing, right? Why don’t you go dog fish fishing, cause you know, you’ve got a Schedule 3 attached to you A and you can do that, right? And I thought are you telling everybody this? Like, you’re gone have (chuckling) 600 guys out there dogfish fishing. Well, there’s no market in that either anymore, right?

Apparently it was quite common for fishers to hear that in the new scheme of things they would need to be diversified in their approach. Diversity, however, was not a new concept to fishers as was explained by one of the participants,

You have to be more diversified! Well, from what I’ve seen in fishing, you’ve had to be diversified for years. Like really. Everybody’s been diversified. Fishermen are probably the most diversified lot you’ll ever
meet. They all do something. They can’t just make it on one species alone. You can’t. They never have been able to.

The following story illustrated this very point. It was one of many examples of how families had generated income from varied sources. As circumstances in the fishing industry changed new approaches were taken. This account described how one woman devised a strategy to help offset the fall in market prices over the past few years.

I started advertising in the newspaper too for fresh sockeye. So, I would take phone calls and take orders and whatnot... set up times to meet at the wharf and then the kids and I would go down and we’d sell the salmon. We’d weigh it all out and sell it. I’d try to set it up so everybody would be coming at staggered times throughout the day. That was working pretty good and then last year I ended up, I had quite a nice lot of customers put together, and then last year it was so disappointing, people were phoning or I was phoning them, and then there were just no fish. There was nothing. So, anyways, we did that though because fish prices had gotten so ridiculously low. I mean, they went to half. We were getting half [the usual price].

In addition to finding customers, preparing the fish for sale, and selling the fish, there were several tasks she completed on a regular basis.

Well I’ve done all the bookkeeping and the business for the companies because we have logging, actually it’s a beach combing industry, so my husband basically spends all his time now on the boat, just trying to scrounge up whatever we can.

We also have some rental properties that... that I look after, and so that sort of takes up any (laughs) extra time. You can imagine there are lots of problems involved, so it just seems like our life is just work, work, work, work. We don’t have any family life together anymore. We don’t do anything as a family now. It’s really, now, it’s like I am bogged down totally. Like I said, it’s 18 hour days for sure... because then I come home at night and do the bookwork, but it’s try to keep decent people in them, it’s just about impossible because half of the people moved out of town.

In preparation for a time when the family would be forced to get out of fishing all together she completed a training course for the travel industry.
So last year I went to school; it was full-time school. I went for 6 or 7 or 8 months to school, by the time the practicum was over, and I guess it was about 7 ½ months.

Not surprising, she was frustrated to find that she did not qualify for retraining funding and was required to pay the cost herself.

In spite of her numerous skills in marketing, bookkeeping, property management, retail sales and skills in the care of her home, and family, including children and years of managing the business side of the fishing operation, she did not qualify for any retraining funding.

No. Unfortunately, which is so frustrating to me, um, the funding program, if you can believe this, were only available if you met this criteria. You had to be in the fishing industry for 3 years, which I met, but you also had to have collected Unemployment Insurance, and of course, I didn’t collect Unemployment Insurance… and so I wasn’t eligible to be in the programme. So now, apparently that has changed, just recently.

This was not an uncommon situation for many women, who had done unpaid work in the industry with their partners/husbands. They had not qualified for adjustment benefits, as their work had not been formally considered as contributing to the economy. “I wasn’t eligible to be in the programme. So that’s how crazy the things were set up.”

b. Social Programmes

As part of their strategies for survival in the fishing industry many people have accessed various social programmes such as employment insurance, social assistance and career change programmes. The programmes however have problems and access is closed or restricted to many.

Employment benefits were only available to those who had been paid a wage and not all wage earners qualified for benefits. For those qualified, the benefits were a welcome
support. "I don't have a problem with UI, the way they've [government] treated us. It's like, thank God for that, because uh, it would have been really tough. Even I... I mean, I would have had a really tough year. Well, it was tough. I should have had a lot more money."

Because of the cyclical nature of the industry, many fishers traditionally have relied on employment insurance benefits to get by until the next season opening. The period of time could be weeks or months. Then, with the closures and reduced fishing times, there was less opportunity to build up the required weeks of employment. "I don't think I know anybody this year that qualified for a full benefit of unemployment. The earnings were so minimal. One day [of fishing] was all we got".

Eligibility rules sometimes disqualified those who had for years paid into the employment insurance programme. The following example illustrated how a family who prided themselves for never having drawn employment insurance learned the benefits were not there for them when they were in need.

After years, because he hadn't claimed the previous year, 'cause once you've had a claim, then you need a lesser amount of weeks to apply, but because we've never had a claim, he needed this big lump of weeks, even though he's worked in the industry for 25 years, oh, it was crazy. Yeah. So we just shook our heads, and just let it go.

Recent changes supposedly made to the employment programme to make qualification easier had not eliminated problems.

Unemployment, just last year and this year, has changed their criteria, which is what fishermen rely on too, in the off-season. Now, before you had to have so many weeks of fishing to qualify. Now they go by earnings, you have to have so many earned. It goes by what you pay into it. You have to make a minimum of; I think it is $10,000; to get a full benefit, to feed your family. And in most households there's only one fisherman. The whole benefit is like, $800 every two weeks. Most people that I know, actually, I don't know anybody this year that qualified for full benefits. Um, I myself
get half of that. I get $400 every two weeks. So, if I wasn’t living with my spouse…

More than one woman had pondered what her circumstances would have been like if she were living on her own.

I think, what if I lived on my own? What if, you know, how would you pay your monthly expenses and I think a lot of people are going to social assistance. And then that whole system is. I mean, I even went so far as to go and check into applying last fall, but I didn’t even go through with it because they make you jump through so many hoops before you even get in the office I just said, forget it.

This raised the question, of how many women felt trapped in relationships because they could not financially afford to leave? Employment insurance benefits were often low. Women, who have been doing unpaid work in the industry, or were unable to find paid employment, relied on spouses or were forced to seek social assistance.

Social assistance was seen as the last resort for many. Nevertheless, increasingly, women were considering this option. One woman described her experience.

Social Assistance programmes out on the reserves are really hit hard. And for a lot of people like myself, I won’t; I just can’t go in. Well; I mean, that’s what it’s there for. I mean, that’s my understanding it’s there for emergencies. And to me this is an emergency. But, we still have a roof over our head and we still have food on our table, but when you get to the point where you don’t, you have to go in, and to me and my partner this is a lot of stress because of them. I know when my dad got sick, he had to go and ask. My dad died of leukaemia. And he had to go and ask at one point because he couldn’t fish, and it was the most humiliating and degrading thing.

Other strategies for survival included accessing programmes supposedly put in place to specifically help fishers impacted by the crisis.

Like there’s a work programme which lasts 16 weeks. Which was great, and then, especially when jobs are hard to find and there’s no other avenues to.
The programme was quite restricted and was not adequate enough to assist those who have been displaced and wanted to find an alternative career. One participant described her understanding of the programme.

Yeah. That's all community-based, yup. No. No. If there was something that you were really interested in, then that would involve you going to Victoria um, well, they would be iffy about sending you. Um, it would be more or less to be accessed here, like in communities. So it's all like, you get a wage. I don't know what it was, a little over $600 every two weeks and then um, they allowed you to take a 16-week... so many dollars a week extra for... and that would just be for if you went to school and so if you took a course.

I mean, people going in a new career direction need a little more than 16 weeks to get... find something. I mean, that's good for a job for the short-term, but once the work programme is over, your 16 weeks are up and you have no job, and you have no savings... and you're more or less left in the lurch. That's what I didn't like about it. And like I said, I appreciated what was there, but that was it.

A way of life and a career cannot be replaced with a sixteen-week course that doesn't assist you in getting training outside the community. As one woman understated, "I think there needs to be a lot more offered to the people that were, you know, directly affected by this."

Another support programme was described by one of the participants.

I took a 4-day course. So, what they do is they take fishermen in and... and they get you set up with resumes and get you thinking about other things that you'd like to do with your life. Careers - they get you on the internet, playing around, you know. It's just a 4-day thing, you know. They can't do much. But I found it excellent, actually.

Having a place to go and to meet with fellow fishers seemed to be an important aspect of the centre.

They get you uh, brainstorming and uh, oh, just all sorts of neat little things that they do and uh, point you in the right direction. It's a great resource centre. You can go there at any time and play on the internet and get
information and they have counsellors there. Um, so you take that for 4 days.

The centre provided some immediate support but how effective the programme would be in the long term was questionable.

Some of the participants were unclear as to what kind of funding or what kinds of programmes were available. It seems, yet again, the fishers were left without adequate information, wondering what government support would be offered.

You have to take that 4-day course, which I am glad I took, but it opens the door for future funding through um, this Fisheries Survival … organisation they have. You see, there's this money, supposedly, and [the centre co-ordinator] would laugh about this, because supposedly there's all this money … (laughs) … it's out there. He doesn't know where it's coming from, but there's all this money the government has for all these community um, programmes, to help people get back on their feet … to get them retrained, you know…

There was a sense of disbelief, "There's all this money out there…. I don't know where it is. It's comin', though, they say. Right?".

Well, and then there's the North Island Fishing Initiative, they've been promised money for…they got Sayward involved because it's um been going down here [economically] for a few years, and it's been really successful, but it wasn't available until today.

I don't really know? We went to this 5 or 4-day thing, in November I went, and I talked to [the manager] every couple of weeks and they're still waiting for their Ministry funding. So they want to start some work, up in Kelsey Bay but the funding is always waiting… who knows? (Chuckling) been telling me since November, it's comin', it's comin', it's comin'.

This seemed to be the common experience of those hoping the government would come through with the much needed funding.

They did tell me the other day that it's there, and I said well, when do we start? Like this… I'm going to be back to work by the time we get started on this, and that's what's happening with a lot of guys that I know is they are going to do other things. Nobody can afford to sit around and wait.
c. Community Building

The centre provided a focal point where people met. This meeting place was appreciated and provided an opportunity for people to share their concerns and to hear differing perspectives.

Oh, absolutely. You...they have group sessions, so you sit in a room with uh, various other people that are in aquaculture or fishermen or deck hands or wives of the fishermen or whatever, that are in the same boat, so to speak. But they have problems too that I didn't ev... I wasn't even aware of; but um, you know their markets are being usurped by the Chilean farm industry. They have their problems. Big corporations are eating up all the little farms and making it tougher for... for the little guys to uh, keep jobs and... and... I didn't know this. But, yeah, they have their problems as well, and some of them are feeling like they're ousted out and nowhere to go, so they're... there were people included from that, the aquaculture sector.

Considering how fish farms are viewed by those in the small scale commercial fishery, one might have expected there would have been little empathy or understanding of the aquaculture/fish farmer's circumstances. The programme provided this woman the opportunity to hear that big corporations are also threatening the existence of the smaller fish farmers in much the same way they are impacting the small commercial fishery.

Another woman described a growing sense of unity among people in fishing communities.

It is kind of interesting because we have been in it for a very long time, or our families were in it or whatever. And it's like native/non-native... there's... we're... we're seen as a group and I think the north island really exemplifies it from Campbell River up and probably the wet side of the island. You've got communities that are really dependent on it [fishing]. Really uh, you know, the person at the drugstore that works there knows full well that part of their income comes from fish, whether from commercial sports or whatever. But they know it, and... and uh, so we sort of have united in some degree in the demise of it all. And we're all sort of saying, ... it's amazing to go to meeting after meeting of people at the grassroots. They hear almost exactly the same responses to exactly the same initiatives, which gives us some hope that we're on the right track because at least we're united now, more than we've ever been.
Participants often spoke of their options and strategies for adjusting to the new economic circumstances in terms of contemplating possible retraining, researching new business endeavours, or pursuing a higher education. They also named the social support programmes, employment insurance and social assistance they hoped to access to help them through this period of unemployment.

In addition, community development was seen as part of the adaptation process in fishing communities. There was some funding for community initiative programmes and the promise, again, of more to come. Two participants spoke with passion about getting people working together developing alternatives for the community. Both women believed people needed to work together to re-establish control over their lives and livelihood. They thought that the management of the fisheries ought to put more emphasis on local knowledge and expertise.

One woman who had done some previous community building believed the process needed to be inclusive, allowing people to examine and share their values. The commonality of values, she believed leads to understanding and unity. Although non-native, she drew from aboriginal cultures for inspiration and used the healing circle as a model to facilitate her work and her personal world-view.

Well, you know, I think that when we, when we start to do grass roots work at the community level and say, “Okay, can you maybe come through the door whether you're a commercial, sports or, or a mother of four children, or a store owner, or a commercial trawler, or a seiner, no matter what your...your interdependence is with fish”. Come through the door and tell it what it is that your values are. And when you start on a value base, and that's how we did at these conferences, we started off with making the quality of life statement. And the quality of life statements that I've worked on, both in Ucluelet and Tofino area, the Campbell River area, Port Hardy, Alert Bay area, always come down to basic principles of love, respect and community
and loving your children and wanting to pass on a legacy; um, of... of work
ethics and all of those kinds of things...

Basically people wanted the same kinds of things in their lives. She claimed what
really motivated people for the most part in the coastal communities was not the endless
drive for profit but rather the desire to conduct a way of life. She believed that, by getting
people talking together, solutions would be created.

Um, but, like I said; once you get everybody invited into the room and
you... and you... well, a lot of people say it's because you have lunch
together. If you can sit down and eat together, you start to recognize
especially if you are working on a quality of life statement, that there's no
difference. Like uh, it's almost like if you did it in Australia, it would be the
same. Um, it would be the same if you were native or non-native.

Another participant, a First Nations woman and an advocate for her community and
for First Nations people, believed there was a need for an alternative system and articulated
her ideas clearly. She did not think having another government report would help. The
people of the community, instead, needed to speak out and demand to be heard and
acknowledged by government.

They pretend to come and help you? The report will only be for the benefit
of the government, and I want people to really understand this. Unless you
take initiative and have the courage to challenge this, I don't care what
structure it is... You can break them down, no need to accept what comes
from government. Because government really should represent people and
when it ceases to do that, then people need to say, okay, this is the
alternative.

This First Nations activist, did not accept the current system and did not believe First
Nations people should be subjected to rules and regulations of a system that has been
imposed on them. In her opinion, the system is destructive and is not sustainable.

You don't need to take anything from anybody, because we don't belong in
the rules and regulations. We had our life-style and we need to go back to
that in order to be sustainable and contributors.... And that's what
government does - it disconnects you from everything. Well, it just can't
work. It's not viable. It's not feasible. It doesn't even make sense. So again, we're back to basics.

She was no longer willing to be told how to live and rejected the idea that First Nations people should be directed by those who have a system that is destructive and unsustainable.

Um... You can't come into my house and tell me how to raise my children. It's the same thing. You can't come and tell me how to live. I know how to live. I know how to take care of the fish stock. I know how to keep the streams clean. I know how to respond to, uh, conservation. That's how I live. My life has been a conservation-first lifestyle. Because I don't abuse this, I don't abuse that, and that's how I live in my household.

This [system] takes it away... the Department of Fisheries and Oceans or any government structure, takes away that lifestyle, and that is not acceptable. We take direction from the Creator. We can't take direction from men who will just abuse that connection.

She believed the next generation of children needed to be educated about what was and was not acceptable.

It's not acceptable. There are a lot of things that are not acceptable in that... in the eyes of the First Nations people, and that's what we teach our children. When our children go out of our household into some place that says something different, there will be confusion. So, in order to, uh, define that confusion, we all need to understand what it is they are saying to each other.

She felt optimistic that eventually the situation will change.

Sooner or later, someone in structure has to hear what we are saying, and, uh, it's time, because it's inevitable we're... we're put in a situation where your back is up against the wall, you have only forward to go, so whoever's in your way had better (chuckles) be careful. We need to be accepted for who we are. Um, I want my grandchildren and their children and all the unborn children to have a place that rightfully makes them belong, without having to suffer the consequences of what someone else has done to destroy it. And, um, the way our people see that, the politicians, is educate yourselves to become, um, infiltrate the government system. I believe that to a certain extent, and also believe that we need to be recognized for the contributions that we have... without having to be educated. Because the knowledge the First Nations people have is a very, um, important... in the context of taking care of this[way or life].
This participant spoke to the need for change, that politicians needed to educate themselves about the contribution First Nations people make and to respect the knowledge they have. The politicians need to incorporate that kind of understanding and knowledge into their decision-making process. She also believed there was a need for First Nations people to educate themselves about what is important about their culture and to take those ideas into places of governance themselves.

The crisis had brought people together in her opinion. She believed that some in the broader community, including non-natives, were beginning to see the First Nations perspective.

In crisis, it's uniting people and that's what government has to be really aware of. Once the sleeping giant is awake, is awakened, there is no stopping what...what the results of that person waking up is. (Chuckles)...so we really have to be thankful....now (chuckles)...It's like...it's like people ask me how we [First Nations] can have a better relationship with them [non-native] when you don't know exactly what it is they are doing...you know? It’s like...once you’ve made that statement, then you [non-native] have to accept the fact that, hey, these people [First Nations] are here. They are not going anywhere...and yeah, it's...it's making us stronger. A lot of white people are beginning to understand that this is where First Nations are coming from, “I think we better get on that wagon...if we're going to survive in this industry”; because a lot of them know how to live in amongst the First Nations people. And they find that that's the most sensible way to be and become, because they understand that this is a lifestyle, this is a way of life...and no one has a right to take that away.

There are many ways in which people can bring about change and this First Nations elder believed that people, both First Nations and non-native, needed to be healthy in an holistic sense incorporating physical and spiritual health, if they are to recapture a sustainable way of life. This participant decided she could best serve her people and community by further developing her healing skills. She pursued studies and training to
become a counsellor. To do this, she made personal sacrifices, as she had to be away from her home and family for weeks at a time.

And so basically that's what we're doing. And right now I am in training because I can't work physically. I'm in training to, uh... and it's a three year training, uh, program. I have to go to Creston, which is really costly, um, to be able to come out as a counsellor. I would be happy to be a counsellor, and I will be able to facilitate workshops for the people, wherever they... that is needed. And this is being done in the context of a real intensive training. So health, [is important], people are going to be astonished at the strength that comes from being healthy. So those are the optimistic things I see. And I can be a part of that movement, not only for myself but also for my family, for the community; um... people are beginning to understand that, because if you're not in a healthy situation you can't win. It doesn't matter what portfolio or what kind of politician you are, um, unless you have a healthy outlook in that field. Our culture comes in as, a teaching of, a holistic style.

Although her energies were focused on First Nations people she saw the need for healthy minds, bodies and souls for all people including those governing. First Nations people in her opinion were demanding change whether non-natives were ready or not.
CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings and their social relevance. From the participants’ personal stories and comments, a picture emerges of the complex and challenging lives of women in one BC fishing community.

1. The Personal Impact of the Crisis

The findings reveal that women are juggling many roles trying to take care of home and family, to meet their emotional and physical needs at the same time as creating income and worrying about the survival of the family unit. The primary focus was economic survival through a crisis that meant a loss of income and a loss of a way of life. All wanted to stay in their community and in fishing. Many strategies were contemplated and practised in an attempt to achieve these goals.

The participants in this study are at different life-stages. Those with younger families were very focused on the survival of the family unit and appeared to be the most stressed. Those who did not have the responsibility of young families were also focused on economic survival; some sought other occupations in which they could subsist; others looked at the community level and possible viable options for the fishing industry. The women assumed many roles in brave attempts to keep families and community together. Consequently they have multiple stressors.

Due to the lack of external support, participants were particularly stressed about trying to create means of keeping the family together. This is nothing new for women. Even when the fishing industry was thriving, women were multitasking. The key difference is that now their options and support have narrowed. The majority of the women are
expending output with little return. Women are increasingly burdened caring for and trying to compensate for their spouses' emotional and physically needs, attempting to buffer the impact the crisis has had on their spouses. Some were living in fractured and/or strained relationships. Many were dealing with an increasing fragmentation of time and of an increasing fragmentation of their lives in general, assuming sole responsibility of children and household and, in addition to all of this, earning a family income. Some had taken part-time work; others piece work at home; others were in training at their own expense. The majority of women were engaged in studied investigation of new or supplemental means of generating income. Some were pondering how to continue to use and stay connected to their boats. Others had developed physical and emotional health problems and were visibly tired and stressed. Like the women of the East Coast, these women were coping with high levels of stress related to the fishing crisis.

Another feature revealed in the stories was the distrust of government. There was a sense of betrayal and a complete lack of confidence in the government's management of the fisheries. All held the view that government actions reflected an attitude of disrespect and a general disregard for their expertise and experience in fishing, for their concerns regarding the environment and for their personal well-being and ability to make a living. Many believed the government did not support the continued existence of small-scale fishery operations and were dissatisfied with policies concerning the restructuring of the industry and the lack of support for those impacted by these policies. The participants felt marginalized by the restructuring policies of the government. All felt there needed to be changes in the way decisions were made concerning fishery management.
I am incredibly impressed given the nature and the severity of the stresses these women have endured for such a long period of time, with their flexibility, endurance, courage and creativity. All had a heightened awareness of the impact of the crisis on others. Some were actively working to bring solutions to the community and to heal the community. All of the participants had a very clear understanding of the impact government policies had had on their lives and some had a sophisticated analysis of the inadequacies of these same policies. The women described their dealings with the government as confusing, secretive and disrespectful. Without exception, all of the women shared a distrust of government. This is a distrust that will not be easily repairable.

2. Women and Government Policy

The Mifflin Plan was introduced in the West Coast without any adjustment programmes. In response to concerns regarding the implementation of the Mifflin Plan, a "Federal-Provincial Review Panel" was created in September of 1996. Not one of the recommendations put forward by the panel on adjustment addressed the specific needs or concerns of women in the fisheries.

Prior to the introduction of the Mifflin Plan, research concerning the East Coast fishery crisis was available with clear specific recommendations that adjustment programmes be inclusive of the special circumstances of women (Neis and Williams, 1996, 1997; Neis, 2000; Woodrow & Ennis 1994). Yet, the federal government chose to proceed, again ignoring the plight of women facing the economic emergency resulting from the West Coast crisis.

Contrary to the recommendations coming from this research, to be cognisant of the experiences of women, women in the fishing industry on the West Coast were for the most
part simply treated as invisible. There was little to no government provision for women who had contributed so much to the fishing economy in unpaid labour. Even those who had participated in the fishery through paid work had little support and few options. This finding is consistent with the literature on the experience of women in the fisheries.

Historically, there has been little recognition of the varied contributions women have made to the fishing industry particularly the unpaid work that women have done supporting their spouses in family fishing enterprises (Binkley, 2000; Davis, 2000; Neis, 1999, 2000; Neis & Williams, 1996, 1997; Rowe, 1991). Women have been controlled and exploited in the fishing industry through familial and societal patriarchal ideologies (Neis, 1999).

Traditionally, husbands and fathers controlled the ability of women and children to access wealth from the fishery through the male control of houses, land, technology and the access to the fish (Neis, 1999). Women primarily performed the informal caring work. Their work was often unpaid, under valued and largely unacknowledged in Western culture (Bains, et al 1991). More recently, women’s access to the wealth of the fishery resource has been negotiated between the forces of familial patriarchy and the societal patriarchal policies of the state and interests of capital (Neis, 1999, 2000).

In addition, the income generated for the family through the work of women is often seen as supplemental. This is the case for women working in family enterprises in the fishing industry as well as in the larger population. The contribution women make to the Canadian economy in general in unpaid work is fundamental to society’s functioning; yet it is not adequately compensated.

Patriarchal attitudes are reflected in government policies. These attitudes are seen generally in economic policies and more specifically in employment benefit policies.
Statistics Canada reported in 1992 that unpaid work, two-thirds of which was done by Canadian women, was comparable to between 32 and 54.2 per cent of Canada's GNP (Sharma, 2000, p. 92). Statistics Canada (1995) data showed female employees were less likely to benefit from unemployment insurance than their male counterparts. Male employees more frequently received UI training benefits, job-creation UI benefits, benefits in work-sharing arrangements, and self-employment assistance benefits (Benoit, 2000). Benoit notes there has been little effort made by the Canadian governments to equalise the gendered nature of unemployment benefits. She further explains the more recent changes have been to change the name from Unemployment (UI) to Employment Insurance (EI) and make eligibility requirements more restrictive.

The result of these economic and social policies was that, women by and large, were ineligible for employment insurance benefits and did not have access to training and/or retraining programmes. Consequently, women were forced to rely on informal support networks and their own personal resources.

All of the women interviewed believed there was a need for change. At least two of the participants had begun working for change in the community. A changed system would ideally address their concerns for the local economy, fishing management, environmental issues and social concerns.

3. Community Change

Organisations are systems of power relations: they can be equalitarian or hierarchical. When a system provides a few with power over others it corrupts the judgment of those who have that power and marginalizes those who don't (Kuyek, p. ix, 1992).
In 1968 John Rothman introduced three models or approaches to community development which he later revised and refined and presented as three modes of community intervention. Social change strategies differ for each mode of intervention. Mode A, locality development, pursues community change involving a broad cross section of people in determining and solving their own problems. Mode B, social planning/policy, seeks change by gathering data about problems and making decisions on the most logical course of action. The basic change strategy of Mode C, social action is to crystallize issues and mobilize people to take action against enemy targets (Rothman, et al., 1995).

Lena Dominelli builds on Rothman’s models of social action adding; class based community action; feminist community action and community action from a black perspective. In Dominelli’s class based community action model, conflict, direct action, confrontation and negotiation are used to achieve change. The feminist community action model promotes change and fosters gender equality by focusing on gender as a central feature of collective action; while community action from a black perspective makes the struggle for racial equality its central focus (Dominelli, 1990).

In keeping with the feminist post-modernist perspective of this study a feminist approach to community intervention is appropriate. Dominelli’s feminist community action model has much to offer those working in the fishing communities of BC. Feminist theory and practice provide the guiding principles for this model. Feminist community action; challenges the nature of capitalist patriarchal social relations; challenges the status quo; and uses advocacy as a basis for individual and collective action. This model recognizes the need to organize women bringing them together; to share and learn from their individual and collective experiences; to make connections between social organization and their personal
reality in political terms; to forge coalitions with other organizations to influence
government policy that impacts their lives (Dominelli, 1990).

This model of community action has much to offer those working to bring about change
to the fishing communities of BC. Another model of feminist community work is presented
by Joan Newman Kuyek in her book, *Fighting for Hope: Organizing to Realize Our
with the goal of returning control and ownership of economic decisions to the people most
affected by those decisions. The desire to return decision-making to the community level
resonates with the expressed aspirations of the study participants and those exploring
optional fisheries management models.

Returning resource-management decisions to local fishing communities and regions
is part of the process of regaining control of economic decisions for those communities.
Governments and communities are exploring new models of resource management as the
fisheries crisis intensifies. Communities with long-term connections and reliance on local
fishing areas are ideally situated to exercise management rights. Moving towards shared
governance of the fisheries requires new power-sharing arrangements and the collaboration
of multiple parties (Pinkerton, 1999).

The crisis in the fishing industry and possible changes in the management structure
provides an opportunity for increased participation for women in the decision making
process. CED values the informal economy: the work and production that goes on that does
not show up in the gross National product. CED is as concerned about creating viable
communities for our grandchildren as it is for ourselves. It is concerned about getting local
control over business and about producing socially useful products, like housing and food.
CED is about development that does not displace the poor or depopulate rural communities. It is about redistributing the wealth and services in a community so they may be more equally shared by all. CED is about creating work that is healthy, satisfying and secure (Kuyek, 1992).

Particularly relevant is the recognition of work that does not show up in the calculation of the GNP. This work includes the multitude of duties many women in the fishing industry do. It includes child-care and the many tasks women do to sustain families and contribute to the fishing economy. This work needs to be valued and should be included in the GNP calculation. This kind of change to government policy requires a collective effort by women.

4. Implication for Social Work Practice

When working in the community, social workers need to be wary of taking on a role of the expert and thus perpetuating a system that diminishes the experience and expertise of those living and working in the community. Social workers can be active in encouraging women in the community to come together to work for change. They need to understand the barriers to women organizing in the community; they need to take practical steps to remove some of those constraints.

Social workers can be instrumental in the development of skills that help people working together. There is a role for social workers in helping to create spaces that are safe and welcoming to all women. Places where women can speak of their personal experiences with someone who has an understanding of the kinds of issues they are faced with in their personal lives. Social workers can help in creating spaces where women can develop those skills they deem necessary to bring about the changes they want to create in their personal
lives and in their communities. There is a role for social workers in participating in the
development of skills that will assist women in questioning and challenging government
policies that impact their lives.

Social workers need to be aware of the historical events and economic policies that have
shaped the lives of the people living and working in the community. When working in
fishing communities, social workers need to be informed of the policies that are specific to
the historical experience of all people, including First Nations people and non-aboriginal
people.

Social workers could be in a position to facilitate workshops that look at issues from an
historical perspective. An example from the study is helpful in illustrating this point. Some
of the women interviewed expressed a sense that the government was not living up to their
expectations. For some women this feeling remained at a gut level. They were able to
provide many examples of how government policies were not meeting their needs. There
continued to be a sense from some women that somehow they must be lacking a critical
piece of information that would explain the governments actions or lack there of. If the
women had had more of an historical perspective of events and policies in the fishing
industry, they would have been in better position to truly evaluate the forces that drove the
government decision-making process. The historical perspective may provide them with
enough information to move beyond simply a gut feeling. It may enable some to work for
change with more clarity and confidence.

Social workers need to facilitate an environment of consciousness raising where women
can make the connections in political terms between their personal realities and social
organisation.
In my personal experience, looking at the historical perspective of the fishing industry made it easier for me to understand the current issues facing the people in the fishing communities. The history of First Nations people within the context of the fishing policy was particularly enlightening. After completing this thesis I feel much more connected to the people living in the coastal communities. Understanding the history behind the issues has helped me to understand and consequently be more able to question and critique media reports concerning the fisheries. It is probable that a similar process would happen for others.

5. Limitations and Future Research

The findings are limited by the degree to which they can be generalized to the experiences of other women impacted by the crisis in the fishery. The participants volunteered to participate indicating a level of confidence perhaps that may not be there for other women in the community. In all probability there may be some women who do not feel they can speak out and it is important not to assume the experiences of the participants are the experiences of all women in the fishing communities.

In addition, although the study did include First Nations and Caucasian women, there was no representation from other ethnic groups that live and work in the fishing communities. It is important to hear their stories and further study would advance our understanding and add to the needed body of research in this area.

In April 2000, the framework for “Coasts Under Stress” a major collaborative research initiative headed by Rosemary Ommer was announced. The goal of the research, “is to identify the interaction between social and environmental restructuring and human, community and environmental health over the long run” (2000). The research apparently
will include an investigation of the historical and current position of women including First Nations women in two resource-based (fishing and forestry) communities. The study will span 1940 - 1990 and is to be initiated in the next year. This is an example of the type of research we need more of.

There is a need however to have research focusing on these resource communities over the past decade when they were faced with economic restructuring. Research that incorporates a critical analysis of power relationships and considers cultural context and social action could promote change (Ristock and Pennell, 1996). Research using this approach can empower women in BC fishing communities to create change in the condition of their lives.

Research concerning the impact of the East Coast fishery crisis on the lives of women was available prior to the economic restructuring of the West Coast fishery. Why was this research ignored? Research looking at social and environmental impact studies and their use in government decision-making processes could shed light on this question.

In summary, the findings of this study illustrate how government economic and social policy continues to exploit women while putting them at a disadvantage for direct economic gain. The economy benefits through the unrecognized and uncompensated contribution made by women.

5. Conclusion

The fisheries crisis has led to a major restructuring in BC coastal communities. Financial well being has been eroded for fishing families. The decline of income and loss of work has put tremendous stress on women’s emotional and
physical resources as they struggle to find new strategies to keep their families together.

Employing qualitative methodology, this study considered the experience of women living in a BC fishing community. Through interviews women discussed the challenges they face each day. They use a multitude of strategies in their many family and community roles that are often unacknowledged.

Women recognize a need for change to a system that provides poor fisheries management and little social support. Like many others in the coastal communities of BC, they are calling for change. Communities have formed collaborative organizations that are demanding greater participation in the control and development of local economies in an attempt to build healthy and sustainable communities. Women are well positioned to join these community organizations in their demands for change and to call for recognition of women’s contribution and to their specific needs.
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