

**"It's the Smell of Money":
Women Shoreworkers of British Columbia**

by

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"It's the Smell of Money": Women Shoreworkers of
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ABSTRACT

Women shoreworkers of the west coast of British Columbia are an ethnically and racially mixed community. Women of all ages work in fish processing, and many of them have families and raise children. Fish processing is seasonal, on-call work, which is stratified by gender within each plant. Men tend to receive job postings that give them access to more money per hour and more hours' work per year, than women typically receive. Ethnicity and race are used in the work place to divide the work force in more informal or subtle ways, while gender correlates highly with specific task worked. Women's tasks within fish processing are also in the process of being mechanized out of the industry. In the 1980s, women lost jobs to fish washing machines and herring sexers, and will lose jobs in the near future to herring poppers.

This thesis examines the women's perceptions of their work. Interviews with twenty-three women shoreworkers, from Prince Rupert, Vancouver and Steveston, show their perceptions of the work that men and women do, the ethnic and racial variety to be found in fish plants, the dangers and stresses of intense on-call seasonal work, the importance of unionization, their access to and beliefs about money, and the effects of all these issues on their families. This thesis argues that these women make up a reserve army of labour, in that they are employed on a random and capricious schedule, depending on the catch of fish. They also are members of a secondary labour market within the fish plant structure, in that they do not have access to all jobs within a plant. Moreover, the combination of the work that these women do at home to maintain their families and houses, and the need to be responsive to the call of the fish plants, is self-perpetuating. Some women do not demand access to the more highly paid men's jobs because they appreciate the opportunity to remain at home and care for their families while collecting unemployment insurance in the off-season.

Since women currently do more of the work involved in childrearing than men do, shoreworkers' families need both women's time at home and the money from the job which women's work 'on the line' can provide. In the case of many women shoreworkers, maximizing their time at home, while receiving some income from the government, is a successful strategy for coping with their double work day and year.

Yet fish plant workers remain among the doubly disadvantaged. Many workers leave the industry after a few years. For those who remain, their incomes are not large enough, nor stable enough, to give them a comfortable living standard. Their employment is erratic and outside their control.

Women shoreworkers' double day of labour and the changeable demands of their employment make fish processing a difficult occupation. Nevertheless, it provides income for these women, which may be lost due to recent political decisions involving the export of whole fish, making it possible for employers to avoid processing in Canada at all. This would potentially cost these women their jobs.

CANNING SALMON

The guys on the dock laze around, race the forklift and
Sass the floorlady till it's time for their tea
Then they sit at the table by the window that opens
and get paid a buck more an hour than me

Chorus:

High is the smell, low is the pay,
Long are the hours, why do we stay?
Somewhere outside a whole summer slips away
While we're stuck in here canning salmon.

The machinery's so loud that we say we've gone 'can deaf'
And your shift is long over before you can hear
But they keep the noise level just under the limit
So they won't have to buy us the right safety gear.

First we do springs, so heavy your arms ache
Then we do socks, which are easy to can
Then we do pinks, all mashed up and rotten
So they're packed up in pound cans and shipped to Japan.

Last night we were waiting for a boat to come in
So they kept us on line just a-standin' around
So we didn't know that outside in the river
The boat had flipped over and two men had drowned.

Linda Chobotuck (1974)

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The women I interviewed -- too many, unfortunately, to list -- are due appreciation for letting me take up their time, and allowing me to quote them here. I truly could not have written the thesis without them. I hope they will find that my use of their words is appropriate. The interview transcribers -- Alexis Burton, Leif Stainsby and Susan MacFarlane -- were incredibly patient and thorough.

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CHAPTER ONE: FISH PROCESSING IS NOT FISHING: WRITINGS ABOUT FISH PROCESSING

Fish processing is not a glamorous occupation. There has been some academic analysis of the industry in B.C., but the specific topic of this thesis, which is the women who are employed in the industry, the work they do and the lives they lead, has not been examined. This thesis closely examines the work and lives of some of these women, within a framework of the size and structure of the entire industry in British Columbia.

This first chapter will outline some academic descriptions of the B.C. industry, and will point out that almost all these texts describe the makeup of the work force only in passing. Reports of fish processing in Atlantic Canada will be examined, because those articles specifically discuss women's roles in the east coast fish processing sector. An analysis of statistical discrimination and labour market segmentation theory will follow, as will a consideration of some literature on the reserve army of labour, in order to provide a theoretical overview. Following this will be a description of the methodology used in this study.

Fish processing added 213.6 million dollars to British Columbia's economy in 1986.¹ In comparison, fishing itself produced slightly more money. Researchers have generally studied fish processing as an adjunct to fishing rather than as an economic, social and political entity in its own right. While fishing is almost completely a male job ghetto, the fish processing work force is approximately two-thirds women.²

For all its uniqueness, this blue-collar women's work on the west coast has not yet been specifically examined. This thesis will begin to remedy that omission. In its examination of the labour force activities and family responsibilities of female fish processors, it will argue that the women's role in the political economy of the fisheries is directly linked to their experience in the domestic economy.

The tasks involved in seasonal work in shore fish plants are divided by gender. Given the division of labour that exists, men are often able to work more of the year than women. All women in shore processing do not see this as a negative occurrence. In fact, the double day of labour that most women must fulfill means that the shorter seasons in fish plants are sometimes viewed positively. This thesis demonstrates firstly that jobs within fish plants are gender specific, and secondly that the double day of labour for women tends to exacerbate this segregation of work.

ate 1980
 This thesis examines the situation of shoreworker women of the B.C. coast in the late 1980s. While the historical setting will be briefly sketched, the bulk of the thesis will investigate the experience of some women who work in the fish plants, their labour, paid and unpaid, and their perceptions of their situation.

Little analysis of gender stratification within fish processing exists. Theses written about salmon fishing and canning on the B.C. coast were largely silent about the makeup and work experience of fish plant employees. For example, one of the first academic records of salmon canning in B.C., written by J.C. Lawrence in 1951, made only token reference to the cannery labour force: "...Indian fishermen and can-filling squaws. Many an Indian got a boat and gear from the cannery manager because he had a good can-filling or net-mending squaw."³ This bare acknowledgement of the role of women has rarely been followed up in subsequent academic studies, which generally concentrated on ethnicity and race. Percy Gladstone, writing in 1959, referred to the ethnic makeup of the shoreworkers, and in fact provided useful and clear appendices about Indian, Chinese and Japanese workers.⁴ However, he failed to examine gender stratification, or even note the presence of both genders. Two decades later, in a thesis on the political economy of the B.C. salmon canning industry by Anders Sandberg, the question of gender still remained subordinate.⁵ Other recent discussions of economic rents⁶ in the fish

processing industry, black entrepreneurs,⁷ strikes by fishermen,⁸ and class divisions among fishermen,⁹ while providing helpful information, were similarly disappointing in their preoccupation with everything, it seems, but gender.

There has been much recent discussion over the status of the resource. The debates have centred on whether the salmon are a common property resource¹⁰ or whether these wild fish are state property, because the state licences fishers.¹¹ While these arguments do not affect the processing of the salmon once it is caught and delivered, rulings by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans affect the amount of fish caught, and therefore the amount of work available to shoreworkers. These studies looked at the larger picture of the fishery, discussing the makeup of both the small-boat fleet and the fish plants, while this thesis looks at fish processing within its larger context.

The studies that examined the structure of work in the fish plants more closely included those by Duncan Stacey, Dianne Newell, Edward Higginbottom, and Alicja Muszynski. A main preoccupation of this literature has been the mechanization of what began as a labour-intensive hand process. Duncan Stacey, in Sockeye and Tinplate (1982), was so concerned with documenting the impact of mechanization that he quite overstated the case. In order to support his thesis that the technologically advanced machines introduced in the canneries in 1905-07 "were not mere aids to the hand process,"¹² Stacey quoted an inaccurate statement, made by the Dominion Fisheries Commission for B.C., 1905-07: "...it may now be claimed that after the fish leaves the boat from which it is captured, all handling of it ends then and there."¹³ Given this erroneous assumption Stacey failed to appreciate that the development of the Iron Butcher in 1905 did not make the entire canning process mechanical. The introduction of can-filling machines between 1902 and 1911¹⁴ and the Coastline fish washing machine in the early 1980s have both affected the size and

composition of the fish processing work force, but a work force does still "handle" the fish.

More recently, Dianne Newell and Arthur Roberts undertook a survey of the machinery and industrial structures in which fish processing work has historically occurred in B.C. Specifically, they located archaeological remains of cannery sites. Newell was particularly interested in the native work force attached to these canneries, technological innovation, and women's wartime work in the B.C. salmon canneries.¹⁵ While she is examining the cannery work force, the basis of her work is an archaeological examination of the physical shape of fish processing plants, rather than current work practices. The Development of the Pacific Salmon Canning Industry: A Grown Man's Game¹⁶ provides an important description of big business but not workers.

Writing in 1989, Edward Higginbottom gave a good overview of the history of these cannery sites, when they were built, when they were in operation, when they were bought, mostly by B.C. Packers, and when they were shut down.¹⁷ The early canneries were scattered across the coast, and subsequently rationalized into a few larger urban centres, resulting in dislocation of the work force, which he does not discuss. The existence of on-site housing for many cannery workers indicates the need to bring labour to the canneries, which were originally located near salmon streams, and some of the women interviewed here recollected growing up in this cannery housing.

Because the focus of this thesis is shoreworkers themselves, Alicja Muszynski's research on fish processing in B.C. is perhaps the most useful. In "The Creation and Organization of Cheap Wage Labour in the British Columbia Fishing Industry" (1987), Muszynski argued that race, ethnicity, age and gender were categories used to stratify the labour force within fish plants, resulting in the creation of a cheap wage

labour force which worked for wages below subsistence level. These labourers survived, according to Muszynski, because they "were embedded in precapitalist social relations,"¹⁸ like kin networks, the potlatch, and unpaid labour in general. As she also points out, "Another alternative [for survival when wages are below subsistence level]...is services and payments provided by the capitalist welfare state."¹⁹ In shorework, unemployment insurance helps to fill a void for some of the workers.

While Muszynski refers to kin networks as important for the maintenance of this stratified labour force, she does not mention the dual role that the women in this industry perform in performing both wage labour and their domestic responsibilities. This thesis describes both sets of tasks that these women must complete. Further, these women are much more dependent on government sources for funding when the fish plants shut down than is apparent in Muszynski's work. Unemployment insurance and social assistance both provide incomes for workers when the companies do not.

As the existing studies indicate, a major historical division within the fish processing labour force has been race and ethnicity. Traditionally, according to Gladstone, Muszynski, and others, Indian women processed the fish while their husbands fished. Japanese workers, both male and female, and male Chinese "sojourners" or labourers, worked on a contract system in both Alaska and B.C. The Chinese labour force has actually been substantially reduced, as large numbers lost their jobs to mechanization in 1905 with the invention of the Iron Butcher, but remnants of the contract system survived until as late as 1949 in B.C.²⁰ While it is true that ethnic divisions within fish processing have had a profound effect on the work experience within the plants, gender now divides the workers more concretely. While ethnic and racial divisions played a large part in the social structure of the

canneries in the past, tasks are no longer specifically assigned to particular racial groups within the plants. Indian, Japanese, Caucasian, and Asiatic women work side-by-side on an assembly line, while men of the same ethnic groups perform other tasks. Over the last eighty-five years, while it has always been a source of division of labour, gender has superceded ethnicity/race as the primary division in the fish plant work force.

This job stratification by gender is not specific to British Columbia, although the precise division varies. The B.C. experience was distinctive in the workers' more successful efforts at unionization and securing better wages, as well as the industry's more dramatic seasonality.

In Atlantic Canada, fish processing has been a larger industry than on the Pacific coast. In 1985, Atlantic Canada employed 10,790 men and 19,305 women in 'fish canning, curing and packing.'²¹ This represented almost 80% of Canada's shoreworker labour force of 37,725. This labour force was 64% female, comparable to the B.C. situation, where 67% of fish processing workers were female. B.C. contained 7.8% of male shoreworkers (1,065 men) and 9.0% of female shoreworkers (2,175 women), or 8.6% of all Canadian shoreworkers. The larger Atlantic labour force has led to more fish processing studies on the Atlantic than on the West coast. In contrast too, work on the Atlantic Canada industry has focused on gender, perhaps because feminist scholars have been interested in the Atlantic Canada fishery community.

A number of the Atlantic Canada studies of women in the fishing industry referred to fishermen's wives, who may or may not work in fish processing. Dona Lee Davis' "'Shore Skippers' and 'Grass Widows': Active and Passive Women's Roles in a Newfoundland Fishery," for example, discussed this group.²² Although other studies had previously recognized that wives salted and sold the cod their husbands

caught, freezer processing work in factories, which replaced salting and drying done individually, had not been recognized as directly contributing to the fishing enterprise. Davis also referred both to active involvement by the women in decision-making in the fishing endeavor, and to the symbolic importance of "worry" in keeping the fishermen's boats afloat.

Marilyn Porter's "'Women and Old Boats': The Sexual Division of Labour in a Newfoundland Outport"²³ described the disjunction between women's old roles and the new fish processing jobs, but it did not examine the changes, both positive and negative, that wage work would bring to these women. Her analysis focused instead on the reorganization of the role of "fisherman's wife" for both older and younger women. She identified the young women's fish plant labour as giving them a "direct relation with capital as individual workers," but they remained primarily wives, while the men (even the fishplant men) were fishermen first.²⁴ Porter did mention that this "complex social formation" needed more analysis.²⁵ In my sample, only three of the twenty-three women were or had been fishermen's wives, and only two had husbands who worked in fish processing, suggesting there may be less overlap between the two occupations in B.C.

Other Atlantic Canada studies have examined women's fish plant labour and working conditions, as opposed to the women's status as fishermen's wives. The first, Messing and Reveret's essay "Are Women In Female Jobs For Their Health?" looked at whether or not 'women's jobs' were easier than 'men's jobs' in fish processing in Quebec, and concluded that "...a too-fast workspeed is probably a common characteristic of women's jobs, and that evidence strongly suggests that it may be harmful to their health."²⁶ The division of labour found in B.C. fish processing reinforces this perception, in particular with reference to herring roe popping* and fish washing and patching*.²⁷ There appears to be a similarity in the

physical intensity of the work between Quebec, Atlantic Canada, and B.C.

Cynthia Lamson surveyed 55 shoreworker women in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia and concluded, in part, that "...in 1983, the female fish plant worker is not equal to her male counterpart in terms of opportunity within the plant, or to women in the workforce outside, in terms of job status or working conditions."²⁸ This thesis agrees with the assessment about the relative status of men and women within the plants. Nevertheless, the high level of unionization within B.C. shorework, and the resulting good hourly wages, also suggest that these women were not as disadvantaged as women in Atlantic Canada in relation to the female work force at large.

Finally, Suzan Ilcan analyzed a small eastern fishing community in light of the effect of the available work, which was casual, segmented, and distributed by gender, on the community.²⁹ She spent two and one-half months doing field research in a fishing/fish processing community, and conducted fifty-three household interviews, as well as eight oral histories of the community. She also worked eight days in a plant. In comparison to Ilcan, my ten years' experience in fish processing, and the interviews I recorded, indicate a more long-term and complete identification with the community under study. She made a strong case that women made up the reserve labour force and described the role of unemployment insurance in perpetuating this scheme. Though they did report an accommodation between their fish processing jobs and their home lives, Ilcan did not acknowledge that many, especially those with young children, may well have preferred to be in the part-time or seasonal labour force, where they could fulfill their job obligations and still have time to pursue other aspects of their lives. In contrast, this thesis suggests that this kind of incomplete attachment to the work force may be seen somewhat positively by the women themselves. Since most have few options, they simply have had to make the best of

*Starred words are defined in the glossary at the end of the thesis.

it. The structure of the paid work seems similar on both coasts, despite B.C.'s unique seasonality (due to the runs of salmon) and unionization, indicating a similar accommodation among the women.

The Atlantic Canada literature does provide some examples of gender-specific research but the writings about fish plant workers do not stress the double work day of the women. Rather they stress the unequal treatment the women receive in the plants, or their status as fishermen's wives, but rarely both. The self-perpetuating nature of the combination of the double work day and job segregation within the plants has not been discussed. It has the effect of limiting the choices the women may make regarding which seasons and how much time over a year they are willing to work in the plants. In turn, predictably, some jobs that involve working longer seasons become defined as male jobs, because the men are more free to do the extra work and some of the women -- especially those with young children -- are not able to remain employed longer. The result is a lower annual income level for the women.

In stark contrast to the B.C. literature, the Atlantic Canada fish processing literature did describe the disjunction between men's and women's jobs in the plants, but it did not mention ethnicity as a factor in the distribution of fish plant labour. Although Acadian women do this work, as the film Les Femmes aux Filets³⁰ clearly indicated, the literature did not indicate whether there was also a native Indian component, or a group of black women who worked with fish. Certainly in B.C. the different ethnic groups in fish processing -- native women and immigrant women from many places, as well as native-born caucasian women and others -- had differing perspectives on the work, and different personal and family histories within the industry, as this thesis will show.

Since the primary way fish plant workers on both coasts are separated into groups is by gender, it is important to account for the structure of the labour force

with a theory that allows for such a division. Labour market segmentation theory posits that there can be differing labour markets within an industry, and in fact within a given establishment. Reserve army theory suggests that some workers are hired at low wage rates, and fired, depending on the needs of the industry in general. The existence of callout procedures for fish plant workers would certainly indicate that they are kept waiting to be called for work. This thesis argues that both these theories apply to the sexual division of labour of fish plant workers.

Job segregation by gender is at least in part a response to the double day of labour that women typically experience. There are several aspects to division of the labour market into two (or several) segmented sections,³¹ which happens, in this instance, internally in the plants. (It also occurs between the fishing sector and the shoreworker sector.) The dividing lines along which some workers receive enhanced status and pay, as well as more interesting, challenging or even easier work, are often gender as well as race/ethnicity. As the 1986 United States Committee on Women's Employment and Related Social Issues found, statistical discrimination (defined as "decision making about an individual on the basis of characteristics believed to be typical of the group to which he or she belongs"³²) is one way in which job applicants are streamed according to gender, in that employers believe that the sexes differ on work-related traits, or they perceive that men are more predictable than women (perhaps because they have had more practice in predicting their work performance). To explain why there is division of work by gender, the committee proposed several factors: social processes and cultural assumptions (for example the belief that women should take care of the house and family); physical differences, which may make a difference in some occupations; legal barriers to employment; women's own choices and preferences (inasmuch as they have opportunities to exercise them); and "the distribution of occupations that are available to members of

each sex...[which] is seen to be limited by institutionalized and informal barriers that restrict workers' opportunities."³³

While all women in this sample agreed that job division by gender existed within their fish plants, and some women found this division of labour by gender acceptable, others did not. There are two actions which could be taken in attempts to redress the situation. Either women could seek employment equity, that is, they could apply for and obtain jobs that have traditionally been men's work, or they could demand pay equity, so that the work that they do would be equally valued relative to men's work. In the case of the fish plant, this would mean also receiving the same number of hours of work.

Job segregation by gender is often justified in terms of the relative worth of the work performed by people in each category. In terms of the comparative worth of men's and women's employment, two aspects used to compare the difficulty of the two jobs are relative stress and relative skill levels. Relative stress levels of men's and women's work and home lives will be examined in chapter four.

With regard to perceptions of skill, Jane Gaskell made the point that perceptions of skill are political in nature, and that workers who have more collective power will be successful in defining their areas of expertise as "skilled". She said that "[t]he differences arise in the power of organized male workers, their ability to monopolize access to their skills and the unwillingness of employers to invest in training women." She went on to say,

...the problem for women is not in their skills, but in the way these skills are rewarded. With the same education and skills as a man a woman gets paid less...Skill is a socially constructed category...managing skill definitions is a political process, one that organized workers engage in continually...the notion of skilled work is used in a way that devalues the work women do.³⁴

Her point was that the jobs that men and women did were not intrinsically different in skill level (though they may differ in job content), but that the perceptions of skill

are mediated through collective action, and this has worked to the detriment of women. Men's jobs were perceived as more skilled, even though this was not necessarily so. This is due in part to women's experience of the double day, and the fact that they are occupied in other work as well, albeit unpaid. The comments made by the women in this sample with reference to job segregation by gender (both agreeing and disagreeing that men's jobs were more difficult) will be discussed in chapter three. It is also true that any 'differentness', in terms of language, ethnicity, race, age, or gender, can be used as a labour force segmentation dividing line, but the argument of this thesis is that gender is the primary division in this particular community.

One of the primary characteristics of a reserve army of labour is that it is employed and laid off in response to the needs of capital. Clearly the female fish plant work force fits that definition. The male workers do too, but mobility between the two sectors -- men's and women's employment -- is severely limited at present. The two preconditions of a reserve army of labour are cheapness and availability, and the major condition is competition,³⁵ (that is, there must be more workers available for employment than there are jobs at any given time). All three of these conditions are met by women in the fish plant work force. There is no shortage of women available to work in fish processing, as the lines of people outside plants applying to be hired at the start of each season attest.

As Harry Braverman says in Labor and Monopoly Capital, (which forms the basis of much of the following discussion), women form by far the greatest sector of the reserve army of labour:

...in a process which cuts across racial and national lines, the female portion of the population has become the prime supplementary reservoir of labor. In all the most rapidly growing sectors of the working class, women make up the majority, and in some instances the overwhelming majority, of the workers. Women form the ideal reservoir of labor for the new mass occupations. The barrier which

confines women to much lower pay scales is reinforced by the vast numbers in which they are available to capital.³⁶

The sheer numbers of women who are available to work depresses the wages in their specific occupations. Fish processing is 'blue-collar' women's work, not 'pink', but it certainly is a mass occupation in the sense that there is a need for large numbers of unskilled workers routinely.

The problem with this analysis, when it is combined with a segmented labour force is that the effect of a reserve army of labour has theoretically been to depress wages for all sectors of the labour force.³⁷ If the reserve army of labour is confined to certain occupations, then its effect may not be to depress all wages. However, according to Connelly, the long-term effect of segregation of women into low-wage occupations is for men to run the risk of having their jobs reclassified into the lower-wage bracket.³⁸ Inspecting salmon after they are washed and before they are canned is one task that is alternately performed by men and women, though the stratification of wages by gender is so strong in fish plants that differing rates of pay are often maintained, even for individuals working side by side, evidence of the differing treatment received by men and women in the fish plants. An argument for equal pay, however, often results in a management threat to reduce the men's rate to that of the women's.

Braverman states that women form a reserve army of labour "for the 'female occupations'" specifically, indicating that he does acknowledge the significance of labour market segmentation:

...This relative surplus population, the industrial reserve army, takes a variety of forms in modern society, including the unemployed; the sporadically employed; the part-time employed; the mass of women who, as houseworkers, form a reserve for the "female occupations"; the armies of migrant labor, both agricultural and industrial; the black population with its extraordinarily high rates of unemployment; and the foreign reserves of labor. (emphasis mine)³⁹

Like a majority of this sample, women who are employed cyclically in the fish plants

are often housewives as well.

If we examine further the categories of reserve army of labour established by Braverman, it is clear that the fish plant women are not latent (they are not part of an agricultural population), and they are not stagnant (they work sometimes and not other times, but they do not "dwell...in the world of pauperism"). They constitute instead a 'floating' population of workers.

"The floating form is found in the centers of industry and employment, in the form of workers who move from job to job, attracted and repelled (that is to say, hired and discarded) by the movements of technology and capital, and suffering a certain amount of unemployment in the course of this motion."⁴⁰

Fish plant workers have the freedom to move from job to job, though they lose their seniority if they do. More to the point, however, they are hired and discarded several times annually by their specific employer, even if they stay with one plant.

[For the floating form of the reserve army of labor]...[a]n ordinary working life for many workers now consists of movement among a considerable number of jobs, so that such workers are in turn part of the employed and the reserve labor populations. This has been reflected in the system of unemployment insurance, which provides for periods of unemployment at a reduced wage with monies collected during employment; it is in part a safeguard against the economic, social and political effects of widespread and prolonged unemployment, and in part a recognition of the roles workers play, now as part of the employed and now as part of the reserve armies of labor.⁴¹

The major difference between this army of floating unemployed workers, and fish plant workers, whether they be men or women, is that fish plant people do not move from job to job. By and large, fish plant workers remain attached -- at least by promise of work -- to specific plants. They do not need to float from job to job because they know when they will be rehired (at least approximately) and they can get unemployment insurance in the meantime. They form a pool of floating reserve workers who are institutionalized within the fish processing system by capital and government.

This institutionalization has been commented on before now. Patricia

Connelly refers to women who work only in the domestic sphere as an "institutionalized inactive reserve army of labour".⁴² I would alter that phrase, in this case, to remove the word 'inactive', which is used in her case to refer to domestic labour as opposed to commodity production. Women employed in fish plants -- and many other places, for example the garment shops of Charlene Gannage's Double Day Double Bind⁴³ -- are active; they are clearly performing both unpaid and paid labour. The particular experience of women in the garment industry is relevant here because it has been clearly shown that gender is a category that is used to divide the workers within that unionized industry. Double Day, Double Bind takes up the questions of job stratification within the industry, and the double work day of women. My argument is that both of these factors are paralleled to some extent in fish processing.

Both the condition that employment is divided by gender, and the condition that employment is erratic and at the behest of capital, are clearly in evidence in the structure of fish processing. We have here a segmented labour force, within which the workers regularly become a 'relative surplus population'. "Thus the mass of employment cannot be separated from its associated mass of unemployment."⁴⁴

The fish plant reserve army of labour has a history of one hundred twenty years, and while the industry has been (and continues to be) mechanized, the companies' need to employ seasonal labour has been a consistent feature of the west coast. Given that these capitalists and these workers know that the jobs will recur seasonally, the unemployment insurance system is a suitable source of income for these workers during the off-season. It means that they have an income, however minimal, and the need to look for another job is subsequently less. As sociologist Suzan Ilcan says, with reference to Nova Scotia,

...[U]nemployment Insurance benefits can be seen to subsidize low wages in the [fish processing] industry as well as to contribute to the

maintenance of a reserve pool of labour in the community.⁴⁵

This institutionalized underemployment in fish processing, which affects women more than men because they tend to get less work annually, has the effect of stabilizing the work force and giving workers a minimal income. These people spend as much as eight months a year as unemployed members of the reserve army of labour, and four months or less employed. The companies exploit the system in order to retain a core, at least, of experienced workers who will return to the plants annually, without having to make any financial or other commitments to those workers. The workers occasionally say that they too appreciate the time off, as they can do other things, but it is directly in response to the needs of the companies (and, originally, to the amount of fish caught) that they are working or on call.

Reinforcing this institutionalization of fish plant work is its unionization. Since this has historically led to higher wages for all sectors in the industry in British Columbia, when compared to both the east coast and to the nearby United States, it has the effect of stabilizing the work force. Largely because of issues like pay disparity, job segregation, and erratic callout to work, fish plant workers have made the British Columbia industry the most unionized in the country.

The methodology involved in this study was different from Charlene Gannage's research in that her method was exploratory, involving a case study with interviews, visits to the shop, and discussions of the trade with union representatives. It represented an excellent attempt to "develop...theory from concrete empirical research" and "...to capture the richly textured lives of trade-union women..."⁴⁶ As she explained, "the case-study methodology seemed more expedient than survey techniques or participant observation, because it facilitates the understanding of the subject from the perspective of the insider."⁴⁷ Time spent with the working women, both at home and at work, facilitated her understanding of their experience.

Elsewhere, other scholars have written of the need to be connected to a group both socially and over time in order to create an accurate "action history" of an event in which the group takes part.⁴⁸ While it is likely that several of the people who have written about fishing and shorework have had personal experience in the industry, I do not know of any academic work that was written by a shoreworker. An insider's perspective on the community can provide a portrait that is uniquely sensitive to the lives of that community's members. In conducting the research for this thesis I have relied on ten seasons spent as a shoreworker in groundfish processing and salmon canning. My lengthy experience in fish processing prior to this research indicates, in hindsight, that I had "gone native" with a vengeance.

Though I remained employed as a shoreworker until 1990, I was not a typical member of the seniority list in any of the plants in which I worked. Notwithstanding the fact that I spent more than three years on a groundfish processing line in Prince Rupert, I did not learn to fillet (which is the task that most women aspire to as it receives slightly increased pay), as I was not fond of the knife. Following that, I worked non-union in an isolated salmon freezer plant on the Stikine River, where I was the only woman in a freezer crew of five, although some women on the Stikine fished with their husbands. After a two year hiatus from the industry, in 1985 I hired on at a fish plant on the Vancouver waterfront that was setting up a new night shift, working nights in August canning salmon for five years.

The length of my stay in the industry was average but not my experience. Besides my fish plant employment, I pursued an education at the university level during this time, and did other work every year. I am not a member of a racial or ethnic minority. I am not an immigrant, and I did not have English as a second language. I define myself as middle class, and many of these women as working class, though many of them would only go so far as to say, 'Prince Rupert (if they

were from there) is a working class town.' In contrast to many women in fish processing, I believe that women should have equal access to the jobs currently held by men.

These differences in social status resulted in two different, but interconnected ways that I was treated within the fish plants. At my first plant I was elected as chief shop steward. At the third, I was hired originally as a grader and given responsibility over several tasks that were normally performed by men. For example, I was allowed to train on a forklift. After my first season, I was not kept 'on the line'; I did not wash fish for a living. Secondly, I was not part of the women's social network. I did not have a husband or children, and, at least in Vancouver, I did not go drinking or socialize with the other workers. Both my treatment within the plants and my different experiences outside them created a distance between myself and many shoreworking women. At the same time, I was passionately involved in the working life and the union actions that took place within the fish plants, and at the time I felt very much a part of that world. I was, however, uniquely equipped by my academic training in anthropology, sociology and women's studies, to step back from the work and examine it critically. I believe that much of the accuracy of what is presented here results from having enough inside knowledge of the industry to do a personal 'reality check' from time to time.

These differences between myself and many shoreworkers were increased when the sample of women I interviewed was taken into consideration. The interviewees had, in general, much longer histories within fish processing than the average, or than I did. As they stayed in the industry for decades, their experiences and knowledge were different from the majority of fish workers. This may be because they had fewer options, due to the requirements of their homes, or of their race/ethnicity, age, command of English, education level, or location. Prince Rupert,

for example, has a large number of fish plants, and few other options for work for women. Whether because of necessity or choice, these women showed a high level of commitment to the industry.

The women in this sample have longer work histories within shorework than the average, which means they have more seniority than many women and therefore they are employed more of the year, and perhaps at a higher rate. They may have a more accurate perception of how fish plant work happens, both in terms of natural constraints on the catch of fish, and the social structure of shorework, than women with fewer seasons on the belts would have. It may also be that these women have stayed with shorework because of a lack of personal options, since the work is far from pleasant.

Central to the arguments in this thesis were these interviews with twenty-three women, of seven or more ethnic groups,⁴⁹ who worked in fish plants. The interviews involved a complex interplay of personal knowledge and experience contributed by both the interviewer and the interviewee. Explicit in these interviews is the fact that, as sociologists Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna have stated, "[w]e are an ingredient of our own research."⁵⁰ Janet Finch discussed the politics of doing feminist sociology by interviewing women, and states:

However effective a male interviewer might be at getting women interviewees to talk, there is still necessarily an additional dimension when the interviewer is also a woman, because both parties share a subordinate structural position by virtue of their gender. This creates the possibility that a particular kind of identification will develop.⁵¹

Finch goes on to describe the intricacies of this identification, and says it has partly to do with "placing" the interviewer as a woman in terms of marriage and motherhood. In my case the identification was between two women workers, rather than in terms of our private lives. Some of the women I interviewed knew me, personally or by reputation, because I had been a worker and an active union

representative, and several of them knew I already held strong opinions about women's rights to access to non-traditional jobs. This knowledge coloured more than one interview, in that several women pointed out specific instances of women (including themselves) doing non-traditional work, while at least two other women vociferously defended the traditional division of labour. Besides these six women I had previously worked with, there were eleven subjects in Prince Rupert whose relationship with me was more formal in the sense that they did not at first know I was also a shoreworker, and initially related to me only as a researcher. These eleven women tended to ask me about my personal life, confirming Finch's observation that women will try to find common ground with other women.

Membership Roles in Field Research, by Patricia and Peter Adler, describes the situation of a researcher studying a group with which she is already familiar as "opportunistic", which I take to mean applying the research methods to a situation with which I am already familiar, in hopes of providing a more in-depth analysis. Further, a researcher who has previously belonged to a group (or who wholeheartedly joins it in the course of research) is described as a "complete member researcher", complete in the sense that her identification with her informants is total. In defense of this intense involvement with the group under study, the Adlers say,

We believe that the native experience does not destroy but, rather, enhances the data-gathering process. Data gathering does not occur only through the detached observational role, but through the subjectively immersed role as well.⁵²

The difficult task for a researcher involved with her subjects is to become detached enough to examine the data critically. Academic training in anthropology, sociology, history and women's studies has provided me with the tools and the opportunity to step back from my involvement with the shoreworker community, and it has given me the latitude to examine it from a new perspective. The opportunity to "straddle" the two worlds, of working-class labouring women and academe, has

resulted in a unique viewpoint on the issues described in this thesis. Specifically it has become apparent to me that the pride and positive sense of self that shoreworker women express among themselves often do not appear in works that examine them from the outside.

It is crucial to this enterprise that the respondents be the working women themselves. Personnel managers, union staff, and a museum director were interviewed, but they were not tape recorded, and their insights were useful as background rather than as primary sources of perceptions of fish plant work. Tape recordings of individual's stories provide unique opportunities to study the powerless of society, in terms of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and/or language, because the recordings capture their speaking voice without being obtrusive (at least usually) and provide an opportunity for them to tell their own stories. In England, oral historian Paul Thompson sums up the advantages of this method:

Since the nature of most existing records is to reflect the standpoint of authority, it is not surprising that the judgement of history has more often than not vindicated the wisdom of the powers that be. Oral history by contrast makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now also be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated. It provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account. In so doing, oral history has radical implications for the social message of history as a whole.⁵³

The women I interviewed fit the description of powerless in many ways. The well-worn phrase "working poor" applies here: the wages are good during the seasons, true, but much of the year is spent laid off. For most, waged work is not an available choice in the off-season. Although I would characterize these women as underprivileged, it is significant that many of them would take exception to that definition. Even though their income is not stable, large, or under their control, and the needs and pace of the work place are also largely outside their control, they believe that they have successfully organized their financial lives. There is a dichotomy between the difficult realities involved in these women's shoreworking

lives, and their perceptions that they were living and coping well.

In this study, I take on the roles of both ethnographer and interviewer. While I was not taking field notes during my working days, the flavour of the work and incidents that occurred during my shifts were never far from my mind. In the sense any information obtained during work was not actively sought, but rather freely given by co-workers in a casual way, this thesis may claim to be more accurately descriptive of work interactions than a more self-conscious research project (on the part of either the researcher or the respondents) would have been. Secondly, an opportunistic member-researcher such as myself is more clearly bound by the rules and mores of the workplace than someone who consciously joins a group in order to study it. In my case, when the bell went in the fish plant to end coffee break, I was as bound as any other worker to return to my place on the line.

The solidarity that I felt with the women extended to editing the transcripts of the interviews in accordance with their wishes. Several topics, particularly interpersonal conflict on the job, drinking (on and off the job), and difficult relationships with husbands were removed from the interviews at the interviewees' request. Actual amounts of money earned was seldom volunteered by the women, and I never asked for it, as this would have been viewed as overly intrusive.

The women I interviewed were chosen in consultation with the two fishplant unions that exist in B.C., and through earlier contacts made "on the floor". Both unions were generous in suggesting names of individuals. The administrator of PRASCU (Prince Rupert Amalgamated Shoreworkers and Clerks Union) in Prince Rupert directed me to the personnel managers of the two largest plants in the town, who both contributed their own insights and suggested interviewees. One woman who worked on nets and was about to retire was interviewed on company time, an unheard-of perk. Because I had been personally active in the UFAWU (United

Fishermen and Allied workers Union) in Prince Rupert, several of the interviewees were my co-workers from an earlier time. The UFAWU shoreworker organizer in Vancouver gave me names of individuals who were known to her personally, and predictably, the bias in that sample was towards union-active women. Subjects for interviews were then selected from among these suggestions. Many of the selection decisions were pragmatic, to do with the women's availability to be interviewed, due to either workplace or home demands on their time.

All the women were generous with their time and insights. Interviews were conducted in Prince Rupert, Vancouver and Steveston. Prince Rupert contains the largest complement of shoreworkers -- fully one-third of the UFAWU shoreworker membership and all the PRASCU union members from the local plant of the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative. Seventeen of the twenty-three women who were interviewed worked there. In contrast, the Vancouver local accounts for 30 per cent of the UFAWU's shoreworkers, while Steveston holds 22.3 per cent. The other six interviewees were from these two areas. While some findings are plant-specific (for example, one woman said that in her plant, the Italians 'rule the roost', which is not universally true), much of the discussion of job stratification, money and the double work day was general to many interviews. The two unions were quite different, in that the UFAWU membership is 50% fishermen, while PRASCU was specifically organized against a fishermen's co-operative. The relative importance of shoreworker issues varied considerably between the two.

Some of the interviews had been arranged by the administrator of PRASCU before I arrived in Prince Rupert, and I have no information on those women's first reactions to the possibility of being interviewed. On more than one occasion, women did decline. One woman called the shoreworker organizer of the UFAWU and asked, "What have you gotten me into now?" The organizer's response was that I was a

shoreworker as well as a researcher, and this seemed to allay some of the disquiet this woman felt. In terms of access to the community, and willingness to be interviewed on the part of the women, I believe that the fact that I am also a shoreworker was crucial.

My shorework sample came from the north coast of British Columbia and from the Lower Mainland. Prince Rupert is a dual-industry town, depending on fishing/fish plant work and on the pulp mill. The shoreworker community is much more visible there in the way it affects the rhythm of life in the town than is true, obviously, for Vancouver. Steveston is a small town too, but it is part of the heavily-populated suburb of Richmond, and part of Greater Vancouver. The number of canneries in Steveston has been significantly reduced since the early part of this century, and Steveston's fishing history is becoming a tourist attraction. Fish plant workers there are now in a minority. Vancouver and North Vancouver both still have fish plants along parts of their shores, but the commercial activity in the harbour dwarfs any effect the fishing boats and plants would have. Some people, often native Indians, do come to Vancouver to work the season in the fish plants, but it is equally likely that people leave Vancouver to work in Prince Rupert during the season.

The interviews were structured as free-flowing life history and work history accounts. Besides allowing women to bring up issues they are particularly interested in themselves, this method allowed them to focus or expand on general questions more than a tightly-organized interview format would have done. While the interviews are perhaps shorter than they would ideally have been, varying from twenty minutes to ninety, I felt it was more important to describe shoreworkers and their lives in more general terms than in-depth interviews with fewer individuals would have accomplished. In short, a minimum of structure was incorporated into

the interviews, beyond the necessary tasks of labelling the tapes, running the machine, and obtaining releases. I did have a list of interview topics to touch on, in order to maintain consistency between interviews, but I did not adhere to it strictly. One topic common to most interviews was the gendered division of labour, and the women's response to it. Other topics included work place issues such as mechanization and free trade. The women's personal backgrounds, and their experiences with domestic labour, often particularly the need for and availability of daycare, were also common topics. Unfortunately, the language of the interviews was limited to English, and this did constrain more than one interviewee. One Portuguese woman stated that she had lots to say about fish plants in her language, but not so much in English, while I found it occasionally difficult to understand what another woman said.

While I made some effort to interview women from different communities, my sample included more native Indians (ten out of twenty-three of the interviewees were native or part-native) and fewer Asiatic women than holds true for the industry in general. More of the interviewees were located in Prince Rupert than elsewhere, and it is in the north, where Prince Rupert is the centre for fish plant activity, that a larger proportion of the fish plant workers are native. One possible result of this imbalance in the interviewees is that this thesis describes fish plant life more accurately for Prince Rupert and its native women than the industry and its workers elsewhere. I believe, however, that there are common experiences in the industry, which unite women in different locations and of different backgrounds, and it is these commonalities which I have attempted to draw out.

The main characteristic that native women shared, when compared to the rest of the sample, was that they tended to have more family connections within fish processing and fishing, both currently and over the previous generations. They

described kin networks that were much more flexible and supportive. In terms of childcare, for example, older girls reported caring for several families' babies while their mothers worked and their fathers fished. It is likely that these networks were established out of necessity, in that there were few options and no services in rural canneries.

Another factor in native women's experience of fish processing that I believe is crucial is their experience of racism. Certainly cannery housing was racially segregated, and tasks were historically both racially- and gender-specific.⁵⁴ The women I interviewed downplayed any references to race, and I believe this was because I am a white woman and would not understand. Since fish processing is not pleasant, or well-rewarded, native women with several generations of family history in the industry are perhaps there because they have fewer options and fewer social supports than members of other racial and ethnic communities.

All of the women who were interviewed signed releases. Several of them asked to hear the tape and this was complied with on the spot; several others read their transcripts. One woman asked that her original tape be returned to her, and, after it was transcribed, this was done.

These interviews were conducted between two individuals who knew the work structure and terminology involved in fish processing. While some attempt was made to define terms as they were used in the interviews, this was not always successful. As a result, a glossary of terms specific to fish processing has been appended to this document.

The interview tapes were transcribed verbatim by three people who were very accurate, although occasionally they found some terms confusing. I checked accuracy by replaying a tape while reading a copy of the transcript, for each transcription. I asked these other people to transcribe the interviews in order to give me some

distance from them. More than once, the transcriber's understanding of the conversation was more accurate than my own, and I would have not found the inaccuracies if I had transcribed the interviews myself. Their transcriptions also prompted discussions and input from the three listeners. They contributed new perceptions of the information, and were quick to ask for explanations of unfamiliar words or descriptions of work, indicating where explanation was needed.

To aid analysis, the interviews were sorted by topic. The categories included:

- Demographic information for each individual.
- Work structure and routines.
- Work injuries.
- Union activity.
- Plant mechanization.
- Farm fish.
- Perceptions of women's place in the plants, with special mention of the box loft.
- Perceptions of the presence of ethnic groups in the plants, particularly the native population.⁵⁵
- Discussion of family history and home life and how work and home interconnect.

The emphasis on both the structure and experience of paid work and on the interconnectedness of the family and paid labour, rather than the domestic workplace itself, was not intended to downplay the importance of the double day many women experience. The hours spent at work, and the financial arrangements people make because of their paycheques and unemployment insurance claims, are basic to their lives. Since the demands of the fishplant are not flexible for the women, they must cope with arbitrary schedules and demands in order to retain their seniority in the plant, as well as meeting the needs of their families when possible. The fact that they are only employed part time, and are therefore theoretically free to do the work

required at home, is undermined by the inflexible demand of the fishplant callout.

Chapter two describes the structure of fish processing and the characteristics of the workers, relying largely on statistical data from the federal government, which is shown to be partially inaccurate. Chapter three evaluates the differing work lives of the individuals in the fish plant. Chapter four describes the experience of the work. The fifth chapter describes the double work day of women, and the connection between their wage labour and their work at home. The central argument of the thesis is that the stratification of the labour force into men's and women's jobs, and the smaller number of hours and lesser pay available to women reinforce and are reinforced by the double day of labour that women commonly experience. It is their perceptions of this double workload which it is important to describe here.

- 1 Statistics Canada, Census of Manufactures, catalogue 32-250B 1021 (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services Canada, 1988), 1.
- 2 Statistics Canada, catalogue 93-157 (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services Canada, 1986), 290 indicates that 1,065 men and 2,175 women worked since January 1985 in 'fish canning, curing and packing occupations' in British Columbia. Given that fish work is so highly seasonal, and that the census records those who identify themselves as fish plant workers, a case could be made that the number of occasional employees is actually underrepresented in the statistics.
- 3 J.C. Lawrence, "An Historical Account of the Salmon Canning Industry, 1870-1900," (B.A. Graduating Essay, University of British Columbia, 1951).
- 4 Percy Gladstone, "Industrial Disputes in the Commercial Fisheries of British Columbia," (Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1959).
- 5 Anders Sandberg, "A Study of Canadian Political Economy: A Critical Review and the Case of the B.C. Salmon Canning Industry, 1870-1914" (Master's thesis, University of Victoria, 1979), 213.
- 6 David Reid, The Development of the Fraser River Salmon Canning Industry 1885-1913 (Vancouver: Economics and Sociology Unit, Northern Operations Branch, Fisheries and Marine Service, Pacific Region, Department of the Environment, July 1973).
- 7 H. K. Ralston, "John Sullivan Deas: A Black Entrepreneur in B.C. Salmon Canning," B.C. Studies 32 (Winter 1976-77): 64. "Patterns of Trade and Investment on the B.C. Coast, 1867-1892: The Case of the B.C. Salmon Canning Industry," B.C. Studies 1 (Winter 1968-69): 40. Also H. K. Ralston "The 1900 Strike of Fraser River Sockeye Salmon Fishermen," (Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1965).
- 8 H. K. Ralston "The 1900 Strike of Fraser River Sockeye Salmon Fishermen" (Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1965). This thesis, while it does discuss ethnicity and socialism in the industry, does not specifically refer to shoreworkers as it is about a strike that was fought over the issue of licencing fishers.
- 9 James Conley, "Relations of Production and Collective Action in the Salmon Fishery, 1900-1925", in Workers, Capital and the State in British Columbia: selected papers ed. Rennie Warburton and David Coburn (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 1988), 86-116.
- 10 Brian Hayward, "The Development of Relations of Production in the B.C. Salmon Fishery" (Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1981) and Marvin Shaffer, An Economic Study of the B.C. Salmon Canning Industry (Vancouver: Department of Fisheries Canada, B.C. Ministry of the Environment, 1979).
- 11 Patricia Marchak, Neil Guppy and John McMullan, Uncommon Property: the Fishing and Fish Processing Industries in British Columbia (Agincourt, Ontario: Methuen Publications, 1987), 5.
- 12 Duncan Stacey, Sockeye and Tinplate: Technological Change in the Fraser River

Canning Industry 1871-1912, B.C. Provincial Museum Heritage Record No. 15 (Victoria: B.C. Provincial Museum, 1982), 20.

13 Stacey, 20. His Masters thesis is on the same topic.

14 Stacey, 23.

15 Dianne Newell, "Industrial Archaeological Survey of B.C. Salmon Canneries Project: UBC/SFU: A Final Report on the Historical Research and Analysis Aspects of the Project" (submitted to the B.C. Heritage Trust, February, 1986), 24.

16 _____ ed., The Development of the Pacific Salmon-Canning Industry: A Grown Man's Game (Montreal and Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).

17 E.N. Higginbottom, "The Changing Geography of Salmon Canning in British Columbia, 1870-1931" (Master's thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1989).

18 Alicja Muszynski, "The Creation and Organization of Cheap Wage Labour in the British Columbia Fish Processing Industry" PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1987, iii.

19 Muszynski, 8.

20 Muszynski, 169.

21 Statistics Canada, catalogue 93-157 (1986 census), 290.

22 Dona Lee Davis, "'Shore Skippers' and 'Grass Widows': Active and Passive Women's Roles in a Newfoundland Fishery," in To Work and to Weep, Women in Fishing Economies, ed. Jane Nadel-Klein and Dona Lee Davis, Social and Economic Papers #18 (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1988), 211-229.

23 Marilyn Porter, "'Women and Old Boats': The Sexual Division of Labour in a Newfoundland Outport," in Gender and Society: creating a Canadian women's sociology, ed. Arlene McLaren (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988), 169-183.

24 Porter, 180.

25 Porter, 181.

26 Messing and Reveret, "Are Women in Female Jobs For Their Health? A Study of Working Conditions and Health Effects in the Fish Processing Industry in Quebec," International Journal of Health Services 13:4 (1983), conclusion.

27 Robert Brubaker, Clyde Hertzman, Andrew Jin, Chris van Netten, and Helen Ward, "Prevalence of Muscle Tendon and Nerve Compression Disorders in the Hand and Wrist of Roe Production Workers in Fish Processing Plants," prepared for the Joint Committee on Repetitive Motion Injuries, project funded by Joint Committee of the Fish Processors' Association and the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, June 1990, summary, states that "Evidence from this study indicates that

short term exposure to roe 'popping' results in a 3.1 times greater risk among exposed subjects to develop case definition CTS [carpal tunnel syndrome]."

28 Cynthia Lamson, "On The Line: Women and Fish Plant Jobs in Atlantic Canada" Relations Industrielles 41:1 (1986), 156.

29 Suzan Ilcan, "Women and Casual Work in the Nova Scotian Fish Processing Industry" Atlantis 11:2 (Spring 1986), 23-34.

30 Claudette Lajoie (director), Les Femmes aux Filets, producer Eric Michel, NFB # 1-0287-068, 1987.

31 Richard Edwards, in Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 163 passim, talks about this division of labour into primary and secondary markets, and points out that, in terms of the secondary labour market, "What marks these jobs as secondary is the casual nature of the employment. The work almost never requires previous training or education beyond basic literacy. Few skills are required and few can be learned. Such jobs offer low pay and virtually no job security...The only thing that a worker brings to a secondary job is labour power; the worker is treated and paid accordingly." (167) While his examples are restricted to jobs that are held by men (168), he describes an accurate reality for fish plant employees, except that his assumption that this low-status, low-paid, seasonal work is also unskilled is arguable.

32 Barbara F. Reskin and Heidi I. Hartmann, editors, Women's Work, Men's Work: Sex Segregation on the Job (Washington: National Academy Press, 1986), 42.

33 Barbara F. Reskin and Heidi I. Hartmann, editors, Women's Work, Men's Work: Sex Segregation on the Job (Washington: National Academy Press, 1986), 37-38.

34 Jane Gaskell, "Conceptions of Skill and the Work of Women: Some Historical and Political Issues," in The Politics of Diversity: Feminism, Marxism and Nationalism (London: Verso, 1986), 362.

35 Patricia Connelly, Last Hired First Fired: Women and the Canadian Work Force (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1978), 41.

36 Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century (New York, London: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 385.

37 Connelly, 40.

38 Connelly, 40.

39 Braverman, 386.

40 Braverman, 386.

41 Braverman, 387.

42 Connelly, 26.

43 Charlene Gannage, Double Day, Double Bind: Women Garment Workers (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986), 177-180.

44 Braverman, 386.

45 Ilcan, 32.

46 Charlene Gannage, Double Day, Double Bind: Women Garment Workers (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986), 24.

47 Gannage, 24.

48 Kim Howells and Merfyn Jones, "Oral History and Contemporary History," Oral History 11:2 (1983), 16.

49 The 'or more' refers to women who belong to two groups by origin, or who are members of specific native Indian bands. These two categories of women would expand the number of categories.

50 Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna, Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods From the Margins (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1989), foreword.

51 Janet Finch, "The ethics and politics of interviewing women," Social Researching: Politics, Problems, Practice, ed. C. Bell and H. Roberts (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 76.

52 Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, Membership Roles in Field Research, Sage University Paper series on Qualitative Research, Volume 6 (Newbury Park, CA: Sage), 84.

53 Paul Thompson, The Voice of the Past, 2nd. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 6.

54 Rolf Knight, Indians At Work (Vancouver: New Star Press, 1978), 88.

55 Ten of the twenty-three interviewees were native or part native.

CHAPTER TWO: HOW THE WEST GUTS FISH: THE STRUCTURE OF FISH PROCESSING

Fish work stinks. No matter what the species (salmon, herring, groundfish, halibut or shellfish) or how you are processing them (freezing and packaging them, packing cans, or specialty treatment such as smoking or salting) a fish plant has a unique smell, especially if the waste fish and parts are going to a nearby reduction plant. When a fish plant is operating, there is blood and fish guts everywhere, both in the bins they should be in and on the floor. When fish are being cut up, or when they are being washed, cold water is running at each place on the line, into troughs which carry away the waste and onto the floor. Rubber aprons and gloves, and rubber boots without holes are necessary. In a freezer plant, it can be cold, partly because fresh fish is kept on ice.¹

As Rolf Knight says, "Whatever else it was, cannery work was factory work...Cannery work proceeded on a disassembly line basis...Cannery workers required stamina as well as speed. It was dirty, smelly, wet and tiring work."²

The work itself is similar to factory work anywhere -- physical and repetitive, with bells ringing to mark breaks and a time clock to 'punch in' and 'punch out' on -- with two distinctions. One is, fish pieces are cold and mushy to cope with, and another is that fish work is an 'on-call' occupation. When there are fish, you work, sometimes more than twelve hours a day for several weeks. No fish means you are laid off.³

This chapter outlines the structure of fish processing. The relative size and makeup of the British Columbia industry are examined, and a brief history of mechanization and rationalization on the part of the companies is sketched. Both mechanization and rationalization tend to reduce the amount of available work. A description of the yearly and daily routine of fish processing follows, as does information about relative wages. Finally the characteristics of the work force, including ethnicity, gender, age, and rate of unionization are described. The sample of workers interviewed for this research is then compared to these averages. The racial, ethnic, gender and age makeup of the workers that remain employed, the length of time they have spent in shorework, and the jobs they perform are variable, but they are divided along predictable lines. "Statistical discrimination"⁴ is one way that jobs are divided among workers, by characteristics ascribed to their group rather than by individual skill. While the fish plant labour force has become smaller over time, because of technological changes, women and racial or ethnic minority men, and often the young, continue to be slotted into particular tasks because of what they are, rather than who they are. The overwhelming evidence is that the division of labour is consistently reinforced with the new-hires, with individuals slotted into particular tasks at the hiring desk. The UFAWU wage scale shows labour groups 1 (general labour), 2 (mostly machine feeders and therefore generally women), 3 (butchers, cutters and inspectors -- often men), and 'special categories' (forklift drivers, for example). The wages increase as the numbers become larger. Some of the jobs are listed as sex-specific: retort man, tallyman and binman, for example. Conversely, ethnicity is no longer a necessary condition for employment in particular areas.

The number of fish plant employees is significant. Fish processing is almost as large an industry as fishing itself. In 1986, fishing and trapping accounted for

245.2 million dollars at factor cost (which is comparable to value added) in British Columbia, compared to 213.6 million "total activity in fish products, value added."⁵ Both these figures represent the amount of money available to the fishermen and/or companies after all expenses and all sales. Fishing and the fish products industry are approximately monetarily equal in size, and the two together make up about 1% of B.C.'s Gross Domestic Product.

Fish processing is larger than other food processing industries in British Columbia. For instance, the meat and meat products industry was not quite two-thirds the size of fish processing.⁶ Not surprisingly, fish products contribute substantially to the local economy, especially in coastal areas.

In 1986, forty-seven establishments actually processed fish in B.C.⁷ The fish processing sector consists of large firms, dominated by B.C. Packers. These firms have consolidated fish processing (which is mostly salmon canning) into the larger population centres over the last ninety years. B.C. Packers holds the lion's share of the processing capacity on the west coast; other concerns are relatively smaller, though several each include a number of operations. Workers can move from one plant to another in hopes of finding more work, though they lose their seniority with every change. This consolidation into a relatively few plants, which mostly occurred between 1902 and the 1980s, came about because of technological change, with the invention of better refrigeration for fish boats, and machines that mechanized the hand processes of butchering the salmon, filling the cans, and fish washing.

At peak salmon canning season in August, 1988, 6,400 workers were employed in "Fishery Products Industries,"⁸ a category which included all fish processing, not only salmon, and all workers, including men and women, and both salaried and hourly-paid. By comparison, in 1986, the number of licensed commercial fish vessels was 6,792, and the number of commercial fishing licences issued was 19,461, though

each licence does not mean a fisherman is employed.⁹ Shore work runs a close second to fishing in terms of value added, while the number of jobs provided in fishing is larger.

The fish processing companies themselves are quite closely and comfortably interconnected. Several negotiate jointly for a contract with the UFAWU. This has the effect of standardizing employment practices among employers, so that workers quickly find themselves in similar situations if they change plants. The United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union has documented the ties between these companies, and is quite concerned that B.C. Packers will become a bona fide monopoly instead of the major player it is now. One UFAWU study revealed that British Columbia Packers Limited

caught 10 percent of the entire 1981 salmon catch with vessels it owned or controlled. It processed fully 42 percent of the salmon catch. It processed 25 percent of all herring landed and 30 percent of all other fish. Single-handed, it accounted for 37 percent of all B.C. fish production.¹⁰

B.C. Packers is owned in turn by George Weston Company, whose food warehousing companies in B.C. include Kelly-Douglas wholesalers.¹¹ The fact that B.C. Packers is vertically and multi-nationally incorporated gives it stability and resources that are the envy of the other processors. In fact, B.C. Packers is a multinational company with interests in various part of the world. Cans of 'Cloverleaf' tuna, for instance, come from Thailand and the Philippines.

Almost as well-established is the Canadian Fishing Company. In 1980, Canadian Fish sold many of its assets, including Oceanside Plant in Prince Rupert, to B.C. Packers, reducing its market share considerably. Canadian Fish was owned 85.8% by the New England Fishing Company (Nefco) of the United States, which went bankrupt in 1982. In 1984, Canadian Fish was bought at auction by Jim Pattison to supply his Overwaitea chain.¹² The sole director and officer of Canadian

Fish is David J. Rowntree, legal counsel for the Jim Pattison Group.¹³ Other processing companies in British Columbia include J.S. MacMillan Fish and Ocean Fish, which appear to be family-run companies.¹⁴ According to a union source, Ocean Fish has become the second largest fish processing operation.¹⁵ A number of mid-size and small concerns also exist but they remain minor players in the industry.

Another source of competition is the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative Association.¹⁶ The Co-op is a fishers' organization, traditionally dominated by trollers. Currently its Board of Directors consists of Prince Rupert fishermen. The theory behind the Co-op is that the producers can band together and market their own product, retaining more of the value-added from sale of the product for themselves. However, the processing workers are not members of the Co-op, and are in fact unionized against their employer. Wages at the Co-op are on average only ten cents an hour more than wages in other union plants, a fact which suggests either that these workers are not considered members of the co-op or that the Co-op is in financial difficulty. This latter possibility is reinforced by the fact that the Co-op has cut back on the amount of fish it buys, and the amount of work available to its shoreworkers, in the last year.¹⁷ The instability in the Co-op may lead to increased concentration of fish processing capacity.

The reason fish processing is largely controlled by these few companies has to do with its history of industry rationalization. In the late 1800s, fish plants were small one-line buildings, where salmon was cut up and the cans were filled by hand. In 1905, E. A. Smith invented the Smith Butchering Machine (the Iron Butcher), still used today to head and gut the salmon carcasses.¹⁸ This caused the first major work force dislocation on the coast. The Iron Butcher made it efficient to run several canning lines in the same establishment. It is estimated that an Iron Butcher replaced 30 men, often Chinese workers.¹⁹ During the same decade, can-filling

machines were installed in many plants, which further reduced the labour force, this time specifically in numbers of women. Due to this technological change, and to increasingly effective refrigeration on board the fishboats, fish plants on the B.C. coast were consolidated into several large establishments in principal population centres. B.C. Packers bought and closed many operations, first between 1902 and 1906 and then between 1926 and 1928.²⁰ This rationalization of the industry continues today, with B.C. Packers establishing the "largest fish plant in the world"²¹ in Prince Rupert, with eleven canning lines and many other operations, including "fresh fish" and groundfish.

Technological change continues to reduce employment. All companies now have machines that put the fish in the cans, and the can-sealing and cooking method have been streamlined. In the early 1980s, a machine called the Coastline fish washing machine was installed in most plants. This had the effect of reducing the number of workers needed to wash salmon from twenty-seven to twelve on each fish-washing line. Washing salmon was and is women's work. Other machines, like the herring sexer*, are now commonplace, though unheard of ten years ago. At the present time, a herring roe popper* is also being tested. The unions have initiated negotiations over many of these changes, with predictable results: they were able to slow the introduction of new machines and new processing methods but they were not able to stop them.²² These last two machines have reduced and will reduce work available to women rather than men, as it is often women who stand and handle the fish.

Much of the work that is still available in fish processing has changed slightly in form since plants were rationalized and machines were introduced, arguably becoming more repetitive and boring. The work of processing fish currently is "disassembly-line"²³ factory work, in the sense that the fish move past the workers

on belts and are gutted, cut up and so on, but there are many variations on a theme. (See Figure 1, over page, for a description of some of the types of processing, seasons, and tasks involved in fish processing.) Other fish are processed besides salmon, though they may not be as glamorous to the consumer. Herring roe processing, groundfish filleting, specialty processing such as smoking salmon or cod, and shellfish and crab processing are all components of the fish processing sector, with the women performing similar repetitive functions in each kind of processing.²⁴ Many women stand in one spot and quickly clean fish that the machines have not done properly, put fish on racks to go into canners, check the cans for correct weights, and perform similar fast-paced activities for salmon canning. In herring processing, those same women stand in one spot and tear apart small stinky fish. Fresh fish workers will also be washing salmon, with a slightly different method, and some people will be grading as well. While most fish workers wear similar uniforms and work in the same buildings, their tasks will vary to a greater or lesser degree.

The gender makeup of the B.C. fish processing workforce varies depending on the job performed. According to UFAWU figures, fresh fish crews (which account for 26% of shoreworkers) are split evenly, with men showing a slight edge, at 52% of the union membership in that category province-wide. Cannery workers present a different story: women make up 58% of the unionized workforce in Steveston, 64.7% of the workers in the Vancouver local, and 67% of the unionized cannery workers in Prince Rupert. The coastwide figure for cannery workers who are both members of the union and female is 64.7% of the shoreworker membership.²⁵ Nearly two-thirds of all shoreworkers in B.C. are women, and half of all B.C. shoreworkers are unionized women. Approximately the same percentage of men are unionized. It is likely that the gender composition of non-union plants will approximate that of union plants though some groundfish filleters* who work in a non-union plant now in order

Figure 1: Typical Gender Divisions for Factory Floor Tasks in Fish Processing in British Columbia, Partial List*

Note: the top seven categories of men's work are consistent over almost all types of processing, as are the parallel women's jobs. Jobs below probationary employees are specific to type of processing or activity. Skill levels and training, where appropriate, are in brackets.

Wages (\$/hr)	Women	Men
1. General employees		
14.29	Supervisor (Floor lady)	Foreman (wage unknown) Charge Hand
17.54		Machine Men (apprenticed)
13.29 to 14.52		Asst. machine men
14.04		Forklift drivers (trained)
14.01		Tallyman
13.70		Unloading crew
12.51	Probationary employees	(both sexes)
2. Salmon Canning: July-Sept		
17.54	Inspector or grader	Retort operator (apprenticed)
13.70		Inspector or grader
13.70		Binman
13.62	Salmon egg pullers	
13.55	Filleters	Knife Sharpener
13.55	Patchers (on assembly line)	
13.62	Bright Stack operator	
13.55	(assembly line)	Warehouse workers
13.70		Iron Butcher feeders
13.62	Feeders for all canning machines	(assembly line)
	(assembly line)	
13.55	Fish Washers	Icers/general labour
	(assembly line)	(not assembly line)
13.55	Can inspectors	
	(assembly line)	
3. Fresh Fish (can be year-round, if there is a groundfish operation)		
14.20 to 14.33		Truck drivers (licenced) cont

Wages	Women	Men
14.54	Graders (skilled)	Graders (skilled)
14.20	Qualified Filleters (tested)	Fresh Fish Shed Workers (1000 hours)
13.74	Semiqualfified Filleters (tested)	
13.55	Fresh Fish Line Workers (400 hours)	Fresh Fish Shed Workers (400 hours)
4. Herring roe processing (unloading Feb/Mar; processing Apr-Jun)		
13.55	Roe grader (skilled, assembly line)	Packers
13.55	Roe poppers (assembly line)	
5. Cold Storage (year-round, if groundfish)		
14.42		Freezer workers (1000 hours)
13.82		(400 hours)
6. Washdown crew		
13.55		General Labour
7. Net Shed (pre- and during herring and salmon seasons)		
17.57	Networker (skilled)	Net boss
13.58 to 16.97		Networker (skilled)
8. Additional		
17.94	First Aid attendant (usu women: ticketed)	Boatshop tradesmen
\$35-50/mo. increase in pay		
13.55	Coffee/lunchroom woman	Watchman

cont

*Notes to Figure 1

This chart indicates the pay schedules and gender makeup of workers involved in specific tasks performed during particular seasons within fish processing in British Columbia. It is not inclusive.

The industry processes several kinds of fish (for example, salmon, halibut, herring, groundfish -- ocean perch, cod, turbot, sole -- and shellfish) and uses various types of processing. Each processing establishment will perform at least one type of processing, but only a few larger plants do more than one, for example salmon canning, herring popping, fresh fish (including groundfish), and halibut. Shellfish is generally processed in separate establishments. Except for halibut processing, similar processing occurs all over B.C. Halibut processing, which only occurs in Prince Rupert, involves washing the fish and sending them to the freezer gutted, head off, much like salmon that is processed by the fresh fish crew for the freezers.

Some processing seasons and types of work are complementary, and are performed by the same employees. This is true in particular of salmon canning and herring popping. Herring is processed from April to June and salmon primarily in July and August (see chart).

'General employees', as referred to in the chart, are people who will be called in to work whenever there is any preparation for any kind of processing occurring, or any actual processing underway, or any after-season tasks to perform. The 'general employees' (except probationary employees) will typically receive better pay, more overtime during season, and more work before and after the season, than the assembly line workers. Retort operators will also work large amounts of overtime waiting for the salmon cans to cook during season, while Bright Stack operators will be kept at home until the cooked cans are cool enough to case. '1000 hours' and '400 hours', as indicated, represent the number of hours, in all, that a probationary employee must work before receiving the preferential rate. 'Additional' categories of workers are people who work whenever there is processing being done in a plant, but they are not directly involved in processing itself.

Salmon canning is just that, and involves large amounts of machinery and belts moving quickly for a short, intense season. Herring popping is more easy to plan, because herring can be frozen in the round, and thawed as required for daily processing. Fresh fish sheds operate during salmon season, to clean and grade the better-quality salmon for freezing. They may also operate year-round on groundfish, which is also frozen. All groundfish is filleted by women on an assembly line, a skill which is taught and tested on-the-job. Fresh fish salmon grading is also a skill, but not tested, at least not according to the union contract, and often it is men who perform this work.

Fish washing, herring popping, and filleting are the most labour-intensive tasks in fish processing. They all involve standing in one place and manipulating pieces of fish. Salmon lasts two months, on average, while herring popping may last three. Almost exclusively women do this work.

While I would estimate that half the labour force found in a typical fish plant would be women who wash, pop, or fillet, it is very difficult to find figures, because the employment schedule is volatile. People are sent home, moved from job to job, or called in late, daily during seasons.

The sources for this information are the work experience of the author, comments from women interviewed, and the UFAWU/Fish Processors' Association 1988 contract.

to receive a piecework rate are men who apparently believe that they will earn more on piecework than by the hourly wage. This is unusual, because in union plants almost all filleters are women.

Most fish processing is seasonal, on-call work. Groundfish (ocean perch, turbot, sole, cod, and other fish caught almost year-round by dragger boats) seasons encompass much of the year, but salmon canning only runs from July to October. Herring, caught in early March, is frozen and processed between April and June. Only the roe is valued, for sale to Japan. The rest of the herring goes to reduction for fish oil or animal food. During the seasons, daily callouts and the length of the work day are irregular. Shoreworkers learn to expect disruption and random scheduling. The "volatile"²⁶ work callout most strongly affects the salmon and herring workers, because these fish only spawn (and can therefore be caught) during a certain part of the year, but all workers are subject to daily layoff depending on the supply of fish.

Being "on call" to a fish plant means waiting for a phone call to come to work, and, according to the union contract, that phone call must be made at least two hours before the work starts. Since callout to work varies with both knowledge of a given task and seniority, seniority is a very important part of the fish plant system. There is not an industry-wide list as there is in longshoring in Vancouver. Each plant keeps its own list. In fact there will be a list for each type of fish processing within a given establishment. As the UFAWU Master Agreement says, "[f]undamentally, rules respecting seniority are designed to provide to employees an equitable measure of security based on length of service with the Company."²⁷ In a few plants, workers are able to move from one list to another and retain their seniority, but this is not commonly done. Since skills are learned on the job, and there is not that much difference in work or pay among women's job categories on

the factory floor, seniority will make the most difference in her callout and therefore her paycheque. Callout is based strictly on one's number, given that workers have, or could learn, the skill required. In practice, however, the personnel supervisors will actually call out employees of a specific sex for a specific task. The practice at present is to go through the unified list and call out only the appropriate workers, starting with the most senior. While the most senior person capable of performing a required task will be the first called, since workers are taught tasks suitable to their gender, they will only be called for those tasks. The only way to gain seniority is by attrition over time.

Although there are many different processes occurring in a plant at a given time, the unions make a case for a unified seniority list in each plant. The argument is that tasks are learned on the job, and one list would mean that people could be called out for work strictly in order of seniority. In the past, and still occasionally,²⁸ there are separate lists of workers divided by gender in some plants, as well as by kinds of processing. Gender-specific seniority lists are relics of an age when contract settlements included different base rates for pay for women and men. The base rate was equalized in canneries in 1973.²⁹ Women are still, however, paid less because they are not promoted into jobs like Iron Butcher man, grading or forklift driving, which receive hourly increments in excess of the base rate, and because they are called out to work less than men with the equivalent amount of seniority, because the assembly line is not operating but there is unloading to do, for example. In some plants, the workers voted on whether to continue with a gender-divided list or to go to a new combined list. In fact, the combined list is often used to call out workers specific to the job required anyway, and that decision can still be based on gender. Separate lists for separate processing help keep the workers divided, and somewhat mystified by what each other does.

Shoreworkers are individually skilled at different aspects of different processing procedures. Groundfish is filleted and frozen, and occasionally breaded and packed as fish cakes. Washing and freezing halibut is similar to washing and freezing salmon. Only the better grades of salmon -- springs, good sockeye and coho -- are frozen for export. Poorer quality salmon -- 'number twos' on sockeye and coho, almost all pink and chum -- is canned. Because canning is a high volume operation involving much machinery, the canneries tend to run full tilt at peak season and shut down when the only salmon boats working are the trollers* (early in the summer specifically). Each product or type of processing requires different skills and different shifts.

Historically, there have been job divisions based on both gender and ethnicity. Specifically, Chinese men hand butchered the salmon before the introduction of the Iron Butcher, and Indian women filled the cans by hand before the introduction of canning machines. In the past, native workers like these spent winters at home inland, and lived in cannery housing and worked for a cannery in the summers. Most fish plants, like Sunnyside Cannery in Port Edward (which burned down in 1981) and Wales Island Cannery near Alaska (which closed in 1944), had attached housing that was racially segregated, as long as the plants were in existence. White bosses had the best housing. Next came Japanese workers with both bunkhouses and married quarters. Single Chinese men lived in a bunkhouse with their own cook. At the bottom of the hierarchy, native families lived in company-built houses with minimal amenities. A company store served all members of the community. Four of the women I interviewed had lived parts of their lives in company housing, but today very little of it survives on this coast, and I am not aware of any still in use. This housing was necessary when canneries were remote, but as plants were relocated to major centres, cannery housing ceased to be.

North Pacific Cannery Museum in Port Edward still has intact housing, although the largest component, the native housing, is conspicuous by its absence. In 1974, the health authorities closed it down. Before the buildings were turned over to the Museum Society, that accommodation, described as a "big congested community,"³⁰ was torn down by B.C. Packers. Northern Pacific cannery native housing had been used as year-round homes for some time, which gave the company the advantage of having its work force located nearby at all times.

Housing was provided in order to keep the needed supply of labour near a plant. While there has always been an overabundance of workers available in urban centres to process fish, the fact that canneries were originally built on remote salmon streams meant that housing needed to be provided for the employees, so that they would relocate in order to work. Some plants used to hire a "spokesman" who would go around his village and talk to people about fishing for, or working in, specific canneries.³¹ In Prince Rupert, each processor clothed employees in company colours, either a hat or a scarf. Until it closed in 1985, Nelson Brothers/B.C. Packers Port Edward Plant workers wore orange, a colour now worn in the B.C. Packers Prince Rupert Plant Cannery, and Seal Cove freezer plant workers wore green. Other companies' hats were white or red, for example, or a combination of two colours. Such strategies were attempts to incite loyalty, in much the same way that fishermen were given company flags to fly. While there was no compulsion to wear scarves of the right colour, women often wore the company's scarves rather than dirty their own.

While companies tried to incite loyalty in the workers, they were not completely successful, perhaps because they did not provide a year-round income. Workers' loyalty was often to the unions instead. These unions, primarily the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, but also the smaller Amalgamated

Shoreworkers and Clerks, have fought for technological change protection in their contracts, but have not been very successful. These two unions account for the workers in more than 80% of B.C.'s processing industry. The United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union is a much larger and more broadly-based organization, since it includes parts of the fishing fleets as well as shoreworkers. Over 3,800 workers in canneries and fresh fish departments are members of that union, out of a coast-wide figure of approximately 5,100 hourly-paid workers.³² Technological change contract provisions, in particular, have affected the quality of work for many women.

The UFAWU has gained wages and benefits for shoreworkers that are the envy of both west coast American shoreworkers and Canadian east coast workers. The divisions within the UFAWU between the fishermen of various gear types, the tendermen (who bring the fish to shore aboard packers), and the shoreworkers, have led to minor disunity -- there are gear-type associations of fishermen, for example the Pacific Gillnetters' Association and the Pacific Trollers' Association -- but the union has remained strong for forty-five years.

Prince Rupert Amalgamated Shoreworkers and Clerks was formed out of one of the 'minor disunities' within the UFAWU in 1967. This Co-op union was a direct charter of the Canadian Labour Congress, but the Congress is phasing out direct charters. The CLC asked PRASCU to affiliate with a larger union. Two unions presented proposals, the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union and the United Food and Commercial Workers, an American-based union. The union membership, three hundred and eighty-three strong, voted to join the American union. This means that there will still be two unions representing shoreworkers in Prince Rupert, but the smaller one is now part of an international bureaucracy and will now be managed from Vancouver, giving the workers much less say in the planning undertaken by their own organization. Since the ratification vote was taken

in mid-1990, it remains to be seen whether the local union activists will be listened to by the new union organizers. PRASCU may well be remembered, at least by shoreworkers not in its bargaining unit, for the fact that one of the provisions in its contract was for free gumboots for the employees.

While ethnic divisions within the industry have changed over time, gender categories have not. Presently, men tend to do the unloading and subsequent grading, control the flow of fish to the canning lines, run the forklifts, fill and control the retorts, and move the bussies* around in the warehouse. Some of the specific women's skills include popping* herring, washing* salmon, and indexing*. Salmon are then graded for species, and/or size, and/or quality by either women or men and the cans are patched by women after they are filled by machine. Other women's jobs are grading herring roe; filleting (this means taking the meat off the bones, which is how all groundfish is handled, and how some salmon are cut up to be used for patching); and other individual tasks like coffee lady, floor lady (supervisor), or knife sharpener. Some of these tasks are performed by either men or women, depending, often, on where in the plant the job is located, but most of them are in practice sex-specific.

While work is seasonal, many individuals return to their plant year after year, and perform exactly the tasks for which they are trained. Training is on-the-job, and often consists of watching the woman next to you and copying her, or having the job described by the floor lady in a few sentences. Since the jobs are relatively easy to learn, much of the floor lady's task is to place the women in spots where they will work harmoniously together for social reasons, as well as because of skill.

Fish plant size varies greatly. Generally, as many operations as are feasible are organized under one roof. Salmon canning and freezing would obviously be more efficiently done in the same building. Since herring roe popping season is

complementary with salmon canning, and both use similar belts and tables for the women to work at, these two are best done in the same establishment.

The sheer rigidity of job division by gender is one reason shorework is not particularly attractive (at least to me), even though the hourly wages are relatively high. The seasonality of the industry on the Pacific coast means that, although the workers are highly paid per hour, with wages ranging from \$13.55 (for most women) to about \$18 an hour (for boatshop tradesmen) in 1988³³, they can be employed for as little time as one month per year, depending on which fish they process and which shift they are on.

Men have access to jobs that have increased pay as well. Men start at the same \$12.51 per hour as women, get the same raise to \$13.55 at 400 hours worked, and then get raises if they work as binmen, butchers, Iron Butcher feeders, inspectors (all at \$13.70/hour), forklift drivers (\$14.04/hour), or machine men (\$17.54/hour). The men who work in cold storage also get increments: they start at twenty-five cents an hour more than the cannery probationary rate, get a raise at 400 hours to \$13.82 and a sixty-cent raise at 1000 hours to \$14.42. Fresh fish shed (group 1) employees, who are usually men but can be women, receive \$13.55 to start and \$14.20 after a thousand hours worked. Women who fully qualify as filleters receive the same rate as thousand-hour men but must, according to union contract, pass a test before receiving the improved pay rate.³⁴ The most highly-paid union workers are the boatshop tradesmen (who maintain the company's fishing fleet) who are paid monthly, who make \$3121.56/month (equivalent to approximately \$18.00 an hour) all year long.³⁵ The monthly-rated workers I am aware of are all men. July 2 concurred:

...you have a monthly staff which is a guaranteed staff of men -- and they are ONLY men. But to complement those jobs you still need a certain amount of women. Which is silly, but they will not give women monthly guarantees. So that's where the gender crunch comes

in...And monthly is -- usually that is the top rate and usually those monthly people have many skills. They can be a tow motor driver, a labeller, a shipper and receiver -- you know, they generally acquire quite a few [skills] before they're given that position.

At Canadian Fish Home Plant, the top six tow motor drivers are monthly-rated. It appears from these examples that men have benefitted from union negotiations in the past, as these pay rates are negotiated within and besides the annual contract. Many of the jobs that receive increments are listed in the union contract and their rate specified, including the monthly-rated towmotor drivers. At Canfisco in Vancouver, only six workers receive that benefit because union negotiations were unsuccessful in obtaining it for any more drivers.

Men who are paid hourly wages also reap advantages. They work on a pay scale with more steps and room for financial gain, as the previous examples have shown, and they work more time. This is true both in terms of the length of season that they work, and in terms of overtime each day during peak season. Men are sometimes paid time-and-a-half or double time for working during the meal breaks, which they find easier to do because, unlike women on the line, they can usually find a minute during the shift to relax. When the canning crew is reduced at 4:30, and some lines are kept going for overtime (a not uncommon practice) all the men tend to stay. I have been told by men, "Men never go home unless they're told to." and "Men always make more than the women." This pattern may have had to do with availability for work in its inception, in that women may have said they wanted to go home to look after children, but what has persisted is that access to overtime varies with gender. Even if women want to stay and they have the seniority to do so, they will be talked out of it because the jobs that need doing are "men's" jobs. In my experience, these jobs have included hosing a clean floor for two hours.

Companies consider these workers as only casually employed though they may return to the same plant annually for a lifetime. This means that both the

unemployment insurance system and the welfare system help support these workers during the off-seasons, and their annual incomes remain low, as will be seen.

Canadian social service programs subsidize wage labourers and, not incidentally, the companies that employ them. These government subsidies to workers make the fish plant work force more stable than could be predicted, given that the seasons are so short and callout is so erratic. Historically, these workers have also depended on "pre-capitalist relations of production"³⁶ to maintain them when the capitalist system fell short. Today some of these methods of providing food still operate, with the native food fishery and home canning. The existence of these alternative ways of providing subsistence indicates that shorework, as a sole source of income, is not a successful financial strategy for the workers.

The bottom line of any job, union or non-union, is of course the pay packet. While the fish plant incomes that result from this work are never high, there is a discrepancy between the wages that men and women receive. In 1985, 'fish canning, curing and packing' showed an average income of \$17,425 annually for males and \$13,101 for females, in all of Canada, for those employed full-year, full-time.³⁷ (See Figure 2) This indicates that among full-time shoreworkers nationally (who account for only 5 percent of all shoreworkers), women earn 75 percent of what men do. In general nationally, not just in shorework, women's wages are on average 60 percent of men's wages overall,³⁸ indicating that while full-time shoreworkers' wages vary predictably along gender lines, they do somewhat better in comparison to men than women workers in other industries.

In B.C., on average, women make 77 percent of what men make in the fish processing sector (see Figure 2), while the full-time percent is 67. This difference in income between the sexes has to do with both the numbers of hours that men work and women work, and with the level of perceived skill (and therefore hourly rate

paid) in the jobs they do. This perception of skill is enshrined in the contract negotiated between the UFAWU and the Fisheries Association, where the rates of pay are defined for jobs that are in practice gender-specific. Males consistently earn more money, but in B.C. the variation between men's and women's wages is more extreme when comparing full-time workers with each other than it is between the 95% of workers who are part-time. This indicates that women are paid less per hour for the tasks they do, probably because 'full-time' typically means more overtime for men than for women.

Figure 2

Women's Wages in Fish Processing as a Percent of Men's Wages, for selected provinces, 1985³⁹

Province	Full-time Percent	Average wage percent
NS	80	56
NFLD	74	57
B.C.	67	77
Canada	75	60

Workers in British Columbia are better off than those in Atlantic Canada. In Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, the discrepancy is much greater, with women earning on average approximately 57 percent of what men do. While full-time production and related workers in all of Canada made from \$13 - 17,000 annually, fish plant workers in British Columbia earned considerably more:

Figure 3

Wages In Fish Processing in selected provinces in Canada, 1985⁴⁰

Province	Male f/t	Male avg	Female f/t	Female avg
N.S.	16,074	9,433	12,891	5,355
Nfld	15,609	7,429	11,621	4,280
B.C.	24,677	11,188	16,587	8,621
Canada	17,425	7,949	13,101	4,782

Since the total of full-time employees in fish processing is 5%, both nationally

and in B.C. and for both genders, these averages are only slightly more than the amount would be for just the workers employed part time. Separate figures, for part-time workers specifically, are not available. The percents indicate that full-time women are paid substantially less than full-time men, even though the two genders start out at the same base rate. The reason for the difference between men's and women's average wages is that men get more work, not that the pay rate is necessarily different, though it may well be.

Unless they work full time, women shoreworkers' incomes are below the poverty line. Even then, female full-timers' incomes are below the line for families, if they were the sole providers.⁴¹ The poverty level for people living in Vancouver in 1985 was \$10,238 per annum for a single person, but \$20,821 for a family of four. In a town the size of Prince Rupert (up to 21,000 people) the comparable figures were \$9,526 for a single person and \$19,438 for a family of four. While shoreworkers in B.C. make more than those elsewhere, they often do not escape poverty. Unless they are men who are employed full-time, full-year, and especially if they depend solely on their fish plant earnings, fish plant workers remain well below the poverty line for a family for their area. The primary implication is that these women must supplement their income with unemployment insurance, if they can qualify, in order to maintain their households.

What is missing from these averages is an awareness of the variation in wages that shoreworkers earn. Some workers are employed for as little as three weeks annually, at peak salmon season, and may net only one thousand dollars in that time. The amount of employment varies with seniority and therefore callout. Any individual could be earning any amount, although it is not likely that anyone's earnings exceed the poverty line by very much. In this sample, ten of the twenty-three respondents worked more than just peak season, since they were filleters or

charge hands, but this points to the unusually stable nature of the sample. Much seasonal employment in fish processing lasts less than a month, yet people return to their plants for that small amount of work annually.

Who is employed in shorework? Statistical breakdowns of ethnic origin and mother tongue are only available on a national and not a regional basis, which, unfortunately, ignores the ethnic variation found among the 9% of shoreworkers that live in British Columbia. One group that is particularly startling by its absence in the national statistics is native Indians.⁴² Native Indians make up a substantial part of the industry all over British Columbia, especially north of Port Hardy on Vancouver Island. If they make up 40% of the female shoreworkers in northern B.C., as they do in the one plant for which we have a statistical breakdown, native workers would account for up to 3.6% of the national female shoreworker workforce. According to a union organizer in Vancouver, Chinese workers are underrepresented in the national sample as well.⁴³ Canadian Fish at the foot of Gore Street in Vancouver, for example, draws heavily on Vancouver's nearby Chinese community. It would appear that, because 80 percent of shoreworkers are in the Atlantic provinces, the ethnic heterogeneity of British Columbia has been overlooked in the national statistical figures, and been subsumed into the category 'other single origins'.

The Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative workforce of 467 individuals gives a good example of the ethnic heterogeneity of the labour force. In June, 1988, the workforce was 5% Chinese, 2% Japanese, 3% Vietnamese, 8% East Indian, 5% Italian, 4% Portuguese, 2% Filipino, and 40% native Indian by origin, while the remaining 31% were probably northern Europeans.⁴⁴ This is clearly a multicultural work force, which will have unique ways of working together, and will in fact often find it difficult to communicate. These workers may have limited options for

employment, because of their lack of English, their race, or both, and this may be one factor keeping them in this low-waged occupation.

Another example of ethnic variety was found in random sampling for a 1990 herring roe popping study in the Greater Vancouver area, which indicated that 30 of 106 women (or 29% of the sample) were from the British Isles or European, 65 (or 62%) were Asiatic (including East Indian), 9 (9%) were native Indian, and 1 did not indicate ethnic origin. In terms of their preferred language, 41% preferred to speak English in the interview setting, 47% preferred Cantonese, 2% wished to talk in Mandarin, 6% spoke Punjabi by preference, 4% chose Korean, and 1% spoke Yugoslavian.⁴⁵

The female shoreworkers who are the special subject of this study were also a varied group, though they varied in ways that were different from the statistical averages listed above. Eight of the twenty-three were native, from various communities, not all coastal. Six women were immigrants: two were Chinese who came to Canada via Hong Kong (one actually born in Calcutta), one was East Indian, two were of British extraction (one Scot and one from Jersey), and one was from Portugal. One was a Canadian-born Japanese, and six were Canadian-born women of European descent, one of whom was French-Canadian. Two women were of mixed native/Norwegian parentage. Statistics Canada reports that the percentage of female shoreworkers in Canada who are immigrants is 6.8,⁴⁶ while this sample has a much higher number of immigrant women, at 26%. This difference is probably attributable to differences between B.C. and the Maritimes.

No particular age group works in fish processing. According to UFAWU statistics (Figure 4), the average ages of the women members, and their length of service in the industry, are as follows:

Figure 4

Unionized B.C. Shoreworkers' Average Service by Age, Female, 1990⁴⁷

Age (avg)	# of Women	%	Years worked
18-19	38	2.5	2.13
20-29	357	23.0	4.23
30-39	350	22.5	6.64
40-49	295	19.0	8.98
50-59	353	22.7	11.84
60-69	152	9.8	12.82
70-73	7	0.5	13.14
Totals:	1553	100.0	8.25 (avg)

Apparently women do not spend their working lives in the industry, though, as could be expected, the older women have spent a longer time in fish processing. If there was a difference between figures for the whole industry and these figures for unionized women, these figures would err on the side of stability and long-term work, as it tends to be the more casually-employed women who do not join the union.

The ages of the women who were interviewed ranged from twenty-seven to sixty-seven. The largest number -- seven -- were in their thirties. Two were in their twenties, three in their forties, and five each in the next two decades. This sample underrepresents 20-29 year-olds and overrepresents those in their thirties and those in their sixties. As a result, women interviewed for this thesis have a longer average work history within the industry. This would skew the statistics in two ways: one, they may have been more content than the average worker (or have fewer options than those who left), and two, they may have had more inside knowledge of the industry, which they have gained over time.

All the women in this sample were or had been married, and all had children. Nationally, 93.4% of shoreworker women live in a "husband-wife family,"⁴⁸ while only 15 of this sample of twenty-three, or 65%, did so, indicating that the remaining 35% were the sole support of their household or family. Four of the women in this

sample were widowed (one twice) and four were separated or divorced. Five native women mentioned losing Indian status, mostly through marrying. All five had applied to regain it. Six women had one child, and the rest had two to nine children. One native woman had borne eight children. Because she lived rurally in the 1940s, when medical care was not easily available, two had died in infancy, and another child died as a teenager; one other child has been missing for twenty years. The two Chinese immigrants, who came here via Hong Kong, reported large families, one with seven children and one with nine, the last three born in Canada. As these numbers suggest, it is very possible to combine fish plant work with raising a family. Only one of the sample was employed full time, and she raised a family of five as a single parent. She pointed out that when she started at the cannery, half her cheque was spent on daycare.

Most of the women in fish plants had relatives who worked there, or who were employed in fishing. I interviewed two sisters and their mother, all of whom toiled on shore. Another two subjects were mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Two others reported mothers in fish plants. One net woman's mother had also been a net woman. Five reported that their fathers or husbands were or had been fishermen; four of these were native, indicating the heavy involvement of native communities in all aspects of the fishing industry. Eight women reported fathers, siblings or husbands also employed in the fish plants. Four of the Prince Rupert women's husbands had jobs at the local pulp mill, as did some of their fathers. All nine of the women who reported no relatives in the industry were either immigrant women with no extended family in B.C. or they had moved away from their place of birth before starting in the fish plants.

These fish plant women, by and large, were not highly educated. Of the sixteen women who gave educational level information, two had no schooling or very

little (less than a year), nine had less than grade twelve, two had completed their General Equivalency Diploma (that is, equivalent to grade twelve) and then had gone on to do another course, one had completed grade twelve and two had university degrees. Nationally, 78% of women shoreworkers have obtained less schooling than grade 12,⁴⁹ like 68% of those who offered information on education in this sample.

The women in this sample have stayed with the industry longer than the industry average, as indicated in Figure Four. Six of the women have been employed in fish plants steadily for more than twenty-five years. Of the others, nine are younger, but have remained all their adult lives in the plants. They started work between thirteen and eighteen years, lying about their ages if necessary, and have now an average of 15.6 years' employment in the plants. Four have toiled on shore since they immigrated to Canada, and four held other jobs or did domestic labour in the home before starting at the cannery. While it is difficult to calculate precisely, these women had worked an average of twenty years in the industry, as compared to 8.25 years spent on average in fish processing, as reported for B.C. unionized shoreworkers (Figure 4). Given the seasonal and cyclical nature of much fish plant work, this stability might be surprising, especially since many of the women had changed plants at various times, with the attendant loss of the seniority they had established up to that point. The sample included women who were recommended by the union organizers, and who were interested enough to be interviewed, who were perhaps more committed to the industry.

Steady work usually means staying in one area of a plant, or on one list, or at one job within a plant. One sixty-four year old woman had been a net woman since she was nineteen. One woman had always been a floor lady, beginning as a warehouse supervisor. Two others had been charge hands for some time. One

younger woman had been a relief timekeeper for ten of the fourteen years she had been employed. Five women were groundfish filleters, which requires training and passing a speed and quality test, but none of them were fresh fish shed workers who did not work on the assembly line. This is one particular example of differing criteria for different workers, and the workers do not consider it an accident that the fresh fish workers who do not have to fillet, and therefore do not get tested but still get the raise in pay after time, are not women. Women who work on the line but do not fillet do not get the preferential pay rate, indicating again that men's expertise is rewarded, while women's often is not.

Only one woman was transient, but consistently so. She spent winters in New Westminster and summers in Prince Rupert. One other woman had, in previous years, combined fish work with Okanagan apple picking. The personnel manager at B.C. Packers Prince Rupert Plant reported that many people come from outlying towns, such as Terrace, Kitimat and smaller centres, to work for the season.⁵⁰ At least four native women in this sample were from smaller communities, though they were all now living in Prince Rupert full-time. The underrepresentation of transients in this sample may have been partly because several of the interviews were done in the fall, when there was little work, so transient workers were more likely to have returned home, replaying the pattern of seasonal migration that was followed when canneries were scattered and there was cannery housing.

Besides their fish plant wages, the women reported several sources of income, in order to avoid poverty, as indicated earlier. If they worked enough weeks, most of them collected unemployment insurance in the off season, though one noted that she did not because she did not need it as her husband worked. One was in school in the off season, and reported that her band helped her out financially. She also received compensation from the Workers' Compensation Board for the loss of a

spouse. None of my sample cited other employment during the winters. The five filleters and the charge hands work varying amounts of time longer than peak salmon season, making it difficult to be otherwise employed. In the case of many of these women, work, especially in the cannery section of the industry, is combined with child-rearing: thirteen women had children at home, and four of them were single parents. No woman reported obtaining Social Assistance, a good fortune which I believe would not hold true for fish processing generally.⁵¹ Some women who are seasonally employed at Canadian Fish Home Plant work at the Vancouver Post Office for the Christmas rush as well.

As this chapter has indicated, fish processing in B.C. is big business, which has gone through significant changes. This has altered the structure of the work force considerably. The work is cyclical, with dramatic daily and yearly variability. It also varies considerably in both content and hours depending on the species of fish and type of processing. The work force, two-thirds female and highly unionized, has made accommodation to this flexibility in callout for work (or almost complete lack of scheduling), and stays in the industry for almost a decade, on average, though those women interviewed had worked notably longer. There is substantial ethnic variation in the B.C. workforce, and that is not reflected accurately in the national statistics. The average wages of men and women are startlingly different, but more so for Atlantic Canada than for B.C.

Fish plant women are all ages and, by and large, not highly educated. The women in this sample all were or had been married, and they all had had children, indicating that accommodation to the double work day is possible in this industry. Fully one-quarter of the women interviewed were immigrants. Most of them supplemented their fish plant earnings with unemployment insurance. Some of them had relatives who were also employed in fish processing or fishing, but several had

relatives working in the Prince Rupert mill. Given the capricious nature of the industry, the women in this sample in particular had come to a hard-won accommodation with it, and with their other obligations.

- 1 The author, "Indian Women in the Fish Plants" (undergraduate paper, UBC 1982), 1-2.
- 2 Rolf Knight, Indians At Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in B.C. 1858 - 1930 (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1978), 88-89.
- 3 Stainsby, op.cit.
- 4 Barbara F. Reskin and Heidi I. Hartmann, Women's Work, Men's Work: Sex Segregation on the Job, (Washington: Committee on Women's Employment and Related Issues, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council, 1986), 42.
- 5 Statistics Canada, 1986 Census of Manufactures, catalogue 32-250B, 1021, 1. Since trapping is a small industry, it is fair to attribute most of this 0.489 percent of B.C.'s gross domestic product (G.D.P.) of 50.192 billion dollars to fishing. In comparison, the fish products industry accounted for 0.426 percent of that G.D.P. The total dollar activity in fish and fish products was therefore 0.915 percent of the G.D.P. The total value of shipments (both local and export) in 1986 was slightly different -- 574.3 million -- and gives a G.D.P. percent figure of 1.1.
- 6 Statistics Canada, catalogue number 32-250B, sections 1011, 1012, 1021, and 1031.
- 7 Statistics Canada, catalogue 32-250B 1021. With unloading sheds, shipyards, net racks and ice chutes the total number of establishments connected to fishing and fish processing is reported provincially as 150, according to B.C. Facts and Statistics (1988).
- 8 Statistics Canada, Employment Earnings and Hours, catalogue 72-002 (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1988), 32.
- 9 B.C. Facts and Statistics (1988), 62. Not everyone who buys a personal commercial fishing licence fishes. Any person who is on a commercial fish boat while fishing is in progress is required to hold a licence, they are not expensive or difficult to get, and anyone who intends to travel on a fishboat to, for example, mend nets in a remote area, is required to hold a licence, inflating the numbers considerably. People may work part of the season, as well. This figure most likely also conflates personal licences and boat licences, and any boat may hold several licences. (The B.C. Facts and Statistics numbers seem odd altogether.) Statistics Canada reports different figures in its Dimension series: 6,240 fishers and 3,235 shoreworkers in 1986. Since this second population figure for shoreworkers is smaller than the UFAWU membership in B.C., it does not reflect all the individuals who are employed at peak season, a number which varies depending on the catch. The number of fishers likely varies the same way.
- 10 Geoff Meggs and Jim Sinclair, "The Future of the B.C. Fishing Industry, vol. 2" (UFAWU, 1984), 1.
- 11 Meggs and Sinclair, 1.
- 12 Meggs and Sinclair, 5.

13 B.C. Government Agent, New Westminster, B.C.

14 Ocean Fish has two principals, both named Safarik; McMillan Fish has two principals as well, both named McMillan.

15 Jim Sinclair, in conversation with writer, September 1990.

16 Geoff Meggs and Jim Sinclair, "The Future of the B.C. Fishing Industry, vol. 2," (UFAWU, 1984), 10.

17 Kathy Booth, Administrator, PRASCU, interview with author, October 1989.

18 Lyons, 221.

19 Duncan Stacey, Sockeye and Tinplate: Technological Change in the Fraser River Canning Industry, 1871 - 1912 (Victoria: B.C. Provincial Museum Heritage Record # 15, 1982), probably 7.

20 E.N. Higginbottom, "The Changing Geography of Salmon Canning in British Columbia, 1870-1931." Master's thesis, SFU 1989.

21 Geoff Meggs and Jim Sinclair, "The Future of the B.C. Fishing Industry, vol. 2" (UFAWU, 1984) 2.

22 David Fairey, "Managing Technological Change in the British Columbia Fish Processing Industry: Productivity Measurement, Implementation Guidelines, and Benefit Sharing, A Technological Impact Study Report prepared by the Trade Union Research Bureau for the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union" (March 1986), 15.

23 Rolf Knight, Indians At Work, (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1978), 88.

24 There are three ways to look at the size of the processing sector for each type of fish processed: landed weight, landed dollar value, and the amount of labour involved in processing. Salmon accounts for 40% of the landed weight of coastal catches, but 59.4% of the landed value. Herring is more nearly equal: 15% of the landed weight and 18.4% of the dollar value. Halibut is 2.8% of the weight but 4.4% of the value. Groundfish shows less monetary recovery, at 30.8% of the landed weight but only 9.8% of the dollars earned by fishermen. Shellfish accounts for 11% of the weight landed, and 7.9% of the income. While I have no statistics on labour intensity of the various processing sectors, clearly salmon canning has the edge in size, though mechanization has reduced the number of fish washers. Herring, while providing less than half the amount of fish that salmon canning does, involves labour-intensive popping, but does not involve as many workers. Groundfish processing is arguably the most labour-intensive, perhaps along with shellfish, since each carcass must be filleted and there is not much meat. Base statistics from Fisheries and Oceans, Annual Summary of British Columbia Commercial Catch Statistics, 1988, Pacific Region, 8-9.

25 Gross numbers provided by the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, to April, 1989.

26 Neil Guppy, "Labouring On Shore" in Uncommon Property: The Fishing and Fish Processing Industries in British Columbia ed. Patricia Marchak, Neil Guppy and John McMullan (Agincourt, Ontario: Methuen Publications, 1987), 200.

27 United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, "Master Agreement: Cannery, Netloft, Reduction, Watchmen, 1988," 4.

28 Great Northern custom canning plant in North Vancouver still maintains two such lists, in 1990, and it is likely that there are others.

29 George North, A Ripple, A Wave ed. Harold Griffin (Vancouver: Fisherman Publishing Society, 1974), 23.

30 Gladys Blyth, of the North Pacific Cannery Society, interview with author, Port Edward, B.C., 8 July 1988.

31 Blyth.

32 Statistics Canada, Employment, Earnings, Hours (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, September, 1988), 32.

33 Fish Processors' Association/UFAWU Cannery Master -- Wage Supplement, 1988, 2-3.

34 A semi-qualified filleter receives \$13.74, or nineteen cents more than cannery base rate, and a qualified filleter (who has passed speed and quality testing) receives \$14.20.

35 United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, "Cannery Master -- Wage Supplement 1988", and "Fresh Fish and Cold Storage Supplement, 1988".

36 Muszynski, 135.

37 Statistics Canada, Canadians and their Occupations, the 'Dimension' series, catalogue 93-157, 1986 census.

38 Josie Bannerman, Kathy Chopik and Ann Zurvrigg, "Cheap at Half the Price: The History of the Fight For Equal Pay in B.C.", in Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984), 308.

39 Statistics Canada, catalogue 93-116, 1986, 1-171.

40 Statistics Canada, catalogue 93-116, 1986, 1-171.

41 The UFAWU daycare survey was filled out voluntarily, and twenty percent of those who did so indicated they were single parents. Sixty-five percent of the women interviewed for this thesis were presently single, and one-quarter of them had children at home. All women interviewed both had been married and had had children.

42 Figure 5 represents ethnic backgrounds for shoreworkers all over Canada, and since 80% of the country's shoreworkers live and work in Atlantic Canada,

this chart more accurately represents them than it does the shoreworkers in British Columbia.

Figure 5

**Population characteristics of Selected Detailed Occupations
(Based on the 1980 Classification), Canada, 1986 Census --
20% Sample Data:**

Fish Canning, Curing and Packing Occupations:...

Female:

by ethnic origin:

Single origin:	85.3%
English	50.0%
French	25.2%
German	0.9%
Italian	0.4%
Ukrainian	0.2%
Chinese	2.2%
Dutch	0.4%
South Asian	0.9%
Other single origins	5.1%
Multiple Origins	14.7%

The ethnic breakdown for men was similar, with two per cent more workers of British origin and one and a half per cent less of French origin. South Asian men accounted for only 0.6 per cent of the total, while 0.9 per cent were South Asian women. Statistics Canada, Catalogue 93-157 (1986 census), 290.

43 Jim Sinclair, UFAWU shoreworker organizer, interview with author, Vancouver, January, 1990.

44 Prince Rupert Amalgamated Shoreworkers and Clerks Union, answer to the question: 'Please describe any significant ethnic groups in your membership, and their approximate size as a percentage of your total membership.' Questionnaire originated with the Canadian Labour Congress.

45 Robert Brubaker, Clyde Hertzman, Andrew Jin, Chris van Netten, and Helen Ward, "Prevalence of Muscle Tendon and Nerve Compression Disorders in the Hand and Wrist of Roe Production Workers in Fish Processing Plants," prepared for the Joint Committee on Repetitive Motion Injuries, project funded by Joint Committee of the Fish Processors' Association and the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, June 1990, Table 4 and Table 5.

46 Statistics Canada, catalogue 93-157 (1986 census), 292.

47 Gross numbers obtained from "UFAWU Shoreworkers' Pension Plan Design Options Preliminary Research Report," Trade Union Research Bureau, 1988, Appendix.

48 Ibid.

49 Statistics Canada, catalogue 93-157 (1986 census), 292.

50 Chris Keehn, B.C. Packers Prince Rupert Plant personnel manager, interview with author, Prince Rupert, July, 1988.

51 Information from women which indicated that they have received Social Assistance in the off season is anecdotal, learned 'on the line' during my work days. The unique stability of this sample is suggested by the fact that none of them had received it.

CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN DON'T DO MEN'S JOBS HERE:
THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR IN FISH PLANTS

"What's your number?" You are greeted by the floor lady as you walk into the cannery carrying all your new gear. "Put on your apron, do you have a knife? Stand here, next to Alice, do what she does." The noise is overwhelming, the women around you seem oblivious to it and to your arrival. The floor lady disappears with the other new ones. You smile tentatively at Alice, who grabs a salmon carcass from the pile in front of you and throws it on your board. "Here, take this stuff out." She points to the innards of the fish and returns to the conversation she was having with her neighbour. So you do. You watch your neighbours and do like they do, except you get yelled at, "Get the blood out!" and you don't know what they mean. But you persist, you figure out where the 'clean' fish goes and where the guts and blood from the insides go, and you look around for your friends. They are miles away on another line, so you forget about talking and stand there, washing fish. Hours later, you finally ask someone what time it is, and she says, "Ten to nine." You started work at eight. Coffee is at ten. You don't know if you're allowed to go to the bathroom, you can't arrange with your friends to go at the same time because they are too far away, and you don't know where it is anyway. The pile of fish gets smaller in front of you, and you think, maybe if I'm done my pile I'll get a break, but it is not to be. More fish are sent along the belt just as you reach the bottom of your tub. Alice holds the board so your area fills up too. You say thank you, though you don't know if that's appropriate.

Finally it's coffee and you push through the crowd to where you last saw your friends. They are very glad to see you, because they didn't know where you were for the whole two hours. "I need a coffee, where did we leave our stuff?" "I need a cigarette." "Let's get out of here." By the time you've skirted all the people who are sitting along the edge of the dock (it's almost a nice day) and found your thermos, a bell has gone and they have all started walking back inside. "That's it, huh?" "Think of the money." And back you go, your first two hours on a cannery wash line under your belt.¹

This chapter will examine job divisions by gender, ethnic diversity, flexible work scheduling and the differences among jobs in terms of amounts of work available, variable pay rates for the same tasks, and the inconsistent amount of autonomy over work tasks that exists within fish plants. The source of the information is primarily personal interviews, conducted with shoreworker women from various parts of the British Columbia west coast. The interviewed women agreed that job division by gender was a fact, but they differed in their responses to this reality. While there is no longer formal racial discrimination within the plants, there are informal groupings of workers by ethnic origin, and the women's opinions of these divisions largely depended on where in the hierarchy they belonged.

Fish plants are stratified, first and foremost, according to gender.² This division not only applies to formally assigned tasks, for example fish washing for women and unloading boats for men, but also influences the amount of work available to an individual, control over the work processes, level of comfort or job satisfaction, promotability, and income levels, as well as more hidden benefits like the amount of vacation pay and Unemployment Insurance. From the day they enter the plant, women experience a world which differs, often sharply, from that of their male co-workers.

According to the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, there has been a distinct gender bias in the study of stress. In general terms, men are studied in terms of job stress, while women are studied in terms of gender. This has resulted in generalizing from studies of men to apply to women as well, and in largely ignoring women's (and men's) home-based stressors.³ This means that it is difficult to compare the relative stress levels of women's and men's jobs.

Some ways that jobs are divided indicate that perceptions of the skills of women workers differ from perceptions of those of men. Jobs that women do are

defined as unskilled, though they may take more training and involve more skill than equivalent men's jobs. One clear example of this is found in groundfish operations, where filleting skill is tested, and rewarded monetarily, while other workers in the shed (who are mostly men) are given an automatic raise above the women's rate after they have worked 1000 hours. (See Figure 1, page 38.)

Men in fish plants are given tasks that involve individual decision-making and moving about, like moving buggies of fish from one part of the plant to another; women typically stand in one place on an assembly line and manipulate fish pieces.

This means that an individual man will become a familiar sight to those around him, while a woman will be facing a table with her back towards the other workers.

Twenty women will work together without looking up, almost literally, for years.

Structuring the work this way certainly reinforces divisiveness among workers, and in fact leads to extreme depersonalization of the women who do not have much chance to interact with each other, or in fact with anybody, because the machinery is too noisy for much talking. The men, with their flexibility of movement, become individually known and empowered relative to all the women. The result was described by one personnel manager,

I do the Step 2 grievances. One of the most recurrent themes is that, 'the men get to do this, the men get to do that', leave early for coffee and stuff. I think there's some truth to it, the men are more like individuals while women are thought of as a group, if one can't come in you call another.⁴

Several indicators of this division of actual tasks by gender exist, and the divisions are quite insidious. Women are the line workers, often only responsible for the fish or cans that pass by the one square foot immediately in front of them. Men are often put on the line to start, but stay there only minutes before they are moved to a more mobile job. The most routinized male job tends to be Iron Butcher feeder, and this job is paid an increment, unlike herring roe grading, for example, which is a

men
move
talk

women
stand
quiet

skilled female job, in that there is training and testing of skill levels within the plants. Men fill and empty the retorts*, each with several thousand cans, while women correct the weight of an individual can. This can be compared to Charlene Gannage's Double Day Double Bind, in which she says,

The division of labour in the shop [at Edna Manufacture] corresponded to a horizontal segregation between crafts and a vertical division between craft workers and noncraft workers. Women were segregated in the sense that they were restricted to finishers' craft and the noncraft jobs...women were hired as cheap labour.⁵

In comparison to this vertical and horizontal division between workers found in the garment industry, men and women in canneries begin their employment at equal wage rates, though the jobs are divided, mostly into assembly line/non-assembly line tasks. It is the men's non-assembly line jobs that tend to lead to vertical promotions, into skilled occupations like machine man. While for Gannage's sample, the women are the noncraft workers and finishers, in fish processing both men and women are employed at non-skilled labour to start, though the tasks differ for the genders, and the men are more likely to progress to trades.

Joy,⁶ a woman who has spent ten years in the fish processing industry, perceived the division as follows:

Women in the canning industry...do all the jobs that are not related to machines, so men do all the jobs that are related to the machines. Men are the mechanics, the [towmotor] drivers, run the pumps, run the warehouse lines...they run the retorts, they work on the dock... And ...men were historically in the reduction plants and I think you'd find ...men probably mended the seine nets, and women probably worked on the gill nets. Men also do a lot of the maintenance jobs, such as you'll never see women painting, but you'll see women doing cleaning up. You'll never see women welding and doing that kind of maintenance, cutting floors, doing the heavy construction maintenance that needs to be done during the winter time...Cleanup [for women] is washing floors, cleaning the washrooms, cleaning the lunchroom, making coffee. ...The men's cleanup is hosing down the tables, cleaning up the processing areas using the steam hoses and hot water hoses and...scrubbing....

Men's work, according to Joy, includes having the power to turn belts and machines

on and off, while women must work while the belts are running. Even in terms of the cleanup, men wash down the whole work area after the shift is over (and receive overtime pay to do so), while women perform routine cleaning tasks similar to what they do at home, while the assembly lines are still operating. Men's work tends to make more of a difference to the work area than women's, women's cleaning tends to be maintenance of the bathrooms and luncheon.

Red Circled

One of the main implications of Joy's analysis is that the maintenance work done in the winter time is performed by men, which means that they get to work more of the year than women. Even though there are tasks which men and women are equally able to perform, for example, painting, scrubbing the insides of vats, or collecting and cleaning all the mats, men tend to get called in. The justification tends to be that there will be some skilled work to do -- driving forklift, or lifting pieces of machinery into place -- at which men are considered, often by both management and workers, to be better.

Pay and informal access to training are other indicators of unequal status, as Mona, a charge hand, reported:

But I'm equal with the other department charge hand, which is one of the mistakes they made at Co-op that our charge hand in our department gets more. That's a mistake that they made and he won't let them back out of it now...He makes more...he's getting the linesmen's rate...I'm gettin' \$14.34.

Jill: So, about three dollars' difference.

Mona: Yeah. But right now he's red circled, because I did ask for a raise to be equal with him and they wouldn't do it, but they did red circle his wages until I catch up, which'll be about ten years, I guess...

...You have to be able to drive a tow motor before you get the equal rate. You have to be able to drive a tow motor before you can go to work in January. Otherwise you start at the end of February or March... And you can't tell me that a man sits on a tow motor for eight hours. But that's the way it works...I drive a little, too, but I don't want to -- I don't want to be called to work on those conditions. I want to be called to work because I'm seniority. I'm number two on the list -- our list. And number three comes in to work before I do

because he drives a tow motor...So I don't think that's fair, either. But I'd have to go and drive a tow motor and that would -- to say that's what I should be doing. But I'm sittin' here, I say, "No, I'm not gonna drive tow motor. I want to be called out in line of seniority."

This experience indicates that job stratification is enforced in the plants by the weight of tradition, in that Mona and the men all assumed that forklift driving was not a woman's job. Mona found she must abide by these unequal customs, because she did not control her own work schedule as much as the men who worked with her seemed to control theirs. She argued that what she did do, as woman chargehand, entitled her to work more of the year than she did, even though she did not have the traditionally 'male' skill of forklift driving. She could have organized the women's work area, or checked the seniority list to see who was available for work, for example. She could have painted a wall.

The question remains, of course, why she would not drive forklift. It seems that many women like Mona have learned what is traditionally "their" work, and they would prefer to have it equally valued rather than step outside this particular division of jobs and assert their right to men's tasks. This set of beliefs reinforces gender difference and is used informally within the plants as a justification for unequal treatment. Mona's argument was that women's work, although it may be different, should be equally valued with men's. She also recognized that women should be encouraged to attempt tasks outside their usual area of expertise, in that she herself had learned how to drive forklift. It was a matter of pride to her, that the tasks she defined as belonging to her job should be equally valued and compensated, though they were different than the tasks men did. Mona would agree both that her work was devalued in the current system, and that equal pay should not depend on equal ability at all tasks, but rather on the concept that the labour of different individuals is equally valuable. The variable pay should perhaps result from different skill levels, assuming all people had access to training and the skills were fairly

valued, neither of which currently holds true.⁷

One particularly grating example of differential rewards for differing effort is to compare men who repair the machines with women line workers. Those men are permitted to stand and watch the process of salmon canning when it is in operation, and much of their work is trouble-shooting, or fixing the machines when they break. In fact, one machineman was heard saying, "I'm not paid to work!" His meaning, clearly, was that if he had done his preventive maintenance properly, he would not have to do any other work during the shift. He was making at least three dollars an hour more than the women who were actually handling the salmon on the line, indicating that his expertise was considered to be worth more to the company than their labour. This clearcut example of different rewards for different skills and/or perceptions of skill that a cannery offers to men and women is enshrined in the union contract.

When men and women do not do separate tasks, pay inequity still frequently occurs. Junior men and women work side by side in the box loft and receive different pay rates, as pointed out by Judy 2,⁸ who worked in the area:

One particular job really infuriated me, we were working side-by-side, in the same room, doing the same boxes, stitching for cold storage. Brand new guy who had put his thousand hours in fresh fish, never ever been on a stitcher, and he was getting paid a dollar an hour more than us. Now, that was the straw that broke the camel's back. We couldn't take it any more. And so we had bosses down there -- they did give us semi-qualified cold storage out of that. But they also told us we would never qualify on the thousand hour cold storage rate*, simply because we do not do any of the other jobs in cold storage.

Jill: Like put the fish seven feet in the air.

Judy 2: ...And I had a crucial appointment that I had to go to. Actually, it was a court case. And they had nobody to take my job over. So they couldn't bring a man in and pay him less...because all the other guys would scream, and so I had to come in at six o'clock in the morning, do my work, go to my court case, come back, and then put in overtime just to make up the difference which would have cost the same, you know. But it was just the idea that that might happen! (emphasis mine)

"They couldn't bring a man in and pay him less...". But they could convince her to start work two hours early and return after her appointment in order to get the job done. This incident indicates the great lengths that management (and working men as well) will go to to maintain pay differentials between the sexes, and to insist that the division be based on gender and not on skill. Perhaps Judy had an opportunity at that moment to ask for a raise for herself to the thousand-hour rate (a pay rate sixty cents higher than she was getting)⁹, as there were only a few women working in this area, but this would have separated her from the rest of the women workers. This would have created a precedent-setting situation the plant management would have been unlikely to accept.¹⁰

Management's ability to control women workers through challenging their right to improved conditions or pay, or by harassing them, is central to job stratification. Not only do men and women get treated differently, they are expected to react differently in a given situation. In this case, the job needed doing, so Judy was convinced to work a split shift, because it was assumed that the men would not allow one of their own to be paid less, nor would they allow women to be paid equally. It was to Judy's financial benefit to do what management requested, as she got at least two hours' overtime pay that day, but she still did not get the cold storage rate.

A gendered division of labour is really clear where there are two promotional ladders.¹¹ Women do the in-season work, involving standing in one place and making "small hand motions"¹² for several months a year. There are several tasks that women do, and they can move around from one to another, depending on seniority, but they are all paid the same (or very nearly) unless they become floor lady, in which case the charge hand's twenty-five cents an hour is added. Job mobility includes both the freedom to change jobs, and the opportunity to move

around the work area during your work, but women can do neither. The tasks that women may move among are gender-specific. While men are freer than women from the demands of the assembly line, and tend to have more autonomy over their work, it would be difficult to say whether or not they can change their jobs, even laterally as opposed to upwardly, more freely than women.

Another issue related to job stratification is control over work speed and/or autonomy. Since most of the women are working at the speed of the assembly line belts, they must respond to the demands of their particular place on the line. Men often have more flexibility over the pacing of their tasks. Christina described it this way:

...men's jobs...differ so much than women's; even by doing their time you really see the difference...we know where the women are every minute of the day...they can't be off the line for more than ten minutes...'cause usually somebody else is filling in for you. The men are doing the jobs...like swabbing, they go and pick up fish off the floor and pack it over here and...they're moving around. They're up on the catwalk or out on the dock and boats -- there's no boats to unload, they'll all go sit and have a cigarette and a cup of coffee, and the women, that doesn't usually happen. You're on a production line and it is a lot different.

The very idea of sitting down and having a cup of coffee during "company time" is alien to women. If a woman line worker did have the nerve to sit and have coffee when the assembly line was running, she would be told by the payroll workers or first aid workers (who are, incidentally, also women) to return to the line. It is much less likely that men who sit will be challenged.

The next question is, who works harder, and is this a justification for variable pay? Men are trained in the maintenance and repair of the machinery, (which is a highly valued skill) and women are not. An Iron Butcher machineman, for example, has a skill that is specific to canneries, and very much in demand when the season is underway. The apprenticeship system appears to be one of patronage, in that men invite other men to begin training in the first place, though technically the jobs must

be posted. In terms of bulk lifting, men are expected to do more than women, occasionally. The bags of salt weigh forty kilograms, and men tend to carry them. The vertical plate freezers, where herring is frozen, create sixty-pound slabs of fish. Men lift these. When salmon milt is frozen in the same machines, a divider is put in the slot, and the resulting bag is thirty pounds, which women are often expected to lift. Part of the reason for this division of labour is capability, part of it is perceptions of capability, and part of it is a holdover from previous provincial legislation that prohibited women from lifting more than thirty-five pounds.¹³ In contrast to the bulk labour that is occasionally expected of men, patience and endurance would be useful traits for working on the line, as women do, but these traits are not valued in the fish plant system even if the women possess them. Women's stereotypical manual dexterity would certainly make their tasks easier if it existed, because they are the ones who manipulate small cans and pieces of fish. Skill at coping with panic when your tub of fish is overflowing, and speeding up when this happens, should be rewarded, but it is not.

The women who were interviewed were divided over whose job is harder. Some thought that the difficulties of men's and women's jobs were about the same, some thought women's jobs were less difficult, and others thought women's jobs were more difficult. Faye, for example, thought the traditional division of labour favoured women:

Faye: Well I believe there are jobs for men and I believe there's jobs for women because [equal opportunity] puts a lot of women in a bad spot...And you can't put a poor wee soul that's 90 pounds and you got to put an anchor on her to hold her down when the wind blows down there, how do you expect her to pick up more than her weight?...It can't be done, it can't be done. You get somebody that's 4' nothing, 70 to 80 pounds, I swore I'd never help, but I find myself helping because I'm a big clunk and I can't stand to see somebody wrastling something, so I go and give them a hand....You know I still believe there's jobs for women and there's jobs for men because women are not built, young, yes, but when you get older, you're going to find a difference. You know, and we have a lot of older women in the plant.

A woman who had actually performed several "men's" tasks during the previous herring season, including binman and forklift operator, held equally strong opinions about women's capabilities in relation to man's jobs:

Judy: ...anybody who says that a woman cannot do a man's job, that's another fallacy there, right there...I guess you have to have the confidence to try and do something new, especially if it's a supposedly, quote/unquote "man's job".

Some women remained unimpressed with men's strength, arguing that men did not work as hard as the women:

Balwinder: Big joke. Because some jobs, they say, oh, heavy duty job. So the guys have to do it...and then the next day you see a woman doing it...did they change the sex? So some are really heavy duty or...forklift operators, some of the women...don't have the proper training, okay that's fine, but some of the jobs that they say heavy duty job, that's a humbug.

Virginia: Oh, I think a lot of [men] could do a little more work than they usually do -- they're just more or less walking around where the women have to just stay put where they're put and they can't move away from that job...the men...get jobs where they're just either sweeping the floors or, you know...but it's always been that way it seems.

Virginia's perception that "it's always been that way it seems" gives an example of the stability of this gendered sense of place that many of these men and women experienced in the plants.

Sandy believed that men's jobs were harder, but women's jobs tested the men's endurance:

[Men's jobs] are a lot harder...lots of lifting and pushing...I don't think the men could do what we do...Because they're just you know impatient, and don't have the patience to stand in line and do repetitious work like candling or filleting or washing salmon...we have had men on the filleting line...and they have been really good filleters, but they get bored...you could see how they get irritable some days and snap at you and...they kinda like belittle women. But it's only because of the job, I'm sure.

Her perception that the men were "belittling" women perhaps indicated an attitude that was not uncommon in the plants.

When a woman did a man's job, she was not necessarily paid the men's rate unless she spoke up, as one woman learned to her cost:

Mary: ...equal work, equal pay it should be, you know. And I myself have to do a lot of butchering in the plant that I work in. And I refused this year, I told them point-blank: if I don't get equal pay, forget it, I'm not doing it...And then they offered, say, "Oh, we could give you butcher's wage while you're on it." And I said, "Nope. It's too late now."...I'm getting smarter, I think, not getting older. I was used quite a bit.

Perhaps the problem with being offered butcher's wages while she was butchering was that, in many plants and possibly in hers, once a pay raise was achieved, a man often remained at that pay rate no matter what he was doing. This situation very rarely occurred for women.

While equal pay for equal work had clearly gained credence, even with Faye, there was not the same support for equally valuing men's and women's jobs. As is apparent from these comments, men have more choice over what they do, and they can in fact insist that a job be left for men. Perhaps it is the weight of tradition, and social stereotyping in general, that gives men this power. The analysis of whose task is more difficult is a "humbug" to some of the women, but not others, and yet others are uncertain about the relative difficulties.

Women shoreworkers felt pride in their jobs, and a sense of satisfaction as a result of earning a substantial paycheque. They also felt solidarity among themselves, though they often were divided along ethnic/racial lines in terms of friendships. Working hard together gives people a bond of sympathy. One technique that both floor ladies I have worked for shared was offering a candy to a worker on the line, by unwrapping it and putting it in her mouth, so that she did not have to stop work and take her gloves off. This had the effect of keeping a worker a little more content on the line, and feeling connected to the other workers around her, although they seldom talked. This contentment (or resignation) could be extended,

for some shoreworkers, to a feeling that the division of labour that existed was preferable to change.

The access to nontraditional jobs was a contentious issue among the women shoreworkers. They were very aware that the management and unions of the fish plants were attempting to initiate change in the traditional job divisions. Mary, a Vancouver shoreworker of Japanese-Canadian origin, had done non-traditional labour but had experienced discrimination when she was not paid butcher rate for butchering. This was one way that the division of labour between men and women in her plant had become a major controversy, which management had helped stir up instead of easing. She identified a problem that occurred in 1988 when the management unilaterally sent the young men students home and put women in these junior men's usual places, because of at least one complaint from a woman:

Oh, we had a problem last year...All the school kids were left at home and...when we start working the foreman came: "You, you into the icehouse; you, you into the freezer" -- lift those fifty-pound boxes, eh?...all the women are doing men's jobs...And the ladies are really mad; you could tell...And at eight-thirty coffee break, they all come running to me: "I don't wanna do this and they stick me in there"...I said, "We're going to have a mass meeting at lunch hour"...They said there were some complaints from the junior women that they're left at home 'cause the high school kids are in...[I said] "If you got complaints from the junior women: they want to come in...you let the people that complain do these dirty jobs, not senior ladies."

Refer to memo on work

The "senior ladies" in Mary's plant were content with the traditional division of labour, and were not at all willing to do non-traditional labour, especially when it was demanded without consultation and their pay was not increased. Mary herself had decided to abide by the traditional division, and not to butcher any more.

Virginia, a night shift cannery charge hand, also refused to do men's work:

{ ...sometimes the boss...comes over and tells me to lift all these fish and I refuse. I'll tell him no, you get one of the guys to do it. They're doing nothing, you know, they can lift that because sometimes they are too heavy to be throwing [them] up on that [table].

As a charge hand and shop steward, Virginia also set an example for the women who

work in her area. As a result, they may have been less inclined to do tasks that are traditionally reserved for the opposite sex. The resentment some women felt because they were not getting as much money per hour or as many hours' work as equally senior men was reflected in their refusal to do what they perceived as men's work.

There are, however, some signs that the current gender stratification within the industry may be changing. One example of an attempt to break the strong gender stratification occurred at B.C. Packers Prince Rupert Plant in 1988. In response to a union/management memorandum signed in 1988 on equal opportunity, women were training on forklifts and were put on a supplementary list as drivers. They would be called to drive before any new men were hired to do the job, and in time would be promoted to the main list. Forklift driving is the main primary-labour-force entry-level job¹⁴ in the industry, and it is used as one main division-point structuring the internal labour market, so the movement of women into that skill area is a hopeful sign that access to better paying jobs and more hours' work may be improving for women.

For all its apparent disadvantages in terms of relative incomes, amounts of available work, choice of tasks performed, and autonomy and mobility on the job, not all women want stratification by gender to end. Some would in fact prefer the system of separate seniority lists by gender, which still exists in at least one plant, Great Northern plant in North Vancouver. Generally the women who appreciated the established division of labour tended to have more seniority, and had become comfortable with the tasks expected of them over time.

* In summary, men and women are treated differently in fish plants, and their treatment does not benefit the women workers. Men have access to more money, because they often work more time and do jobs which give them more pay per hour. Men have more autonomy over their tasks on the floor as they do not have to stand

in one place and handle fish at the speed of the machines. Only men progress to monthly pay scales. Men tend to control the machines that control the women. Women are often conflicted about whether they want to do "men's" work, at least partly because of the needs of their families. While some women were training at men's jobs other women, including those in authority, chose to restrict their labour to tasks traditionally performed by women.

Just as in the garment industry discussed by Charlene Gannage,¹⁵ this sexual division of labour was exacerbated by the ethnic origins of the employees. In the case of shorework, the management and the "skilled" trades, like machineman, are dominated by white men, but ethnic and racial variation characterizes the bulk of shoreworkers. Even among the men, various ethnic groups will dominate in particular work areas. As indicated in chapter two, by far the largest group within shorework in Prince Rupert is the native community, while Asian workers generally dominate in plants south of Port Hardy.¹⁶ Canadian Fish in Vancouver has a contingent of Chinese workers, both immigrant and Canadian-born. Some plants employ Japanese workers. In others, Italians, Portuguese, and Koreans work together.

Unlike Gannage's sample, where men who spoke Yiddish dominated in the workplace and in the union over women who did not, the one language dominating union and workplace activities for both men and women in shorework is English, which is particularly problematic for immigrant workers. Asian women, often immigrants, outnumber Asian men, and they have perhaps the most difficulties communicating in the plants, due to lack of English. The three Asian women interviewed all spoke English as a second language, as did one European immigrant. The native women were almost all bilingual, as was the Japanese-Canadian woman.

This "melting pot" is not without strife. The problem of division among the

workers by ethnic group or origin is exacerbated by the variety of languages spoken: if one group wishes to keep information to itself, the members can simply speak in their own language. A number of interviewees mentioned this diversity, and in fact described a hierarchy based on ethnicity. Sandy, who is a native/Norwegian woman, described her fish plant this way:

Portuguese, Italians, East Indians, Sikhs, Natives, Whites, you know just about all [groups are represented]...there's quite a few East Indians and quite a few Italians. The Italians sort of like run the roost though.

While the analysis of who runs the plant refers to interactions between the workers rather than between workers and management, Sandy indicated how aware the workers were of ethnic or racial divisions. These divisions are often more crucial to the smooth functioning of a plant than management initiatives are. Informal barriers that restrict workers' opportunities, defined by Reskin and Hartmann as "provid[ing] an inhospitable context for women", through profanity and sexual harassment for example,¹⁷ do appear to exist in the plants, but these are not codified formally into management practice.

Those workers who speak another language better than they speak English must rely on interpreters. Yet, as Thelma's description of an incident she witnessed indicates, interpreters do not necessarily serve the best interests of the women:

interpreters
 ...you get these people that...are so intimidated, we have a lot of that in our plant because there's a lot of women who don't speak any English, different nationalities, Chinese, Indo-Canadians, you know. And they are so afraid of losing their job that they will jump through hoops of fire...And then, they have a habit -- a trick that they use with the Chinese ladies -- it's quite noticeable. They'll get 'em a Chinese man to interpret for them, but he is getting it in English and it's coming out of his mouth in Chinese and what they're probably saying to him in English is "Tell 'em that they have to work, you know, at a better speed," that their speed is lower. "You better work faster; you[re] gonna lose your damn job."...that's what he's telling them in Chinese...I've actually seen the women in tears -- actually in tears, you know.

In fairness to the interpreter in this instance, perhaps he did not understand how

difficult it was for the women to speed up, or perhaps he felt that his job or status was threatened if the women of his ethnic group did not perform adequately. Such employee interaction is not uncommon in fish plants, and, while it is a reflection of ethnic or racial diversity, it also frequently reinforces gender inequality. In this case, a male interpreter was apparently intimidating the women who spoke his language, reinforcing their subordinate position within the fish plant structure.

The experience of ethnic disparity can be negative, as Balwinder, an East Indian woman, perceived. East Indians make up a sizeable group in some fish plants, but they do not 'rule the roost':

East Indians did not rule the roost

{ [the bosses and some workers,]...they treat you like, I don't know, I thought they were treating me like dirt. That I have never been treated like before...The bosses, you know, and the whole atmosphere was so different...[racism] plus the little bit discrimination...you all have to face that, and we see that, [from] some of the other communities.

A woman of European origin felt differently about the ethnic mix.

Portuguese-born Rosa found herself in the group that dominated in her particular fish plant, and, not surprisingly, her experience of social relations at work was much more positive:

...when I feel like talk[ing, I] talk...I enjoy the life, [we are] all together, you know...lunch room sometimes we just talk -- everybody talk at table...from where I come -- Portugal, Italy, it's all the same and we want [to] talk all [at] the same time...sometimes three or four...It's fun, sometimes, too.

Ethnic identities mean that workers define themselves in terms of their group of origin, dividing themselves from each other. It still remains true, however, that ethnic diversity is not structured into the fish plant system the same way that gender divisions are.

Some native women, like their parents, have spent their lives in harness to shorework seasons. Since canning started on the west coast in 1870, native women have patched* cans, and many of them have family histories that span several

generations in the industry. The memories of two native shoreworkers in Prince Rupert included a long period of canning history:

A friend in Prince Rupert:...few white people work[ed] with us, not very many Europeans that time in '48 and '50, '51, and now they're all mixed, Europeans and Hindus, you name it, and we [are] just a few amongst them now. Lots of people back home they...can't get a job down here because there's too many other people, you know.

Penny: Chinamen they worked there and the Japanese -- mostly Japanese ladies worked...and all the native women [at Claxton Cannery] were hand filling.

The native women were sparing with their memories. They left a great deal unsaid, about their status within the shoreworking communities and the nature of the housing. This may be a reflection of the fact a white woman was questioning them, and it may also reflect the fact that many of them had not lived in company housing since they were small children and had experienced working lives that were increasingly like those of other workers.

Today discrimination is no longer formal, but it has not disappeared. The UFAWU official history, A Ripple, A Wave, mentions one symbolic rejection of established sexism and racism:

...the days of inferior wages and atrocious working conditions, uncontrolled hours and lack of callout guarantees, discrimination on the basis of sex and race now are bitter relics of a past symbolically rejected by Native women at Namu when they took down segregated toilet signs labelled "Indians" and "whites".

Discrimination against natives has become more informal in recent times. Two native women in this sample were floor ladies, or supervisory personnel, indicating it is possible for a native woman to be promoted.

Given the long history native women have had with fish processing, it is important to note that some parts of the native community still organize their annual schedules around salmon canning in particular. This was described by Virginia, a Tahltan and a charge hand:

...it's mostly Natives and East Indians, I think...A lot of [Natives] just come here for the summer...Prince Rupert is a fishing town...a lot of people come in from all over the place to work with the fish. So, I think that's the busiest time of the year is the summer for this town. There's a lot more people here and in the wintertime when it's all over they all go back upcountry or wherever they're from ...Because a lot of them stay in motels...When the season's slow they really don't like to come down because they got to pay their babysitter at home, a lot of them, and then they come down and stay in a motel -- they have to pay that -- and then they don't [get] very many days [work] in a week, eh -- two days, three days -- not even eight hours; it's not really worth their while, sometimes.

Not all the transient workers are native. Another group settling in Prince Rupert for the season is comprised of university students like my brothers and me, seeking summer employment. One subject was both a student and native, receiving band funding for her schooling.

Ethnic background is a much more subtle influence than gender, creating divisions within sex groups. Balwinder pointed out that:

I would love to work on the patching table. But there are hardly any East Indians working on the patching table, you know? Because you have to be attentive and you have to be fast.

Although Balwinder does not believe that jobs on the patching table go to those who will get along best with the people who are already there -- in other words, that ethnic grouping may play a part -- it appears possible that that is in fact what happens. The floor lady's decisions about where women workers are placed is final.

Preferential jobs within the factory are often posted. Seniority dictates the order in which applicants are considered, and offers each sex the opportunity to apply for the jobs traditionally held by the other. This is a relatively recent phenomenon, which has allowed women to be given trials on forklifts, and men to fillet. Previously, gendered job divisions were more rigid. Ten years ago there was not a woman forklift driver in any plant I worked in, but I have trained on a forklift in the last two years. Seniority is not dependent on ethnicity or race. According to the union contracts, the person who has been there the longest will have priority for

any job they applied for, though jobs are considered 'appropriate' for one sex or the other to apply for.

In a previous contract, any person who left the fish plant to go to any kind of schooling lost their seniority completely, which a earlier Northern Organizer described as a situation in which "they don't want anyone to upgrade themselves out of the industry."¹⁸ Currently, a student retains her seniority until she graduates from her program of study, at which point she is put at the bottom of the regular fish plant list. This tends to make it easier for students to leave the industry.¹⁹ Students may also be resented by other workers each year that they return to the plant and move back into the middle of the list in a spot that has been empty for up to eleven months. It adds another level of uncertainty to the fish plant system, in the sense that placement on the seniority list can be changed seasonally.


Besides the seasonality of the fishplant, there are the daily and weekly variations in the amount of available work. Christina spoke for many people when she said:

On call { ...being on call is a bit tedious. But, where else are you going to work where you're going to make that amount of money -- and have so much time off, you know?...Being on call, like, being up and coming out of the shower and then you get a phone call, "Can you come to work in twenty minutes?" Those are bad days -- that's when I go and I'm kinda grumbly, eh. I like to know the night before.

The fish plant women were unanimous that they would like work to be more regular and dependable, and several of them would also like there to be more work available to them. The erratic callout is perhaps the least favoured part of fish plant work, especially for women who have family obligations.

Of course in plants longer than men Women tend to work at a plant longer than men. At Canadian Fish Home Plant in Vancouver, twenty-one of the thirty most senior workers on the 1989 cannery list were women, or seventy per cent, which is higher than the ratio of women to men industry-wide. One possible explanation is that some men's jobs

involve skills that are transferable to operations outside the fishplant: forklift driving is the best example. Thus, men may leave the fish plant for other employment, and even for better pay and more regular hours. Women tend not to have learned skills that would be transferable, or would only be transferable to factory work that may not be as successfully unionized. This means that other work they may obtain may be at a lower rate of pay. As Barbara, a Chinese woman who looked for employment around Vancouver, indicated, before she began at her fish plant, she could have gone to a potato chip factory for much less money. The high fish plant wages are likely due to the unionization in the industry.



In conclusion, this chapter has found that fish plant jobs are primarily divided by gender. While the shoreworker community is ethnically diverse, ethnic and racial barriers are more informally enforced than the gender divisions. Flexible work scheduling and the differences between the jobs in terms of amounts of work available give men a decided advantage in terms of their choice of job and amount of work and therefore pay they get. The unionization of the industry has resulted in higher wages and seniority provisions within plants, even though the sexual division of labour is both formally and informally maintained. The next chapter will look at women's experience of the work and the effects of unionization.

1 Description of the writer's experience of her first day in a cannery, spring 1978.

2 This inequality is often characteristic of factory work generally. According to sociologist Pat Armstrong:

About 8 per cent of women work in factories -- packing fruits and vegetables, cleaning fish and chickens, making clothes and sorting paper -- but...[f]actories remain highly sex-segregated, and women continue to do work that is very similar to the jobs they had at the turn of the century.

From "Women's Work, Women's Wages", in Women and men: Interdisciplinary readings on gender, ed. G.H. Nemiroff (Markham: Fitzhenry and Whiteside Ltd, 1987), 370.

3 Graham S. Lowe, Women, Paid/Unpaid Work and Stress: New Directions for Research (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1989), 2-3.

4 Chris Keehn, personnel manager of B.C. Packers Prince Rupert Plant, interview with author, Prince Rupert, B.C., June, 1988.

5 Charlene Gannage, Double Day, Double Bind (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986), 100 and 109.

6 Each woman was asked which first name she would prefer to be identified by in this paper.

7 Debra Lewis, Just Give Us the Money: A Discussion of Wage Discrimination and Pay Equity (Vancouver: Women's Research Centre, 1988), 34, says "...the system of determining wages in general is not really based on the value of the work we do", and that we should value labour differently than we do.

8 Two women interviewed indicated that they preferred to be identified as Judy; hence the number 2.

9 The thousand-hour cold storage rate is eighty-seven cents more per hour than cannery 400-hour rate, and is paid to the people (all men) who work in the freezers, once they have worked 1000 hours in a plant.

10 At Seal Cove fish plant in Prince Rupert, as chief shop steward I asked for a constant base rate to be established in the box loft, and in fact I said I did not care what the rate was, as long as it was the same for men and women. The management of that plant did not either raise the women's rate or drop the men's, and the issue remains unresolved, nearly ten years later.

11 There are now some efforts being made to address this situation, but it remains true that the divided labour force is common throughout the industry.

12 Karen Messing and Jean-Pierre Reveret, "Are Women in Female Jobs For Their Health?" International Journal of Health Services 13:4 (1983), 636.

13 "Factories Act: Regulations re Female Factory Employees, made by Order in

Council No. 811, Approved May 11th, 1945," B.C. Reg. 195/59, The B.C. Gazette--Part II (June 11th, 1959), 484. This regulation was repealed by B.C. Reg. 415/73, of November 14, 1973.

14 Mary Lynn Stewart, "Economic theories to Explain Women's Position in the Labour Market," audiotape conversation with Anita Clair Fellman for Women's Studies 100 by correspondence, Simon Fraser University, course revised 1989.

15 Charlene Gannage, Double Day, Double Bind: Women Garment Workers (Toronto: The women's Press, 1986), 99-102.

16 Jim Sinclair, UFAWU Shoreworker Organizer, in conversation with author, January, 1990.

17 Barbara F. Reskin and Heidi I. Hartmann, editors, Women's Work, Men's Work: Sex Segregation on the Job (Washington: Committee on Women's Employment and Related Social Issues, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council, National Academy Press, 1986), 54-56.

18 Mike Darnell, UFAWU Northern Organizer, in conversation with the author, 1982.

19 Currently I am the most senior person who only works on the cannery night shift at Canadian Fish Home Plant in Vancouver, and when I finish my course of study at university I will drop approximately one hundred places. It is unlikely that I will be free to spend five years regaining that seniority; instead like many others I will look for more fulltime work outside the industry.

CHAPTER FOUR: WORKING CONDITIONS AND WORK CULTURE

Life in a fish plant is hard, and hardest on women. In particular, this chapter will focus on the pace of work and physical stresses associated with the occupation, and on mechanization and its effect on the composition of the labour force. Union activity among the women will be described. Some aspects of the culture of work will be sketched, including access to and perceptions of money on the part of the women. Some of the flavour of the experience of work will be described. This is an attempt to describe the demands of the fish plants on the assembly line workers, and the resulting working conditions and experience of work for them.

The pace of work within fish plants is often frantic, as the fish must be canned or processed before it spoils. Besides, or perhaps partly because of, the changeability of the callout, and the intensity of work, injuries are a fact of life in fish plants. This is true, of course, for many other large fast-paced processing establishments as well. The Workers' Compensation Board recognizes some injuries as having occurred at work, but not others, and the ones that are usually not recognized are stress injuries that have been exacerbated by the new machines introduced in the last ten years.

Technological change within the industry has far-reaching effects on workers, as the introduction of fish washers and herring sexers has shown. Mechanical fish washers reduce the number of labourers needed to wash salmon. Sexers have substantially reduced the amount of effort involved in herring popping, as the males do not need to be handled again after being sexed. Previously the women opened up each herring to check for roe. Both of these innovations have reduced work available to women.

The recent creation of fish farms is another innovation in this industry. Farm fish is much easier to harvest than wild salmon, and makes it possible to schedule

fish processing in a much calmer fashion. For the workers, there is a trade-off here, between the large amounts of overtime available to be worked during a season when wild fish are caught and processed, and being able to organize their time outside work hours when work on farm fish is planned. In the second instance, the pay cheque is smaller, as there is no need to schedule overtime. If the farm fish could be processed all year, much of the uncertainty inherent in fish plant work would disappear, but the net pay would definitely decrease during peak season. Overall, it is likely that salmon workers would get more work, and therefore more money because of farm fish, but they may put in more labour to get it, as they would not be working overtime in response to the amount of fish caught during an opening*. If they were called in to work on both kinds of fish, the number of weeks worked may be increased, which would give the workers more access to unemployment insurance. Such a longer period of work would also cut inevitably into the time they would allocate to their domestic duties.

The shoreworkers' union has actively participated in negotiations over these changes in the industry, but has at best only been able to slow the pace of change. The union has not, as yet, been able to bargain for or obtain major benefits like a year-round income or an industry-wide seniority list. In the case of a year-round income, farm fish is a recent phenomenon, and may change the structure of callout enough to make that option attractive to the companies yet.

Shoreworkers' perception of money, though their access to it may become more routinized with farm fish, is different than that of people who receive a regular income. Currently, this perception is also different from the capitalist ethic of greed. Because the earnings are so irregular, a large amount of money can be earned in a short time, but the salmon seasons in particular are so short, averaging less than six weeks, that there is often only one 'good' paycheque a year. Women shoreworkers sometimes describe themselves as greedy and only there for the money, but they are

often satisfied with this seasonal pay, which results in low yearly incomes, even with unemployment insurance. They can earn a large sum quickly and be free to fulfill other obligations, but the time that they must work in order to do this is not schedulable.

While it is true that unemployment insurance may add substantial amounts of money to their income over the year, these women are forced to maintain their families as best they can on wages that are below the poverty level. Some of the women consider that they only work for "pin money," that their husbands support the households. Some women justify their lower incomes by arguing that men need a family wage but women do not. Alternatively, women do not contest the situation because they see a benefit in having more time to devote to tasks other than paid work. Despite a gendered division of labour which works to their disadvantage, they do not tend to organize against the system.

Even with irregular work and pay, seasonality, the on-call nature of the industry, job stratification by gender, and the unpleasant nature of the work place, many women stay in the fish plants. Even though the companies make no guarantees about work or income to their hourly-paid employees -- in fact, they may treat a person who has returned to the same plant for twenty years as no more than a casual employee, though seniority provisions codify the way the workers may apply for preferential jobs and increased amounts of work -- the female workers stay with the industry. Six of the women in this sample had spent their entire working lives in the industry, and several of the younger women may do so yet. Several women are in Prince Rupert, where fish processing provides much of the work available in town, especially for women. It is also true that many of these women are immigrants or have English as a second language, or have little education, all factors restricting job mobility.

Of course, the quality of life at work and the interactions between people

make a real difference in how possible it is to remain employed at a particular plant. The women's relationships with each other, as well as with men and with management, become very important in making the daily work more or less difficult. On the floor and in the lunchroom, interaction among the workers makes a great deal of difference in how smoothly the plant runs.

The woman across the table from her, or beside her on the line, or who is turning the fish to make them ready for her to place in the canning machine, is probably the only person a woman will talk to during her entire shift. That relationship is crucial. The stress and monotony of the tasks -- that is, for a woman to stand on a line for hours in all her gear beside a noisy machine, making the same movements over and over again -- gives rise to an intense awareness of the actions of the women who are standing near her, even if their communications are non-verbal. Celeste, a young French Canadian woman with eight years' employment in the industry, talked about job interactions in a straightforward way:

...you have fight[s] with people...it's hard to dislike somebody because she's slow or she's like this or like that, because if you want it or not, you are going to have to work with her...like this year [we] had [a] fight break out between two women...I have really like[d] my partner this year. She's a nice woman...For sure we...fight together, and I think it's normal...But we had a nice year together.

The same woman talked about how women notice how long one another spends on a bathroom break, which is almost the only time someone can be away from the line. Women who are in a routine of working together will know who spends a long time in the bathroom, which women like to go at the same time so they can talk, and when there is likely to be a lineup (this can be a positive occurrence as it means the time spent off the line will be longer). At Canadian Fish during herring season recently, the herring roe graders took their bathroom breaks in order, one woman going when the one before her on the line returned. This is, of course, not condoned by management, but it gives some indication of the co-operation, and boredom, that builds during the daily routine for those workers who are forced to work on an

assembly line.

There are few other ways to vary the monotony of assembly-line work. Since the early eighties, radios have not been permitted in most fish plants, and Walkmans are not acceptable either, due to possible ear damage from the aggregate noise level. In most plants, the cannery section at least is posted by the WCB as a noise hazard area, and earplugs are issued. Women sometimes stretch or dance a bit, to loosen up their muscles, and I have heard several women singing the theme from "Cats" in order to relieve the tedium. Another tactic is less easy to plan: if a woman has a work-related injury she can go to First Aid during "company time." Company time is the time between bells, during which the assembly lines are actually operating, when an employee is expected to be working, and when she is paid. Union shop stewards serve on safety committees and/or have to negotiate grievances during company time, and this is no small benefit. The need to remain on the line, or to have your job covered when you are absent for a few minutes, is intense, as the machinery cannot function without enough people to keep it supplied with fish. In the main, though, women are unable to change more than the smallest part of their work.

Not surprisingly, the unpleasant surroundings and the monotony of assembly-line work exacerbate any tensions that may exist. The extent of this tension is evident in the following comment, where Faye and Terry flippantly mentioned the use of knives as weapons:

Terry: We never told you about the guy who stabbed the guy in the freezer. Or the girl who held the guy against the end with a knife?

Incidents like these achieve the status of folklore, but seem in fact to occur very rarely. A line -- fillet or washing or popping -- may have more than one hundred knife-carrying women on it daily, but the knives are simply tools of work. If a woman is unlucky enough to cut herself, it is the shock and surprise that the knife can actually cut her that stays with her.

It is up to the floor lady or woman charge hand to keep the women working as harmoniously as possible, which means organizing them into the tasks according to seniority and keeping tension at acceptable levels. Women who talk together so much that work is suffering will be separated, an event reminiscent of grade school. Break time is marked by bells or shouts from the foreman. The machines do not stop during work time, unless the crew is "unlucky" enough to have one break down. I have many memories of standing on a processing line, looking over at the machine men, who idly stand, watching the action and smoking, waiting for their skills to be needed. When machines break down, the line workers often sneak to the bathroom, perhaps for a cigarette, while the machine men work frenetically to get the machines functional again. One sarcastic comment often shared among the women is that the machine men must be receiving productivity bonuses, they work so fast when necessary.

Women do their best to manipulate the fish plant system to their own benefit, by applying for particular jobs or working with certain people. They often work to get a friend or relative hired, perhaps because this will give them someone to talk to at work. Barbara talked about how she got some people hired at a plant one herring season:

Then three or four girl[s], they go with me to see the manager, right?...And I say, "Oh, you hire people? This is my friend or my cousin," I say that. Then all the women go there, they work.

The chance that these women were her cousins is pretty slim, since her family is in Calcutta, but it is the perception that she has in some way guaranteed their minimum acceptability that is important. A woman's ability to "place" friends in the plant is also a reflection of her own status, at least in their eyes.

Clearly, much hiring is done through family networks, a system that I used for my own family's benefit last year. The seasonal demand for labour, which requires that people work for several weeks on two hours' notice annually, underpins

this reliance on kin and friends. Plant managers know that family members of current employees will understand the requirements of the job without much explanation, either through previous observation or because their relative is keeping them in line. It is another method, like statistical discrimination, for easing the stress load on a personnel manager. It also tends to give workers some sense that they too have influence in the work place, and thus make them more content.

Even for people who are recommended by workers, hiring is often done at the factory gate. Those who are recommended will be told when this hiring will take place, and thus may only have the advantage of being able to line up first. A payroll clerk or personnel manager will make a decision on hiring based in part on the reliability of the worker who has recommended the prospective employee. Sometimes it is the plant foreman who makes the decisions: in 1978 in Prince Rupert Seal Cove plant, this is how it was done. At Canadian Fish Home Plant in 1989, word was sent out that applications would be accepted on one day in June only, and predictably, there was a lineup of several hundred people that morning. The first two hundred applications were accepted, and hiring for the summer was done from those applications.

During the first year or two of employment, a worker will not get much work unless the catch of fish is extraordinary, because her/his callout number is so low. Because of this, many people do not stay and the last people on a seniority list may change several times in a season. Consequently, floor ladies and personnel supervisors may not invest much work or concern in a new person. The amount of work available during a day, a week, or a season, is never dependable. Many people find this difficult or inconvenient, and leave.

There is also danger, as there is in any factory. Plants are not particularly safe or healthy. The mercurial nature of fish plant work exacerbates the dangers, as workers are often not used to the line at all, as well as perhaps being unfamiliar with

a particular machine. There are possibilities of injury from the machines and belts, and the almost predictable occurrence of stress-related muscle and hand deterioration.¹

Occasionally, people get caught up in the belts, as happened to Penny several years ago:

The only time I got really hurt bad was 1984. We were working washing down, I seen one fish under the conveyor. I picked it up. Just when I was standing up, I slipped and fell down and my sleeve got caught on that conveyor. Soon I feel it. Everything went in my face and I can't see 'cause I got my eyes shut...It's when my thumb was come right off.

This woman has a scar around her thumb and first finger and reports no feeling in that part of her hand, which doctors did manage to reattach. She was on compensation for a year.

Another woman who worked with me reached for a fish that was on the underneath part of a conveyor, and the roller at the end grabbed her glove and pulled her arm in, breaking it. Terry, an assistant charge hand, talked about her knee injury, which was recognized by the WCB as a work-related injury because she hurt it pushing a buggy full of fish:

Terry: I became the tally for Atlin and that was what I was doing until I hurt my knee a year ago.

Jill: Now you've been on worker's comp for a bit?

Terry: A year, yeah, and this is my second operation and now I don't know if I'll ever be able to go back to the fish plant either, now ...Who's going to retrain me at 54 years old to do what? I don't type, I never did type...I tell you, this year it's cost me a lot of money, and I mean a lot of money this year, I'm about \$18,000 out of pocket for this knee.

More common injuries are knife cuts or pulled muscles and cramps. Also, freezer plants occasionally leak ammonia that damages workers' lungs.

Less dramatic, but equally important, are the physical costs of daily repetitive work. Many women who work in fish processing suffer from muscle strain at the least, if not chronic deterioration of hand flexibility. It is difficult to find hard

information about these injuries, as the Workers' Compensation Board did not recognize them as work-related until recently.² Repetitive Strain Injury has a high incidence of occurrence among "process workers in...food industries"³ among many other occupations.

Thelma: Repetitive motion. Years ago they used to allow you to pop herring what they called freestyle: any method that was most comfortable for you...And the roe was of high quality and nobody seemed to complain. And then suddenly we had new management in and they discovered that -- or, they decided that -- they would have better roe if they used a new method of popping...And this is where your repetitive motion comes in...I think the theory is that when you frack it that it's gonna work like a zipper and they're just gonna fall out....And then you squeeze. Well, after an eight to ten hour day, you start getting really bad -- I have actually seen...women absolutely swollen up; women who go into work in the morning and go to first aid immediately and have their arms wrapped to give them a little extra push, you know. I have seen women with great lumps that form on their hands here.

Jill: At the wristbone.

Thelma: Yeah. There's one woman you should talk to...I have never seen anybody's hands as bad as hers. And that comes from -- strictly from repetitive motion which, of course, the company does not believe and which the Workers' Compensation don't recognize. They do not pay you for that...

The UFAWU has recently successfully pushed for a study of repetitive motion disease, which includes hand cramps, tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome, all resulting from popping herring too long. Thelma described the inauguration of the roe popping study:

there is a study going on in B.C. Packers at the moment on ergonomics. We fought like hell to get that in...when Clyde Hertzman and the other doctor came into the plant with management they came over to me to watch what was happening; so I said to Clyde, "Here, take one of my gloves and you do it," you know. "You try it." Well, he tried and he said, "Oh boy, I see where the strain is." So the other doctor did the same thing. There was a girl standing next to me...we got talking about this repetitive motion and [she] said, "And this is what you have to do to survive here." And she stripped off her gloves, put up both her hands and "tchew," she's got -- she's been operated on on both hands.

According to Thelma, each woman's individual results from this herring roe popping study will not be made public, but will only be released to participants who request

the information. The results indicated statistically that there was a 3.1 times greater risk of developing carpal tunnel syndrome among herring roe poppers than among a control group.⁴

Routinized physical work is often debilitating. Fish plants are very dependent on the workers' physical labour, and not enough safeguards prevent injury or stress. Technological change has all been in the direction of more routinized, more efficient, steadier fish processing in the plant. Since women work as part of the machines, technological change has lessened their autonomy, as well as reducing their numbers. This kind of change in the industry has the effect of reducing the number of workers doing routinized jobs, but increasing the stresses involved in the jobs that remain.

Perhaps partly because these work-related stress injuries are not recognized by the Workers' Compensation Board as compensable, fishing appears statistically to be a much more dangerous occupation than shorework. While the total number of workers in each industry appears to be approximately the same, at something over 6,000 workers when all employees are counted, the total cost of Compensation claims in fish processing was 48% of the cost of fishers' claims in 1988.⁵ Fishing on small boats has the potential to be more dramatically dangerous than work inside a plant, because the sea is capricious to say the least, but shorework may be more debilitating over time, at least for those who perform the small hand motions involved in popping roe or patching cans of salmon. There is some movement by the WCB on this issue in 1990, in that roe popping hand and arm injuries have been compensated for as work-related injuries, but only in unique cases. When the daily work is proceeding normally, the WCB does not recognize any resulting stress injury as yet. In one specific case, a woman was awarded wage-loss compensation because the herring had been improperly thawed, making the work more difficult than usual.⁶

Because great gluts of fish arrive in plants all at once, there is occasionally (and predictably) a push on to increase production. The machine men control the

speed of the belts and machines, and the management can demand that they increase this speed, but women working on the line will not necessarily be told that this is happening. They must work faster without consultation, as if they were parts of the machines. This clearly indicates a difference between men's and women's control over work: the women lose control through automation, while men retain it. This is true for the women who work on the fish washing machines or the patching table, or who pop herring. Since the herring sexer has been introduced, every fish a woman gets has roe to be removed, so she works at a steady speed. The forklift drivers who put the totes of herring in the dumpers to feed to the line of women now know how long it will take to process that herring. This means they are then free to go do other work in the plant, until the assembly line needs herring again. Before the introduction of the sexer, a glut of male herring in a woman's tub might mean she would have a minute to rest, as she would finish her fish first. Any rest during a day is a memorable event for women, while it is not so remarkable for many men.

One recent technological change in the fish plants has been the introduction of Coastline fish-washing machines, in both canneries and fresh fish departments. These machines wash fish more quickly but less well than the manual labourers did previously. In addition, those washers who are still employed are having to work at the speed of the machine to check the quality of the fish that come out of it. This leads at the very least to stress, and eventually to hand and muscle injuries. The machine feeders receive seven cents an hour compensation to work with this machinery, but the checkers and the washers receive no rewards.

As Thelma, an older woman with twelve years' experience in her plant, pointed out, the fact that the quality of this canned fish will decrease is not lost on the women:

The machine does not touch [the] bloodline. And if they're really in a hurry, the girls down there don't catch much of it either. So, consequently,...the girls that are putting it into the cans are complaining that they're finding this blood, you know, but what can

they do? It's too late and it's too fast; they can't stop and flick out the blood before they put it in the can, you know.

The bloodline in the inside of the fish, along the backbone, gives a bitter taste to the meat if it is not cleaned out. The "deskilling" of fish washing means that women have less control over their work speed and over the quality of the product they turn out. This has led to both a reduction in quality and an alienation of the women from the products of their labour.

Lack of control over work speed makes the plant even less pleasant than it was previously, and has the added negative effect of taking away the women's pride in their work, the belief that they were turning out a quality product, something that they themselves would eat. Again, Thelma's comment is the most telling:

...when they decided to put these [machine] washers in a few years ago, they changed our technique of washing the fish manually. And I can remember one of the supervisors coming along and saying to me, "Oh Thelma, that's a clean fish--that's a very clean fish. Chuck it down the thing." I said, "That's not a clean fish." I said, "You know, I can my own fish at home, and that thing wouldn't stand jar room in my cupboards." ...when I washed a fish manually, when it got to the point where I would look at it and I would say, "Oh, that looks good enough to eat," then I would put it down the thing, you know?...I think it's a case of having pride in your work...And the machine does not clean fish as well as it -- as a manual cleaning, you know. No way. I don't believe it.

Another way of mechanizing the industry, in a sense, is to farm the fish. The possible effects of creating this new farm fish industry have not been documented fully, but it will change the work schedule, as well as some processes, because fish plants will receive regular, planned deliveries of fish instead of an erratic wild catch. Farm fish also tend to be all the same size and quality, qualities which would further standardize their treatment.

Pride in production also is undermined by farm fish. Several of the women do not think that the increasing amount of farm fish measures up to the same level of quality as wild stocks:

Elsie: Yeah, you open it up sometimes and the stink about knocks you over, and...big sores in there and deformities. Noses broken off, tail

fins gone, five or six fins where there should be only one, and you know... they're mass raised that's why.

Elsie was not the only woman to emphasize her dislike of farm fish. Joy in Rupert and Judy in Steveston both insisted that they would not eat it because of deformities, tumours, and differences in texture. The women who wash the fish are most aware of these problems: it is their job to look inside each fish they wash. Even a grader is not as aware of the quality of the insides of the salmon.

Fish plant mechanization does not benefit either the women line workers or the consumers, in terms of quality of the product. It may reduce the cost of processing the fish, but whether that will be reflected on supermarket shelves remains to be seen. The way that fish washing is becoming deskilled will result in poorer-quality canned salmon, perhaps reducing the quality of the canned salmon to the same level as that of the salmon canned in the United States, as fish plant folklore has it.

These changes in the industry have meant that the workers have needed their collective strength in order to keep the disruption of their lives to a minimum. The unions have been very active on "tech change" issues over the last ten years, though the effect that union activity has had has been to slow or ameliorate the effects of change, rather than stop it. Largely because of issues like pay disparity, job segregation, erratic callout to work, injury on the job, and technological change within the industry, fish plant workers need the unions to represent them. The women discussed the unions with varying degrees of enthusiasm, depending largely on whether they perceived that they were getting equitable treatment themselves. Several women, in fact, were union-active, as particular interviewees were suggested by union representatives.

Several women, from both unions, reported that unions were a good thing, even though the women themselves might not be particularly active. Balwinder was speaking about PRASCU:

...it's good to have unions. I am for unions. Because [there are] so many problems which you can't handle, and you won't even know what is going on...And they can really make their point, while you as an individual can't. The union means the whole labour force is behind that. So they can get their point across to the bosses in a better way than an individual can do it.

The system of union representation by Shop Stewards within the plants is stable, in that many of the women who held Shop Steward positions had held them for several years. When I interviewed them, at least seven women held an elected position within one of the two unions. A veteran shop steward, Elsie, pointed to changes that had occurred at her plant:

We're always having an argument about something. Took us three years to get gloves there and sleeves, because they said they would only provide aprons...and we got the lunchroom enlarged, it was too small, and too many smokers...But now it's really nice. All new paint and new lighting and nice fan and dressing room upstairs...major improvements to what it used to be.

Mary identified the failure to abide by seniority rules in her plant as a reason she helped organize her co-workers:

...they were picking and choosing who to call in out of order: senior ladies were staying home when junior ladies were coming in...because they were a relative or friend or something, hey? And they said, "No more of that." They said, "We want job security." So...Jim Sinclair at that time helped us organize our plant.

Mary became the chief shop steward herself once that plant was organized, a position she held at the time of the interview. She reported they were still having arguments about seniority callout. If her company does not finally decide to operate strictly by seniority, labour relations will be further damaged.

Beyond shop steward, there are also union staff members. Joy had worked on staff for five years before stepping down to raise her children. She reflected that:

...people who want to work for the union, [there] aren't that many of them within the fishing industry and our union has a policy of trying to find somebody within the industry to work [on staff].

...if I wanted to work for the union again, I'd go back and work for the fishing industry, I think because it's so challenging, people are so poor. I like the policies of the union...I like their stand on peace, I like [their] stand on what kind of society we're trying to turn this country into, I

like the union's stand on the ownership and control of the resource...our industry is far more political than most industries...

The feeling among other women was that the union helped them when they were powerless. This is likely more true for native-born Canadians, and not for the 26 percent of this sample who are immigrants, who often find it difficult to work in the union structure.⁷ Both fish processing unions operate almost entirely in English, which will constrain many of these women.

The unions were also viewed as meeting the special needs of the north. A Prince Rupert activist, Christina, argued that:

...it's quite strong up north because the people that are involved with this union up here have been with it for so many years. You'll find a lot of old timers...down south you have more people that are coming and going and you don't have the same...ties to the union. So I think it is stronger up here; it runs deeper.

Whether or not ties to the union are stronger in Prince Rupert than they are in Vancouver, there is certainly more harmony of opinion among the workers there over whether the unions have a right to exist, and whether they serve a useful function. In contrast, in Vancouver and outlying districts, there are non-union plants -- Ocean Fish is perhaps the largest and best-established -- and one must ask a shoreworker, "Are you union?" In Prince Rupert, a more solidly working-class town, the question is, "Which union are you in?" Given the ease of moving from one plant to another to do very similar work, it is perhaps true, as Christina would argue, that people are more tied to the union than they are to the company.

This view was of course not unanimous. In particular there were complaints of the UFAWU's failure to address women's inequality. A long-time worker, Frances, pointed out:

...they're doing such a good job, why haven't they changed the policy of the woman getting the thousand hour rate? Never gotten that. So they're not doing a very good job.

Frances worked as a filleter, so her concern with the thousand-hour-rate (which is automatically given to shed workers, mostly male, when they have worked that

much, but only extended to filleters, almost all female, who pass a test) was more immediate than it was for the cannery section of the plant, where nobody got the preferential rate.

There are individuals who other workers describe as "company"; that is, not trustworthy, someone who will not necessarily support the workers. These people are often those who are between a rock and a hard place, in the sense that they supervise workers but have no real authority over them. One man in Canadian Fish stated, "I'm a monthly-rated," meaning he received guaranteed monthly pay and was therefore supportive of management, notwithstanding the fact that it was negotiation by the union that had gained him that benefit. Allegiance to the company instead of the union on the part of non-monthly-rated women was not unknown, but was not commented on by the women interviewed.

The UFAWU has negotiated some change with reference to access to non-traditional job categories, for both men and women. The union has not only negotiated for monthly pay for a few men, but it has also begun negotiations with the companies over equal access to jobs and equal pay for women. In 1988, the UFAWU negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding with the Fish Processors' Bargaining Association entitled "Equal Opportunities for Employment." The text reads:

1. The Parties will endeavour to ensure that there shall be no discrimination between employees with respect to seniority or job opportunity...
2. That each plant shall set up a small working committee to review plant procedures...to:
 - a)...to ensure opportunity for employment is equal without regard to gender.

This agreement is a major innovation in an industry that has more than a century of gender inequality. According to Joy, who has been a union staff member, this memorandum goes a long way towards recognizing inequality:

...this memorandum that we signed this year is so exciting because for the first time the companies are recognizing contracturally that there is

inequality both in rates of pay and in job access and training...

Joy understood that the two issues of pay equity and employment equity were both addressed in the memorandum.

In February, 1990, the Women's Rights Committee reported to the UFAWU Convention that this committee had been created in four plants to date: B.C. Packers Imperial plant, Canadian Fish Home Plant fresh fish department, Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative Vancouver plant, and another unnamed plant. Arguments that have occurred so far in these committees have been between management demands for reclassification of workers (usually to a lower pay rate), and union or workers' demands for access for all to Group One thousand-hour pay rates.⁸ Reclassification has the potential effect of reducing rates paid to men when they are not doing Group One work, as they would be reclassified to get a lower rate for the work. At present they retain their pay increment whatever they are doing, once they have qualified for it, so this would lower their pay part of the time. Equal access to Group One jobs, which are currently almost all held by men, would alter the gender division of labour within the plants, and give some women more money. The hierarchy of pay rates would, however, still exist.

The unions give the women some collective strength to call for changes to the system as it now exists, but they are not completely blameless in terms of maintaining the current division of labour. The executive board of the UFAWU now consists of twenty-six men and ten women, reflecting a bias in favour of males. In the case of the UFAWU, the number of fishermen and tendermen members has in part been the cause of this, as those are male-dominated industries. At least in part, women's issues, such as daycare, often take a back seat in contract negotiations.

One of the union's negotiating concerns is of course the pay packet. The differing rates of pay, varying between the probationary rate and the rate for boat shop tradesmen, do not only account for the relative sizes of the paycheques during

the season, they also have a direct bearing on how much unemployment insurance a worker can receive to maintain her/his family during the off-season. While this is not strictly a workplace concern, it is very important to the individual worker, and to the stability of the labour force in the industry.

Not all women used unemployment insurance to temper the seasonality of the industry:

Thelma: I know lots of shoreworkers that don't even bother to collect UIC. I never did; in the heavy years that I was getting paid well I figured, what the heck, I earned enough in four months to coast for the rest of the year. And I know a lot of other people like that.

Penny: Now for myself, I like working -- I don't really like going on UIC 'cause it's too much [of a] problem.

In contrast to the previous accounts, one woman spent years trying to qualify for UI in the first place, since twenty weeks are required for a first claim:

Barbara: ...I work[ed] one week or ten days, then [the herring season] finish[ed]. I can't collect UIC, right?...After salmon then I can collect UIC...Still not enough stamps that time; they cut off the stamps, twenty stamps...No stamps...can't get UIC.

One reason that unemployment insurance is considered a 'problem' may have to do with the intricacy of the forms. Many fish plant workers speak English as a second language. Many others have little education. The hassle of decoding the forms, which must be perfectly filled out every two weeks or they are returned by the bureaucracy, makes the idea of collecting UI intimidating.

Cannery workers who work herring may not qualify for UI for several years, as they must build up their seniority to the point that they are actually permitted to work twenty weeks in a year. Other workers may find other seasonal employment in order to earn the weeks to qualify. Women in my sample did not do that but I have done so myself. Most women who qualify for unemployment insurance do collect it, even some who said they would prefer not to, because of their need for money. Time at home with their children, and an income at the same time, were considered the primary benefits of fish plant work by most of the women. Terry costed out the

amount of wages against the amount of unemployment insurance as follows:

...the [WCB] don't take into consideration unemployment insurance which you made. So, okay, you make \$21,000 in the cannery, I mean in the fish plant, right? Plus you make another \$6,000 say unemployment insurance, so you end up [near] \$28,000...

Terry's point was that a WCB claim is only paid out on actual earnings, which does not work out to the employee's benefit. Terry is a groundfish worker and assistant charge hand, so her earnings are high relative to most women workers. Her figures indicate that twenty-one per cent of her income came from the unemployment insurance system.

Even though they can receive money from the government, shoreworkers remain poor. The short seasons and the on-call nature of the industry mean that income is erratic at best, and minimal much of the year. Shorework is one industry where the companies have been able to rely on government intervention in order to keep the work force stable. Without unemployment insurance, workers would perhaps be forced to move on, if they could, to something that provided an income all year. Alternatively, the companies would be forced to increase both the wages for their employees, and the level of mechanization in the plants. A case could be made that the UI system helps maintain patriarchal relations of employment, in that it is the least advantaged employees that benefit. The government fills the needs of these workers in much the same way as "pre-capitalist relations of production"⁹ have done in the past. In all likelihood, these relations persist, and are simply tempered by the government insurance system. For example, I have been offered food fish, illegally sold from a native fishery, by co-workers.

Because of the structure and unreliability of the fish processing industry, I would expect that many women would want to leave it, but this was not always the case. The dreams and aspirations of the women who were willing to share them were not extravagant. Few dreamed beyond jobs in "pink collar" work for themselves, though most of their hopes for their children revolved around education. Yet jobs

with computers or as travel agents, with their greater security and cleaner and more pleasant working conditions, were considered superior to the jobs these women had now. Frances, a filleter with fifteen years' experience in the industry, summed up many of the women's aspirations:

I want to work in an office. I want to do something with computers. I don't want to wear rain gear any more. I tried to talk one of my sisters into going back to school. -- Oh, na, no, they don't want to.

Some women, like Christina, felt they were committed to the jobs they had as long as they stayed in Prince Rupert:

I would like to live on Vancouver Island. Probably, like, half of everyone you know would like to live on the Island. But no, I can't see quitting a job that is a steady job and uprooting just on a whim. I think what we'll probably do is stay and...get established, and then when your children are grown, then you're more free to do what you want to do, financially. And, who knows...I'm hoping that my children will go to college or university or what have you and, and if the need arises, we -- we'll all move...And then my big plan is to maybe work for a travel agent. So I could travel...I know the pay isn't as -- isn't that great, but...the benefits are of travelling which is something I'd like to do. Mel has never travelled and I know he'd enjoy it.

Financially, Christina probably earns more in the fish plant and with UI than she would as a travel agent. To be a travel agent, Christina would need to take a course which is not offered in Prince Rupert, which is a major stumbling block.

Balwinder, an East Indian woman, did not think her job was worth staying in Canada for. The reason she stayed in shorework was her husband's happiness with his job at the mill. As long as he wanted to stay there, she would too:

...what a change of career, from a [grass] hockey coach to working in a cannery. That was a shock to me...For two years, every day I would cry there, stand there and cry, that's what, there I was, I used to go around the world and do things, we used to be welcomed like VIPs, at airports, you know. The team would arrive, they would put garlands around, you know, and then I had such a high education and here I am. And I used to think like that, and I used to cry all day.

This disjunction between Balwinder's expectations for work in her life and the reality of fish plant labour is extreme. In contrast, many women remain in the industry because they are accustomed to, or even like, the routine of shorework. Their

families may have worked in the industry for generations.

Women did not talk much about leaving the fishing industry. Their perceptions were that the money was too good to leave easily, a perception caused by the one annual cheque with all the overtime on it, received in August. Ten of these women, filleters or charge hands, worked more of the year than just peak season, but even so their money was not easily come by. Thelma, a veteran of twelve years at B.C. Packers Imperial Plant in Steveston, summed up the rewards of shorework:

I didn't start working for B.C. Packers as I say 'till I was in my forties and...I think it was the smell of the place, "oh, who'd want to work there?," and then everybody explained to me that oh, that's the smell of money.

There is a definite discrepancy between the actual incomes of shoreworker women and their perceptions of it. As the women mentioned above stated, they considered that the money was good. In peak seasons the earnings are substantial, and weekend work, at overtime rates, is common. A woman's paycheque for the two weeks from approximately August 6 to 20, depending on the season, will be between one and two thousand dollars net. For the same period, many men's cheques will be nearer the two thousand figure. The incomes of these part-time workers are below the poverty line, especially for a family. With unemployment insurance, or combined with another income, it can become a liveable wage, but without either of those, many shoreworkers would live in want, even at the high hourly rate achieved by union negotiation.

The way the money comes in leads to a "feast or famine," "boom or bust" mentality. Either the workers are wealthy during season, or they are unemployed and poor, perhaps without even enough weeks for UI. The fact that paycheques are large during August means that people spend freely. Stories of large purchases, of cars or dinners out, parties and recreational drug taking, abound. It is also probably true that many, if not most shoreworkers save their money and spend it sensibly during the off-season on their family's needs. It still remains that shoreworkers'

perceptions of their earning power are heavily influenced by the big cheques. The fact that much of the year is spent on unemployment insurance gets forgotten in the frenzy of summer work. These people have low incomes, but they do not always perceive their own poverty.

As this chapter has shown, the speed of the assembly lines in shorework is frenetic, due to the need to process fish before it spoils, and leads to both injuries and to physical stresses which are usually not recognized as work injuries. Union activity among the women is common, and the community is very union-conscious and supportive, and one result has been that some changes are being made in terms of the gendered division of labour, though how effective they will be remains to be seen. Shoreworkers are poor, and make up their incomes through government sources, specifically the unemployment insurance system, but they do perceive the big cheques they get during season as very important. The quality of work is such that people most frequently explain working in the industry in terms of money only.

Shoreworkers are strong people. Many shoreworker families have worked in fish processing for generations, while many others have moved half-way around the world and now work with the fish. Communication on the factory floor can be difficult, but workers of very different backgrounds find themselves working together, and do so harmoniously, for the most part. Women shoreworkers, in particular, balance a complicated and changeable work schedule with the demands of children and family, as the next chapter will show.

1 Robert Brubaker, Clyde Hertzman, Andrew Jin, Chris van Netten, and Helen Ward, "Prevalence of Muscle Tendon and Nerve Compression Disorders in the Hand and Wrist of Roe Production Workers in Fish Processing Plants," prepared for the Joint Committee on Repetitive Motion Injuries, project funded by Joint Committee of the Fish Processors' Association and the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, June 1990, summary, states that "Evidence from this study indicates that short term exposure to roe 'popping' results in a 3.1 times greater risk among exposed subjects to develop case definition CTS [carpal tunnel syndrome]."

2 "Roe popping changes urged", The Fisherman Vol. 55 no. 4 (April 24, 1990), 3.

3 Meekosha and Jakubowicz, cited in Brubaker et al., 4, list the other occupations as "the electronics, white goods, electrical, automobile and packaging industries; production workers in food industries; cleaners in schools and factories; piece workers and outworkers in the clothing industry; clerical and video display operators in the banks, insurance companies, newspaper classified advertising sections; white collar professionals such as computer programmers, print and radio journalists and sub-editors."

4 Robert Brubaker, Clyde Hertzman, Andrew Jin, Chris van Netten, and Helen Ward, "Prevalence of Muscle Tendon and Nerve Compression Disorders in the Hand and Wrist of Roe Production Workers in Fish Processing Plants," prepared for the Joint Committee on Repetitive Motion Injuries, project funded by Joint Committee of the Fish Processors' Association and the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union, June 1990, summary.

5 Workers' Compensation Board of British Columbia 1988 Annual Report, 29.

6 "Roe popping changes urged", The Fisherman Vol. 55 No. 4 (April 24, 1990), 3.

7 Cumsille, Egan, Klestorny and Larrain, "Immigrant Women in the Labour Force" in Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement ed. Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz (Toronto: The Women's Educational Press, 1983), 218, states that "[i]mmigrant women have, for the most part, been excluded from active participation in unions".

8 "Women's Rights Report to the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union convention of January 29 to February 2, 1990," 1-2.

9 Alicja Muszynski, "The Creation and Organization of Cheap Wage Labour in the British Columbia Fish Processing Industry" PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1987, iii.

CHAPTER FIVE: WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIPS AND TASKS AT HOME

As studies like The Double Ghetto and Double Day, Double Bind¹ have illustrated in detail, the concept of women's involvement in both paid and unpaid labour is increasingly well understood as a feature of Canadian life. Fish plant women, like women in the garment industry and women in the work force in general, maintain their home lives and families, and reproduce the next generation of workers, while they are also employed for money. At the plant or at home they are on the job.

The focus of this chapter is the double work day that the women experience, and the effects of the need for child care on many of the women's availability for work. The complicated nature of daycare scheduling in an on-call seasonal industry is at least partly the reason that some of the interview women appreciated work that was not full-time. Some of the women's other activities, for example religious activity or bingo, are also explored, in order to give a more well-rounded picture of these women's lives.

When employment is available in the fish plants, child care is obviously necessary in families with youngsters. This is a chronic source of stress for shoreworker parents, and occasionally results in erratic attendance at work and inability to stay for overtime. Daycare organized to meet the needs of the shoreworking industry is non-existent on this coast, though there have been attempts to plan it. For that matter, the great majority of working mothers in Canada have had to rely on informal day care arrangements.²

Women's lives outside the fish plants revolve around their families, their children, and social activities. As is typical of working women in Canada, housework occupies much of shoreworkers' time off from paid employment. Although fish plant

work is not year-round, it affects the organization of home life all year in that tasks are often scheduled for "when I'm laid off." Activities such as attending church, playing bingo, or drinking and socializing with friends and kin occupy whatever time is left over.

Women clearly do much more of the domestic labour involved in a household than men do. According to sociologist Meg Luxton, men in her Flin Flon study whose wives thought they should 'help' with domestic labour, actually did 19.1 hours' worth of housework or childcare per week. However, women did 31.4 hours' chores at home in the same week, on top of 42.5-hours' paid employment.³ While no statistical evidence of the amount of household labour performed by shoreworking women exists, for either the on- or off-season, their own testimony confirms that their work loads, and those of their husbands, conform to the pattern described above. The difference in the experience of paid jobs between husbands and wives reaffirms women's dual responsibilities. Often, shoreworker women are employed less of the year than their husbands, who may be employed full time. Even when both are fish plant workers, the men tend to get more hours. The discrepancy in hours and wages tends to reinforce the attitude that household chores are women's responsibility.

Given women's primary responsibility for household labour, paid employment poses major dilemmas. One description of the complications involved in the decision to go into the cannery illustrates common concerns and disagreements between husbands and wives over the issue of mothers of young children in employment. Barbara, a mother of nine who works both herring and salmon seasons on the day shift at her plant, had difficulty deciding to apply for work, especially since her husband did not support her decision. It was only because her mother offered to do child care that Barbara was free to work at all. Only after her husband found out that she had been looking for work did he admit he knew where to apply. Barbara

recalled the incident:

from Balwinder's interview

...then my mother said, "Oh, I can look after your kids right now, you can go to work. If you can find a job."...How can I go to work with three little ones? I can't. One is three years old, one is, ah, four years old, one is not even five...Then...my husband do[es]n't like me to go to work. He said, "The kids [are] young; you can't go to work." Then afterwards my husband doesn't tell me where is Canadian Fish...But my mother look[ed] after [the] three...Then I talk to my husband. "You want to work?...Yesterday, you [looked for work] the whole day?"...Then afterwards my husband told me where you go...my mother came to my place, I say, "You look after these kids, and I go see."...after two days [the personnel manager] phoned me. He said, "You come to work tomorrow."

Her remarks clearly show the stress experienced by mothers, or for that matter by fathers, over mothers leaving children. Neither she nor her husband were certain that she should work, given that she had small children. Even so, she has now spent more than seventeen years in the plants.

Other workers also confirm the pressure for women to conform to radically different roles than men, and indicate how the seasonality of the labour eases the tension between expectations and the need for paid labour. Balwinder, an Indo-Canadian with three sons, described the division of labour:

like

Hardly anybody was working out, because all the East Indian men would want their women to stay with the kids...so even if they are educated, East Indian ladies had to opt for something like this [seasonal cannery work], that gives them enough time to be with their kids...And at the same time to be able to earn some money for to support the house.

Anita, a young woman who also liked the seasonality of the plant, agreed with Balwinder's assessment that this seasonality is an advantage for women who work a double day. She herself had one toddler at home at the time of the interview:

like seasonality

I really like working in a fish plant for the fact that, when you have children, it's great because you work your season -- your herring and your halibut and your salmon -- and then you collect UIC and you can be with your family.

The six months or so each year that some of these women could spend with their children, because they were laid off, were important to them.

not like traditionally

In contrast, some women felt that their home lives suffered badly because of the overtime. They believed it tended to have the effect of dividing them from their families. As Judy, a night shift cannery worker who worked a minimum of eleven hours a night, pointed out:

absolute

we used to start from eight and work until seven ... and then my boss, he says, uh, "No, we'll try it this way." So we started work at five and I was still there till six or seven and I just... Oh, yeah, better cheques, but it just, oh, really took a lot out of me...it is hard; you put in so many long hours you completely wreck your home life. You have no home life whatsoever. Like, you're just so tired when you get home you just drop: that's it. I mean, I felt so bad when my kids were younger because I wasn't home all the time...

Judy was referring specifically to night shift, which had a more dramatic effect on household routines than day labour, but women who worked day shift reported difficulty with maintaining home routines as well.

only to working part time

Few of the interviewees actually appreciated being called in for only two or three days a week, as happens at the beginning and end of most seasons because the supply of fish dries up. This was especially true during the summer seasons when the children usually did not have to get to school on time, and so could be sent away, to camp or to relatives, to be cared for. Older children could also be convinced to care for younger ones during the summer. Part time employment in the plant reduced the women's future UI earnings and, if a woman already had a UI claim running, she could be working for money that would in any event have been paid to her by the government if she had not been called in. Given the overhead costs of part time employment, whether they be for babysitting, transportation, or eating out for convenience, a woman could well earn a net loss by working. Work during regular hours cannot be refused, however, as a woman could lose seniority or, if the refusal was reported to UI, her claim could be cut off. The seniority system and the UI system are both structured in such a way that people cannot choose whether or not to work on a given day. This means a woman must respond to the demands of

callout, and when the company calls, she must go to work. There is no flexibility in the work scheduling to meet children's needs.

Other aspects of these women's lives included, of course, their marital relationships. All were or had been married, and many expressed traditional beliefs that husbands should work and wives should raise the children. The fact that all the women in this sample had domestic tasks to perform has reinforced their ambivalent attitude towards their jobs and has probably had the effect of strengthening the gender division of labour over time. Rosa, a Portuguese immigrant and mother of four teenagers, found a conflict between the traditional role expectations, both inside and outside the plants, and the need for two incomes in the home:

{ ...the women can [choose] now; they can get men's jobs too...I don't really think it's right, but that's the way we are...when the women still work and the men stay home, it's no good, too...The men should work and the women [stay home]... Everything's so expensive; that's why it's easy if the wife work[s], too; it's a little help, you know.

should not work but needed to

Rosa found that her roles at work and in the home conflicted: she felt that a woman should be in the home, raising children, while her husband worked, but she conceded that this was not economically feasible. She mentioned later that she enjoyed working with the women, that they all talked together and "it's fun, sometimes, too."

socialize

For her, work in the fish plant gave her money she needed for her family, and it also gave her a chance to socialize, something she would sorely miss if she were to quit.

Despite the reliance on women's incomes from outside the home, within the home the traditional pattern of domestic relationships still persisted among shoreworkers, and men were often still the decision-makers in a family:

Jill: So you think Canada is where you'll stay?

Balwinder: As long as my husband has the job, and he wants to stay.

Naturally, married life is not always easy or pleasant. As Penny indicated, not all women were completely positive about their husbands' habits:

...My husband used to drink. I used to hate it. He used to make me go with him in the bar and I used to sit there. I just sit there. Seven up, or coke, something like that. And he just loved drinking. I don't. He [drank] a lot of beer...He died of it.

Hers is not the only report of a problem with a husband's drinking. It was also implicated in incidents of wife battering.⁴ Shoreworkers are no strangers to domestic violence, though they are probably not more likely to suffer abuse from their husbands than any other work group.⁵ In the case of seasonal fish plant workers, the violence within the family may follow a seasonal pattern as well. Kathy Booth, who is the administrator of PRASCU and also a spokesperson for the transition house in Prince Rupert, described a seasonal cycle of family violence:

Very often it's the twenty to twenty-two-year-old single parents, and those living common-law, who are struggling with daycare or babysitters, who find they need to use the services of the transition house. Fish plant women in particular have a really tough situation to start with, with working at a fish plant -- the hours, the seasonality, having to have a babysitter on call. Often when women are reprimanded or terminated at the fish plant for missing work, they missed because of their inability to find/keep/have a babysitter. Their appearance at the transition house seems most marked just prior to and just following the season. My guess is that it is economic- and stress-related. Peak season at the transition house is mid-spring: the beginning of March till the end of April. This may correspond to the fishing season in general; the timing is just before the season starts for women.

The critical need to find dependable, flexible child care adds to the stress of seasonal poverty for these women. Their partners' perception that they will be responding to the demands of work and therefore will be unavailable to do their traditional household tasks until the season ends may also trigger the violence.

These women have several options for providing for their children, although some choices are more accessible to shoreworkers than others. In fish processing women usually work on-call, seasonally, with overtime. Some other jobs offer the prospect of a forty-or-so-hour week. Other work is part time on a regular (or irregular) schedule. Each of these patterns has advantages and disadvantages. It is

a matter of maximizing gain and balancing the family's simultaneous need for both women's time and women's money. Many women feel that combining long hours of work for a short season with high UI maximizes their contributions to the family. Other women find the demands of fish plant labour destructive to their home life. In particular, the night shift increases alienation from a "normal" (traditional) family life. The crisis-like nature of fish process work increases the disjunction between the women's waged work and their need to respond to the needs of their families.

An important need for these women and their families was quality, available, affordable childcare. Cannery workers during salmon season basically needed child care full time (often twenty-four hours a day) for six or seven weeks seasonally. After that, the part-time weeks would continue, sometimes until November. Many used their mothers, as Barbara did. Some of the women indicated that their spouses, if they were not working themselves, were willing to take on the child care role. Christina was careful to point out that Mel would take care of the children, except for the fact that his work called him away, at the time her season started. Some relied on kin and friends. Judy's experience was not unique:

...my husband, he used to take the kids, and he ...started spending a lot more time with them 'cause I was working, like, during summertime and he'd take his holidays and they'd go camping and stuff like that.

This sounds like an occasion when a husband would "help out" with the children, for a few weeks a year, rather than take responsibility for them for an extended length of time. Others, without family members who were free to babysit, hired nannies, as Christina described:

I go all year knowing that, by July fifteenth, that's it -- that's all I'm going to do is work right till September. So you just...make plans to do that -- have everything all lined up:...you need a babysitter; I've had to have live-in nannies...because Mel worked in camp.

The main responsibility for providing or organizing child care remained with the

child care

family

nannies

women.

A 1989 Vancouver shoreworker childcare survey was filled out by eighty-three individuals, forty-two of whom needed child care. Sixty-four of the workers in this sample worked twenty to forty weeks, seventeen were single parents, and fifteen respondents had only one child. Children ranged in age from under eighteen months to over eleven years old. At peak season, if they needed to work overtime in order to increase their UI earnings, women reportedly paid up to \$300 for a weekend's childcare. Nine of the survey's respondents (out of a total of twenty-one who answered the specific question) spent between \$200 and \$300 a month on childcare, and six spent more. During peak season, three respondents reported spending more than \$400 in a week. Twelve (out of twenty-seven workers who responded to this particular question) relied on family members, including spouses, to do child care, while nine hired babysitters, and five placed their children in licenced daycares. Ten out of twenty-three respondents indicated that they had missed work at some time or another because they were unable to find acceptable child care. Fourteen of the eighty-three respondents in this survey completed a questionnaire form that was printed in Chinese characters. Only one of the fourteen, unfortunately, completed the second half of the questionnaire, which had to do with specific daycare needs.

Because of the unstable nature of callout in the industry, the majority of these workers reported that they would prefer a drop-in daycare, open from six am to eight p.m. (nobody worked the night shift in this sample). Most would pay a monthly fee, but a sizeable number (ten out of thirty-two) would prefer to pay by the day. Less than one-third would use an overnight service. For all the demonstrated need, a daycare designed to meet drop-in, pay-by-the-day, seasonal needs, and changeable daily requirements, would be very difficult to organize. The UFAWU Vancouver workers have put their project on hold, though there is municipal support, albeit

limited.⁶

The childcare dilemma often, but not always, restricts mothers from taking part in work-connected activities like union meetings. There are, however, exceptions. Judy 2 actually became involved with the union because she was concerned over daycare:

...it was expensive, very expensive, day care...fortunately for me, I was working full time and...I would say a good half of my cheque was going to daycare. But at the same time my seniority was building higher. So, you know, I felt long term...we'd get through this stage...Actually, daycare was how I got involved in the union...because I was concerned about the quality of daycare that was available and also some of the seasonal problems that some of my co-workers were having. You know, being a full time worker, it was bad enough for me, but being a part time worker or a seasonal worker, those were the women that really had the problem. And I could sympathize with them.

She was concerned with the daycare issue in Steveston, but, as she recalled, it was not feasible to establish a daycare at that time:

...we looked at the situation here, and we just couldn't see it happening. There was just no way that there were enough people who really needed daycare on a full time basis that you could really look at starting a daycare. 'Cause you would have to have a certain amount year-round to, you know, even reach the requirements.

In the twenty years that Judy has needed childcare, little has changed.

The lack of available daycare has meant that women have stayed home and missed their seasons, with an attendant loss in seniority. In an odd way, it was fortunate for some women that Oceanside Fish Plant burned down in Prince Rupert in 1970, as they could take the opportunity to stay home with their children for the time it took to build a new plant. The advantage to them was that they did not lose their seniority, as they were not called to work. Dora took advantage of the fact that the cannery did not need her:

...we worked on the herring, and just before we started, the salmon cannery burned...most of [the workers] were transferred to Port Edward, Cassiar and MacMillan, but I didn't go because I didn't want to leave my kids at home alone. So I stayed home till they built the new Oceanside. 'Bout three years -- two or three years...and I used to

can't
participate
in union
meetings

work all year 'round, but then I decided to stay home -- too much problem with babysitters.

Dora, and women who stayed home like her, would have collected UI for one year, but any further time off would have been without income. Dora is one woman who, given opportunity, appears to have decided that her time at home was more important to her children than the money she could bring in. Typically, on-call babysitting was difficult for her to organize, as well.

The way childcare was worked out within the family, particularly but not only for native women, often meant that an oldest girl would look after the younger children. Dora, a Haida woman, reported that her daughter started babysitting for her when she was twelve years old. Addie, a Nishga, described what it was like for her, when she lived in cannery housing at Wales Island as a child:

... my mom and dad, they were both working. I had to do the cooking and the babysitting for other people, you know, in the summer months...I looked after quite a few babies...I don't remember whether I did get paid. Maybe I got a dollar, two dollars here or there, then I cooked for mom and dad, I did all the housework, and everything for them 'cause she used to start at six in the morning, and she'd work till about ten, eleven at night, you know. She never had too much time for anything. I had to do all that...

Addie explained what the seasonal migrations of the workers meant for her:

We were living at the company house in the summer months. We used to be there, March, April, May, June, July, September we'd go home to Kincolith...Half the time at Wales Island, half at Kincolith...They were just shacks like, you know, all together.

For Addie, living in company housing correlated with doing the domestic labour for her family and other people, all employed in the cannery. During the winter months at Kincolith, her parents had time at home and she was more free from household responsibilities.

This responsibility for the home included providing whatever medical care she could, as native women like Addie, who lived rurally, either in small communities or in cannery houses, only had access to limited health care. A friend in Prince Rupert

*Added
do not
forget
open book*

*Medical
Care*

did not talk about her own illnesses, but rather about her children:

...my first two babies died of diarrhea; too far away from the hospital, at a time when there [were] not too many cars, in 1942, '42 or '43. They died one week apart and it's hard for me to remember, it's very sad, that time for me.

Native women described a situation where the fact that they lived so far from medical care meant that they relied on their community for aid. Penny never went to hospital at all until she hurt her hand at work, and she reported that the experience of going to hospital was frightening:

...she said, "You have to go to the doctor, have to go to the hospital."...Boy, that [was] scary. I never even go to hospital.

Jill: No? You went to the hospital to have your kids though, didn't you?

Penny: Oh no, at home. You can't afford to go to hospital around that time.

Pregnancy
Pregnancy, and its effect on a woman's ability to earn wages, was discussed by several women. As Penny indicated, the expense of medical care was a deterrent, so childbirth often happened without medical intervention:

We got a nurse...to deliver my last baby...I didn't make it over here to the hospital when my last baby was born...I had the [first] two at home in Kitkatla...My aunt is a midwife.

Native people, especially those in rural communities, did not receive, or expect to receive, the same standard of health care as the more urbanized population.⁷

Working in the fish plant during pregnancy can be done, but not easily or comfortably. Several women had missed a fishing season, with loss of their seniority, because they were pregnant. Others worked as much of the season as they could. Judy 2 passed out at work when she was quite pregnant -- she said she thought she was just too hot -- and Judy was told to go home when she was seven or eight months pregnant. At that time, Judy was working year-round, which is unusual for fishplant women.

Many women tried to organize their pregnancies around the seasons, with more or less success, and several others quit the fish plants and returned to them after spending some time at home. Joy was one of these. She decided to leave her union employment, and remain on leave from the fishplant, in order to give birth to and raise her children:

...I told the union I had a five year plan and everybody laughed...I'll work for the union for five years and after that have kids and I'm not going to work for the union when I have kids...because your hours are too long. I wanted to try to bring up my own family. So, true to my schedule I got pregnant in 1983...and, my first son Cai was born in July of '84 and I told the union I was going to have him the day we went on strike and the day I got out of hospital would be the day the strike ended and everybody laughed, and I said, look, I had a five year plan, what are you laughing for? And certainly he was born the day we went on strike and I got out of hospital the day the strike ended.

While Joy continued to be involved with union issues during her pregnancy, she found that her responsibilities at home eventually took precedence.

For many of these women, children remained the main focus of life, and justification for the hard labour that awaited them in the plants. Joy, in particular, found something had to be sacrificed when she returned to the fish plant. It turned out to be her political engagement:

...I was still quite active until Wynn [her second son] came along, and now we work year round on groundfish [in the plant], so there's less time for me to be politically active, if I want to be involved as much as I can with my family.

Withdrawal from her union work was, however, temporary, as Joy went back to full-time union organizing again in 1990.

Not all of these shoreworker women were still actively parenting. Many had already raised a family and were now "empty nesters"; at least eight of them were grandmothers. Four women were widows, and lived alone. Their activities were diverse: some went to bingo or played cards, while others were active in their churches. Penny, who was canning salmon at home when I visited once, described

social
life
in 1990

how bingo filled some of her spare time:

I go to bingo when I got nothing to do. I go to bingo...Last Saturday I went to the Palace here; I won four times. I won about two hundred and something all together...A lot of fun when you win. But it's a good cause, anyway...helping the kids and orphans...or the old people.

Other women go to bingo too, in Vancouver as well as Prince Rupert. Women leaving Port Edward Plant at the end of shift happily called to one another, "Save me a spot! Get me five cards!" Later on they would rendezvous at a local hall, where an evening's entertainment was available for a moderate fee. The bingo halls operate all year, and fill some part of the off-seasons as well for some women, especially older women with more time.

religion
 Religion also played some role, albeit it seems less than previously, in influencing women's lives outside the plant. Many native communities historically had missions attached, particularly Anglican, United or Catholic. Other religions represented in the sample interviewed included Lutheran, Hindu, and Pentecostal. Many women reported that their parents had been more religious than they themselves were. Faye, who was not specific about her denomination, said:

I don't condemn anybody else's religion and I don't ask them to commend mine. Yes I am [religious]. But I don't preach it to other people, I hold...my own counsel...If I want to help you, that's my business that's nobody else's. If I want to give a good deed to somebody, that's nobody else's business, but mine.

Tolerance was the watchword among shoreworkers, both of each others' ethnicity and of their religious practices. Balwinder talked about how her ethnic group was divided into two different faiths:

Well none of us go to the church because we have our own religion and we believe in it. Which is Hinduism. And we believe in it...there's a Sikh temple [in Prince Rupert] but there is no Hindu temple. There are hardly any Hindus. There are ten families or maybe so. But there may be maybe eighty to ninety Sikh families in town...We are all from the same place so you can't compartmentalize yourselves just on the basis of religion, you know.

Both Sikhs and Hindus work in fish plants in Prince Rupert, though the Hindus are

outnumbered. Women were more likely to be reticent about their religious practices than about many other aspects of their lives, and the credo of the fish plant seemed to be to "live and let live".

For younger women, the seasonality of the fish plant allows them some respite from the double work day, though the amount of work during the season certainly puts a strain on any arrangements they may have made at home. It is extremely difficult to organize a social response to these women's needs for childcare. This means that the seasonality of fish plant work reinforces the unequal division of pay (in the work force), and amount of labour performed (in the home): ultimately both inequalities benefit men, as employers, economic competitors, and husbands. Men's social roles involve less domestic work than women's roles do. As a result, they are more free to become employed more of the year (and more hours during the seasons) than many women are, especially those with children. Seasonality can be, and often is, construed by the women as a positive part of shorework, because it frees them to do other tasks, but its effect is to cost the women both money and time. It does this in ways that are often hidden in the pay packet and within the relationships in the home between women and their spouses and children. The family need for both women's time and women's money truly results in a double work day and year for women shoreworkers.

1 Charlene Gannage, Double Day, Double Bind: Women Garment Workers (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986). Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work, revised edition (1984; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).

2 Genevieve Ledoux, "Current Issue Review: Child Care in Canada", Library of Parliament Research Branch, 11 March 1987, reviewed 7 December 1987, 5.

3 Meg Luxton, as cited in Armstrong and Armstrong, 78.

4 Yet it was not always men who drank. Elsie began working in a fish plant while she had a drinking problem. She believed her ability to work in a fish plant gave her a stronger self-image than she had had when she only received Social Assistance:

...when my son was born I quit working altogether, went on Social Assistance. Just got lazy, I guess, that's when I started in with the drinking and you know, just being a 'rangy-tang.' (laughter) Trying to raise children, trying to be a person also you know...it was hard. But here I am. Better for it and a good paying job now and [I] feel secure that it's going to last for awhile and if it doesn't I can go elsewhere...five years ago I sobered up...[I] started in the [fish packing] business at Bingham's, in '75.

While it is evident that Elsie worked in a fish plant, and drank, for almost ten years, part of her description of how well she is doing now has to do with the fact that she has a "good paying job." For her, pride in her sobriety and pride in her work go hand in hand.

5 Linda McLeod, Battered But Not Beaten: Preventing Wife Battering in Canada (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1987), 38. Violence against women is sometimes seen to be an attempt to assert control over them, as Linda McLeod mentions. Further, she says:

...while alcohol or drug abuse may frequently be associated with wife battering, and...unemployment or poverty, like other life stresses...can precipitate wife battering by lowering inhibitions against it, there is no conclusive evidence that any of these factors cause wife battering. (emphasis in original.)(citing Keith M. Farrington, "Stress and Family Violence", in The Social Causes of Husband-Wife Violence, ed. M. Straus and G. Hotaling (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1980), 94-113.)

She describes two theories that lend themselves to analysis of why men batter women. Either the battering is an attempt to express power over another person who is socially defined as lesser, or battering is learned in the home, while growing up -- or both. Both of these explanations would apply to fish plant women as much as, but no more than, the rest of society.

6 Geoff Meggs, interview with author, February, 1990.

7 Dara Culhane Speck, An error in judgement: the politics of medical care in an Indian/White community (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987).

CONCLUSION: A SELF-PERPETUATING LOOP: PAID WORK AND WORK AT HOME

There are many threads of analysis in this examination of shoreworker women, but all combine to paint a picture of a community in which work is erratic, incomes are low, job stratification by gender is chronic, and ethnic divisiveness has its effect. Shoreworkers in B.C. are a small population, about five thousand all told. Approximately two-thirds are women -- women who have an irregular connection to wage-earning, because the seasons are so cyclical. Because of the division of jobs by gender, men have more autonomy on the job, access to preferential work and, usually, more pay. Women tend to stand in one spot and manipulate pieces of fish, responding more directly to the demands of the assembly line.

The two labour market theories that are both supported by the evidence in this thesis are labour market segmentation theory and the concept of the reserve army of labour. Women in fish processing are relegated to particular tasks within the plants, and are also hired and fired (that is, called in and laid off) according to the needs of the processing line. The effect of this institutionalized unemployment for women in fish plants is not to reduce the wages of men to the same level, because of the high degree of job stratification. Neither of these descriptions of the structure of the labour force works to the advantage of the women shoreworkers.

The twenty-three interview respondents had all been married and had all had children. They were an ethnically and racially varied group, of all ages. They came from all over B.C. and from various parts of the world. They had done almost every women's task in fish processing, and some men's tasks too.

The women in this sample have stayed in fish processing longer than the industry average. Reasons for this stability may include lack of opportunity, because of lack of education, lack of English, or personal commitments. They may have

remained in fish processing because there were many jobs in fish processing in their area, as would be particularly true for women who lived in Prince Rupert. The effect of this long-term connection to the industry may be that these women knew more about fish processing than the average worker, and they may have come to terms with the needs of the industry, or even be more content, than women who moved on. Many of them felt a stronger commitment to their union than to the company employing them.

A crucial component of work is of course the wage, and there were differences between male and female wages. There is some pay equity in shorework: in canneries, the base rates for women and men are the same. This is not true for other areas of the fish plants, though some fresh fish departments are attempting to address the issue. Inequality occurs in both fresh fish departments and canneries, because the men have more access to preferred jobs with more autonomy, mobility, and individuality, receiving pay increments for them. Women's work is more a part of the stationary assembly line, and is more seasonal. For example, grading the fish by species when it is unloaded from the boats is a male job category, and receives slightly increased pay; herring roe grading, which involves deciding on quality differences between nine grades of roe, is done by women and does not receive an increment. One researcher has described the difference as follows:

...the work is organized around social divisions in job allocations. For example, women typically find themselves in jobs that are routine and monotonous, stationary and seasonal.¹

Even when men and women are doing the same job, men are often kept at their higher rate of pay, which they have been promoted to after some time in the plant. That is, the higher rate of pay applies to them at all times, not just when they are doing work that is classified at the higher rate. They also tend to be given more overtime, during shift as well as during the off-season. Men are valued as individual

workers, while women simply fill spots on the assembly line, and are often considered interchangeable.

All women who took part in this research agreed that men and women should get equal pay for equal work. If a woman were fool enough to do men's work, as some would have it, she should be equally recompensed. But the concept of pay equity, or valuing men's and women's jobs equally though they were different, was not widespread. The women who believed that the traditional division of labour served them well tended to be older, with longer work histories in the plants, which suggests that the division of work by gender is something that becomes more acceptable or even agreeable over time. Comfortable with the tasks and routines they knew, they could see less benefit for themselves in change. It is also possible that the ideas that women and men should have equal access to all jobs, and equal work should be equally paid for both genders, are relatively recent, and so the younger women believe them more strongly.

The shoreworker work force was a polyglot group. Many ethnic and racial groups were represented, in particular in the north, native Indians. Natives tended to have longer family histories within the industry, and more kin connections at present, than others. Many native women were raised, at least in summers, in cannery housing, which no longer exists on the west coast. There was a sizeable contingent of Asian and immigrant women in this shoreworker sample as well, and one shoreworker organizer believed that Chinese workers, in particular, were underrepresented in the national statistics. There appeared to be less divisiveness by ethnic origin among the workers than might be expected; none of the workers in this sample generalized about other ethnic groups, beyond a comment that the "Italians sort of rule the roost" in one plant.

Racial distinctions were downplayed by the shoreworkers, which may be

because a white woman was asking them questions. Clearly family histories within the industry and experiences of racism vary depending, at least in part, on which subgroup a woman belongs to. The women did not freely discuss racial issues, but this was more likely a factor of who was asking them questions than of the reality of their experience.

Shorework was not easy. Fish plants, like factories elsewhere, require hard physical work, and this is certainly more easily done by the young. While many women spent many years in the industry, others left because the physical strain of repetitive labour, uncertain work schedules, and sometimes overnight work took their toll. There were work-related injuries, which were insured by the Workers' Compensation Board, and there were also work-related stress injuries that were not recognized by the WCB as injuries that should be compensated. Stationary jobs done by women tended to cause repetitive motion disease, a disease that was still not yet recognized by the WCB. This is true for workers in other industries as well, but women in fish processing perhaps have a longer history of coping with hand and arm stress.

The union that represents most shoreworkers -- the UFAWU -- has negotiated for, and gotten, several benefits for women. Equal base rates in canneries is one such issue; instituting a study on repetitive motion disease is another. The UFAWU is a union of shoreworkers, tendermen (who deliver the fish to the plants) and fishermen. This means that, even though shoreworkers in B.C. are two-thirds women, the union is dominated by men, and too frequently women's issues take a back seat.

One example of this lack of enthusiasm for a women's issue is the repeated failure to establish any kind of daycare for the children of shoreworkers. It is true that studies have been conducted about the need for child care, both in Steveston and in Vancouver, but the results suggested that it would be hard to organize a

daycare because the workers needed a drop-in, seasonal, pay-by-the-day or pay-by-the-month operation with flexible hours, which would take a real commitment to organize. As it stands, many women hire their mothers, or look for on-call babysitters to care for the children, so that they can respond to the erratic needs of the industry. In shorework, some men appeared to take on some childcare during the fish processing seasons, but most women were still primarily responsible for finding and paying for it. The need for daycare has had the effect of keeping women in the seasonal work force, which allows them to be home to take care of their children for part of the year. This has reinforced the sexual division of labour. Due to the social constructions of gender, specifically the way childcare is defined as a female occupation, women face major constraints in redefining their roles at home or in the labour force.

Women in this industry make choices, and usually those choices (whether conscious or unconscious) are designed to maximize their contributions to their families. In the case of shorework, women balanced the amount of time they had to spend caring for their children and maintaining the household against their monetary contribution. The combination of a frantic, highly-paid season during summer, when children are not attached to the routine of school (and other family members are perhaps available to babysit) and the ability to collect unemployment insurance during the winter, were attractive to many women.

These women did not earn large incomes. Statistically, their actual earnings were below the poverty line, even for a single person. This interview sample included women who had worked in the industry substantially longer than the industry average, so at some level their earnings from fish processing were minimally acceptable. The fish plant provided many women with a better income than they could earn elsewhere, especially when the time off and alternative sources of available

income were considered. There was a discrepancy, between the actual incomes and shoreworkers' perceptions of their earnings. It was quite marked in several interviews, possibly because of the relatively high hourly wages and seasonal volatility.

Shoreworker women live a complicated, variable and, in terms of income, tenuous existence. Even though they are skilled workers, there are no guarantees in shorework, except perhaps that there will be change, especially in the daily and weekly scheduling. Shorework gives some of these women pride in their ability to work and earn money; others believe it gives them 'that little bit extra' and a chance to socialize. Whatever their reasons, some shoreworker women stay in the industry for years.

As is true for women in Canada generally, shoreworking women work a double day (or double year) of labour. These women tended to do altogether more work than the men they associated with (because they worked both on paid and unpaid labour), and were paid less. Evidence of the inequality that exists between men and women is borne out in this examination of the B.C. fish plant community.

While these jobs are not particularly attractive for women, they provide at least an income and a sense of identity as a worker, benefits that would be lost if this work was exported to other nations. A ruling by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1987² and the US -- Canada Free Trade Agreement both have the effect of removing Canadian barriers to the export of raw fish. These barriers have existed since 1908.³ A GATT panel set up to hear United States and Canadian arguments about the exporting of unprocessed fish found:

...that the export prohibitions on certain unprocessed salmon and unprocessed herring were contrary to Article XI:1 and were justified neither by Article XI:2(b) nor by article XX(g). The Panel therefore suggests that the CONTRACTING PARTIES recommend that Canada bring its measures affecting exports of certain unprocessed salmon and unprocessed herring into conformity with the General

Agreement. (emphasis in original.)⁴

This means that Canada's protectionism was judged indefensible. As the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement contains a clause that makes GATT decisions binding, Canada did not appeal this, but responded by instituting a landing requirement for at least 80 percent of the fish caught.⁵ In practice, however, fish buyers can apply for a licence to buy at sea and deliver directly to an American port, which makes the landing requirement difficult to enforce. Even if the fish were landed in Canada, they could simply be trucked raw to an American processing plant.

Companies want to process in the United States because the American industry is only partially unionized, unlike that of the B.C. coast. Union wages in Washington State and Alaska vary between seven and nine dollars an hour, and non-union American plants pay only five dollars an hour,⁶ while the companies pay thirteen to seventeen dollars an hour in B.C. Even when these amounts are translated into the same currency, a big difference remains. As a result, Canadian jobs are in jeopardy.

The women interviewed believed that some fish was already being exported in the round. Several of them recognized the possible repercussions of Free Trade:

Sandy: Well there won't be very much processing any more in our plants, it's gonna take a lot of work away from our workers, they'll be just shipping everything out whole and selling it to wherever they want, [they are] doing that now.

They believed that the GATT decision and the Free Trade Agreement were going to cost them work.

Judy: ...my dad says well, he goes "Could be good, it could be bad," he goes "but think about it: how many jobs it has created," he goes, "how many jobs it will create." And I said "Yeah, but..." you know, like, working in the cannery and that, I said, "It could eliminate my job."

Judy was uncertain, and worried, about the effects of free trade. Judy 2 trusted that the better quality of Canadian canned salmon compared to American would protect

the workers in Canada. Other women echoed this belief in the quality of Canadian canned salmon.

A few women were politically active on the issue of exporting of fish. Mona had gone to Ottawa to lobby against the GATT decision and the Free Trade Agreement:

Mona: I believe in what I'm doin'. I believe that we should save our jobs. And with the free trade and the GATT I think that's very hard to do.

Such workers saw little hope of bettering themselves or their work lives if fish processing is lost to the Americans. Like this author, such activists believe that these jobs should be kept in Canada. This is another way of making fish processing an unstable and volatile industry, where nothing is predictable.

It would be more appropriate to restructure the industry (perhaps with fish farming) so that shoreworkers were guaranteed a year-round income, and organization of the jobs and working conditions were improved, perhaps by removing the job stratification by gender found in the industry. Exporting the fish processing work will not benefit these Canadian workers. Free trade will eliminate the jobs but not the inequality that formally marks the lives of the female fish processors described in this thesis.

1 Neil Guppy, "Labouring on Shore" in Uncommon Property: The Fishing and Fish Processing Industries in British Columbia ed. Patricia Marchak, Neil Guppy and John McMullan (Agincourt: Methuen Publications, 1987), 213.

2 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, "Canada -- Measures Affecting Exports of Unprocessed Herring and Salmon: Report of the Panel," 20 November 1987, 16.

3 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, "Canada -- Measures Affecting Exports of Unprocessed Herring and Salmon", 2, states that the regulations restricting exporting herring in the round have continued in force since 1908, while only sockeye salmon was covered at first. From 1935 to 1949 there were no restrictions on salmon exports, except for war measures. In 1949, sockeye, pinks and coho were restricted, and the restriction on coho was later lifted.

4 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, "Canada -- Measures Affecting Exports of Unprocessed Herring and Salmon, Report of the Panel", 20 November 1987, 16.

5 Government of Canada, External Affairs News Release #247 of October 16, 1989.

6 David Lane, "Five bucks an hour with no benefits is the norm", The Fisherman vol. 54 no. 10 (October 20, 1989), 10.

GLOSSARY

1000-hour rate -- a pay rate that union members in cold storage and fresh fish get after 1000 hours worked. Sixty cents more than the 400 hour rate. Those who work in cold storage are all men, and it is mostly men who work in fresh fish. The cold storage rate is twenty-five cents more than the qualified filleter's rate, while the fresh fish rate is the same.

400-hour rate -- base rate for pay, after the probationary period, for both cannery and fresh fish. Cold storage 400-hour rate is twenty-five cents more.

belly burn -- a condition where the entrails have been left in the fish longer than is optimum, and the belly meat has softened and discoloured. This fish is always canned, if it's salmon.

binman -- a job perhaps particular to plants that have several hoppers leading to the canning lines. Involves making sure there is always fish at the canning machine feeders. Men's work.

box loft -- place where cardboard boxes are stitched together to hold frozen fish. Often a bit grimy, but not wet and slippery, and there are no fish guts in the area.

buggies -- metal hand carts that can hold up to 1000 pounds of fish.

bussies -- carts that hold cans of salmon. These carts are pushed directly into the retorts, and out the other side once cooked. Men's work.

callout -- a daily event in the life of fish plants, which depend on supplies of fresh fish. The size of the crew called out will vary with the amount of fish, and whether or not an individual is called to work depends on their skills and their seniority.

can loft -- where the cans are fed into the lines that bring them down to the canning machine. They need inspecting, and this is considered a lazy woman's job, as it does not involve much moving.

candling -- looking at groundfish fillets and tidying them up, that is, removing worms and rough edges with a knife. Done on a light table. Women's work.

chum -- a big salmon with pale flesh caught in the fall. Also called dog salmon or keta. Has a distinctive mouth, especially as it gets near to spawning time.

clinchler -- the machine that seals the lid on a can. The clincher person works at the end of the canning line, keeping the machine supplied with lids. In some plants this is a man's job, and in other places it is women's work.

Coastline machine -- a machine that washes a salmon, but not as well as manual labour used to. Sets a workspeed for the women who check the fish that come out of it.

coffee woman -- person responsible to keep the coffee brewing, and to clean the lunchroom and restock the toilets during the shift. Considered a preferential job because you have some control over your movements, you can smoke, and you can talk.

coho -- a salmon that is good-tasting, a little cheaper than sockeye, and that doesn't school up as much as sockeye or pinks, so less of it is canned.

cold storage -- the walk-in freezers where number 1 salmon from the fresh fish line is stored. Also where herring is stored before it is popped. These freezers can be several stories high. Men work in the freezers, and they receive an increment at 1000 hours, and a 5-minute 'pee break' every hour.

double time day -- a Sunday when there is a full work shift, which is paid double time. The companies often threaten to put a 'flexible weekend' in place, which would mean that people could work twelve days straight before receiving double pay.

factory ship -- a large fishing vessel which has processing capability on board. It is difficult to imagine processing fish -- usually groundfish -- in a storm or swell. Other countries, Russia for example, have factory ships, even fleets of them, but the Pacific coast of Canada does not.

feeders -- women who pick up each fish and manually place it on a moving rack to go into a canning machine.

filleting -- cutting the meat off the bones of a fish. In canning, salmon fillets are needed for patching; in groundfish the total recovery of meat from the carcass is accomplished this way. Women's work in BC. Men's work in Newfoundland.

floor lady -- interchangeable with 'woman chargehand'. Floor ladies organize the women, do callout, and are sometimes called 'personnel supervisors'. They also tell men what to do in the absence of a male chargehand.

fracking -- manually tearing the head off a herring. Women's work.

fresh fish -- a separate line and crew, where fish is cleaned and graded before it is sold fresh or frozen. Considered the elite salmon crew. Mixed men and women.

gillnetting -- a type of fishing involving a drift net the colour of the water that unsuspecting salmon swim into. Usually results in better-quality fish than seiners, but poorer than trollers.

grading -- sorting the fish by species when they come off the boat, and when they go through the salmon canning line. Separating fish for species, quality and size when they are going through a fresh fish line. Sorting groundfish fillets by size. Sorting brined herring roe into nine or more grades. Work for both sexes but unloading in particular is jealously guarded as a male job, while herring roe grading is considered a female occupation.

halves -- medium-sized cans of salmon. Most common pack.

heading -- as it says, manually cutting the head off a fish, salmon or halibut. Mostly men's work, as it receives an increment.

indexing -- feeding the various machines, especially the Iron Butcher, with salmon carcasses.

in the round -- a whole fish, which still contains its entrails.

IQF machine -- 'Individual Quick Freeze' machine, that freezes fillets separately, also called the 'tunnel' or the 'train'.

Iron Butcher -- a machine especially designed for salmon canning, that heads, defins and guts a salmon before it is washed.

jacks -- two-year-old male spring salmon that decide to return to the river to spawn early. You get a certain number in any catch.

net woman -- woman who repairs gillnets and seine nets for the fishermen. Done for companies or by piecework.

night shift -- a cannery shift, usually, which is called out secondarily at peak season. There can be a night shift during herring as well.

opening -- a time set by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans when specific gear types of fishermen are permitted to fish for specified lengths of time. It makes for very unpredictable work schedules.

patching -- examining cans of salmon before they are sealed for defects (too much bone showing, meat outside can, wrong weight). Women's work.

pinks -- pink salmon. They have a two-year cycle, usually, and are smaller and softer than sockeye, for example. Also called humpies, as they develop a shoulder hump when they approach spawning time.

popper -- a machine that is currently in the experimental stage, that will replace women who pop roe now.

popping or pulling -- manually separating a herring from its roe. Women's work.

PRASCU -- Prince Rupert Amalgamated Shoreworkers and Clerks Union.

quarters -- smallest cans of salmon, usually filled with the best fish, fresh sockeye.

reduction -- turning fish carcasses into fish meal. When one can smell a fish plant, usually the reduction plant is working to capacity. Not all plants have reduction facilities, but one is generally aware of it when they do.

reform line -- a line of workers that forms cans from flattened pieces. Done so that shipping is not prohibitive. Not done any more since fishplants have been consolidated into two or three centres.

retort -- steam oven that can hold several thousand cans to be cooked at once.

Looks like a tunnel, as cans are pushed in one end and pulled out the other.

salt -- this comes in 40 kg bags, which men lift and bring over to the canning line.

Then women scoop it up and keep the canisters on the canning machines full. Each can gets some salt unless it is a special pack. The women consider that working on the salt is a lazy woman's job, as she can stand still sometimes.

seining -- a type of fishing involving a large net and a fairly large boat. Usually has a crew of five. Salmon caught by a seiner is usually of fairly poor quality.

seniority -- the reason there is stability in a given plant. Seniority is not transferable between plants, and all callouts are done by seniority, assuming an individual can do the work. Separate seniority lists for men and women were previously the rule, and in some places they still are.

sexer -- a machine that tells the gender of herring.

shuffling -- working on the quarter-pound canning lines, patting the fish pieces into a flat mass while they go past you on the belt, before they are canned by machine. Always done by women, unless you can talk a machine man into doing it while you go to the washroom.

sockeye -- the reddest of the salmon except for red spring. The mainstay of the canning industry. Bigger than pinks, they usually run earlier in the year.

spring -- the biggest salmon, also called kings, chinook, smilies, tyee, and I'm sure other things. Their meat is either red or white, and the red is considered far preferable. They don't school like other salmon, so are caught one at a time - - but one fish may be worth more than \$100 to the fisherman, as they can be large.

steelhead -- actually an anadromous trout. Acts like a salmon. Does not school up. Nice to eat.

talls -- one-pound cans for salmon. Usually filled with pinks or chum.

tally -- keeping count of weight and species of fish landed. A man's job, for the most part, though women are starting to work tally. The word is sometimes used as a noun: 'I'm the tally.' Usually involves pushing the buggies of fish on and off the scale.

tendermen -- men who work on packers, who bring the fish from the fishboats on the fishing grounds into the plants.

totes -- metal, wood or plastic tubs for carrying fish around the plants by forklift. Can hold between 750 and 3000 pounds, depending on size.

troller -- a type of fishboat that catches salmon with many hooks and lines. Results in the least damaged fish.

UFAWU -- United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union.

warehouse -- where the cooked cans are cooled down, labelled, packaged up, and stored.

washing -- examining a fish after it has been beheaded and degutted to make sure it is clean and the fins have been removed. Women's work.

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