

“I believe I’ll go fishing”: A critical analysis of the Key West commercial fishing industry and its people

An Honors Thesis

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This Honors Thesis represents my own work and due acknowledgement is given wherever information is derived from other sources. No part of this Honors Thesis has been or is being concurrently submitted for any other qualification at any other university.

Signed:


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I would first and foremost like to thank my survey participants for providing the information vital to this study, as well as Mr. Peter M. Bacle for graciously providing his book, *Trapped in Key West*. Secondly, my parents, Sharon and Captain Mike Pierce. Conchs of many generations, they lent their undying and enthusiastic support. Thirdly, my wonderful partner, Justin, for his calming voice and tea deliveries on long nights of research and data comparison. Lastly, my best of friends, Renee, for generally helping me keep my sanity during this whole process, and of course my advisor, Dr. Stepp.

This study is dedicated to the men and women of the Key West commercial fishing community— as vibrant and unique as the island it calls home. It is also dedicated to my inspiration for the study: my only brother, our beloved Captain Derek “Big D” Pierce, who went to sail on distant shores in 2016. Fly on, freebird.

Abstract:

The purpose of this research was to explore the formation and the existence of the unique subculture of commercial fishermen in Key West. Factors of the study include the historic fisheries of Key West, as well as the influence of immigrants. The study also looks at issues faced by the fishermen, inclusive of difficulties finding housing on the island, government relations, and substance addictions. Data was collected via survey and during time spent with the Key West fishermen from 2016-2017 for a total of 40 respondents, 25 of which were commercial fishermen, and 15 of which were their immediate family members. Questions were asked regarding opinions on present conditions, as well as historical participation. The “Conch”, or Key West local dialect of English was also examined. Implications of results include acute awareness of drug issues, a significant family role in the fishermen’s lives, as well as concerns for the future of the community. The results of this study could be used to help support the fishermen both in Key West and elsewhere, as well as serve as a comparative basis for other small commercial fishing communities.

Introduction

No matter the subfield of anthropology, its purpose comes down to the study of humanity. At times, this involves study of obscure, isolated groups or well-known dead empires. Other times, these groups of people are subgroups within large ones, but still unique. This thesis is the latter, approaching the history and present environment of a somewhat small, yet important and influential group within the larger group of Key West inhabitants. This group is that of the commercial fishermen. Since well before the island's booming popularity as a tourist hotspot, these men of the sea helped the economy prosper, and were essential to the island's formation of its unique identity. For approximately two centuries, these men have had their histories passed down and documented in a historical sense by authors such as John Viele, Peter Bacle and Donnie Williams, but at the time of this writing and to my knowledge, no anthropological studies have been conducted on them. With this thesis, I plan to change that in honor of such a rich community, in honor of my Conch fishermen ancestors, and in honor of my older brother, who loved nothing more than his dog, his boat, and his job. This study will illuminate the highly individual characteristics of the Key West commercial fishermen, explore some problems the community faces that could apply more holistically to other fishing communities, and will perhaps set a precedent for studies on other unique fisher cultures within North America.

I specifically approach the sociocultural, political, and environmental factors that have impacted both the historic and modern development of the fishermen and their culture. I put forth that they constitute a small sub-culture within American fisheries, highly influenced by both the general Conch culture they live in and by immigrant groups. However, I also believe they are a valuable case study towards approaching and understanding all American fisher cultures, as they

have similar goals, rely equally on the environment for their income and way of life, and face similar problems such as addictions.

Key West and its Fishermen: An Introduction and History

The island of Key West, Florida, is well-known as the southernmost point of the United States, and the last in the chain of islands known as the Florida Keys. The relatively small island is home to a plethora of local legends, historic buildings, bars, and unique cuisine, along with a sizable population of wild chickens and iguanas. College students from around the world flock to the island for spring break, while people of all ages and walks of life attend the yearly Fantasy Fest celebration in October. Those families who have been on the island for multiple generations are known as Conchs, with many hailing from the Bahamas or elsewhere in the Caribbean. In discussing the topic of being a Conch, many inhabitants of the island are “Fresh-water” Conchs, or those who have relocated to Key West rather than being born there. If one is from the island and makes a trip to Winn-Dixie, it is impossible to avoid running into distant cousins or family friends. The journey to the store may only take a few moments, but it is at least a half-hour long affair to retrieve even a single item and leave if one manages to run into someone they know. This is a good summary of the close-knit nature of Key West, as well as familial importance.

The Keys’ past was just as colorful and varied as their present. Archaeological evidence suggests that human occupation of the Keys began around 1000 BCE, though some speculate it could have started around two thousand years earlier (Viele 1996: 3). Early visitors to the areas noted the native population, who were most likely of the non-agricultural Calusa or Tequesta groups. Spanish records indicate the existence of a chief on the Key of Bones, also known as

Key West (Viele 1996, 4). By the 1600s, Spaniards in Cuba discovered the fishing grounds in the Keys and made efforts of friendship with the native populous. By the 1700s, natives who survived the onslaught of disease and war had adopted pieces of Spanish culture and were sometimes employed as treasure divers (Viele 1996: 6). Between periods of native and European-American occupation, the Keys lacked permanent settlements, though Key West remained utilized as an important Cuban and Bahamian harbor. Florida became a possession of the United States in 1819, and the Keys along with it. Key West specifically became rather important, housing the first permanent European-American settlement in the area, and serving as a location of naval strategic importance (Viele 1996: 21). Initially supported by wrecking (the practice of retrieving goods from shipwrecks), the island's main economies included fishing, port operations, cigar making, and salt manufacturing at some level by the 1830s (Viele 1996: 22). After the Seminole Wars as well as the Civil War passed, the Keys became more appealing as a tourist destination, with the first train from mainland Florida arriving in Key West in 1912 (Viele 1996: 99). From this point forward, the Keys developed culturally and economically into the vacation hotspot it is today.

The Conch culture itself is also notable. It is an identity that residents of Key West are quite proud to hold. The Dictionary of American Regional English defines Conch as "A White resident of the Florida Keys, esp one of Bahamian descent." (Harvard University Press 2013) While the use of the word "Conch" to describe a people has uncertain origins, early usage started after the American Revolution in relation to European residents of the Bahamas (Viele 1996). As Bahamians migrated to the Keys, the name seemed to stick. In modern usage, a "Salt Water" Conch denotes someone born on the island, likely to Conch parents, and a "Fresh Water" Conch denotes a person who has been living on the island for more than seven years. A particularly

iconic period in Conch history was in 1982, when Key West “seceded” from the mainland in response to a blockade set up by border patrol at the entrance to the Keys on US-1. The Conch Republic was formed and declared war on the United States. The tiny country declared a prime minister as well as a secretary general and adopted the motto “We Seceded Where Others Failed”. It quickly surrendered, however, as it had no intention of actual warfare (The Conch Republic n.d.). The Conch Republic lives on as a characteristic moment in Florida Keys history, as well as a popular tourist attraction of sorts. It is also a testament to the culture of the Conchs. The issue of the blockade was a fairly serious one, but one they approached with tongue-in-cheek humor.

At this point, it is prudent to break from the history of the Keys and briefly discuss the history of fishing. Archaeological evidence suggests that the practice of fishing began with *Homo habilis* around 1,900,000 to 800,000 BCE. Harvesting of shellfish may be attributed to *Homo erectus* at around 700,000 BCE (Pitcher and Lam 2015). Early hominins, however, did not have specialized technology for this purpose. Early *Homo sapiens* developed several tools, including fish traps, nets, and hooks (Pitcher and Lam 2015). These tools continued to develop, with fishing providing a valuable food source for many early civilizations, especially in the Mediterranean region. Evidence in the form of serrated projectile points found on the California coast suggest fishing technology also developed in the Americas (Pitcher and Lam 2015). While fishing for trade and profit of some sort certainly began 1000-500 BCE, it seems that the Romans were the first to seriously commoditize it in the production of garum, fermented fish sauce, between 100 BCE and the first three centuries of the common era (Pitcher and Lam 2015). As with other industries, fishing began to modernize and become increasingly more mechanized as well as globalized after the Industrial Revolution took place. In modern times, commercial

fishermen may be found nearly everywhere there is a coastline. The Florida Keys are an ideal location for this particular occupation, with the Gulf of Mexico on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other. Between these two bodies of water, considerable variation in marine life exists. Early inhabitants of the Keys quickly realized this and took advantage of the rich fishing grounds within.

Famous for large-sized pink shrimp (known, appropriately, as Key West Jumbo Pinks) and Spiny Lobster (called crawfish by locals) fisheries, the waters surrounding Key West also yield Stone Crab, Yellowtail Snapper, and various other species of fish. In the past, harvesting sponge was also on this list, as was turtle. Each played an important, if not vital role in the socio-economic development of Key West. Many older Conchs I have spoken with were around, and in some cases, actively participating in harvests during the prime eras of harvesting for these particular fisheries.

Sponging, while presently practiced mostly by the Cuban fisherman, was a major Conch industry in the past. In the late 19th century and the first few decades of the 20th century, the sponge beds of Key West and the Tarpon Springs area held somewhat of a monopoly on the sponge trade (Viele 1996). Testaments to the importance of this fishery may be found throughout the island, and sponge carts and stores still line the streets of the downtown sector. Large figures made of sponge known as Spongemen grace many storefronts, with some being upwards of thirty years old.

Sponging was also a center of conflict which is seldom discussed. Greek spongers, having been harvesting sponge for centuries in the Mediterranean, used diving suits with lead shoes to descend to deeper waters and retrieve sponge. Conch fishermen, being newer to the fishery, harvested from shallow waters, using a glass-bottomed bucket to locate sponge from the

surface and a three-pronged hook to retrieve them. The Greek method, however, was far more efficient, and allowed them to harvest more sponge. The Conchs claimed that the Greeks' shoes trampled young sponge and killed them, though this was likely conjecture, with the Key West fishermen envious of the larger harvests. These men were also remarkably territorial (something that to an extent, survives to the present). When some Greek vessels made their way to Key West, Conch spongers razed them, looting their supplies and destroying what they left (Shubow 1969). There is a level of racial motivation here. According to the granddaughter of one participant in the razing, the children of the Conchs who were part of this so-called "sponge war" employed slurs towards the Greeks. Now, though, four to five generations since the war, they are all but forgotten.

Modern Conch sponging has not changed drastically from that of the 19th and early 20th centuries. According to one of the older fishermen interviewed, who has harvested sponge at multiple points in his career, it goes something like this: "To prepare, you put shark liver in the sun, in a drum to turn into oil. You put a stick in the drum, and then you throw it into the water, it makes the surface clear. You put sponge hooks on an 18-foot pole to pull them up. You dry them flat for a few days, then you go to shallow water and beat them out until they're clean. Then you squeeze them out, string them out, let them dry for a few days, and sell them."

As with sponging, the island's turtle industry has an extensive history, beginning with the natives who occupied the area in pre-Spanish times. Turtle would have been a primary food source for these peoples, supported by evidence taken from village sites on Stock Island (Malcom 2013). Before the island was settled, fishermen and wreckers from Cuba and the Bahamas often harvested turtles from the area.

While most of the world's sea turtle species can be found in the Keys, the Green Turtle was particularly popular because of its fat, used for soup. The harvesting of these animals was a definitive industry for Key West, which opened its first turtle soup cannery in 1857 (Malcom 2013). The island even developed a so-called "turtle district", in which most people who worked in the industry lived. While the Keys turtle population had dwindled significantly by the 1940s, many fishermen harvested from waters in the Caymans and Bahamas, still bringing their catches to the Key West turtle pens, or kraals, for processing. The industry officially died in 1971, after the implementation of a carapace size requirement of 41 inches. While the original cannery at the kraals collapsed into the water in 1995, a new building at the site now houses the Key West Turtle Museum, which exhibits artifacts recovered from the kraals in an archaeological excavation conducted in 2000 (Malcom 2013).

A fisherman who previously harvested the animals for personal consumption only had some insight. "We always had turtle to eat. It was a Key West thing, like Jewfish, this was before they started spearing them with powerheads. They almost wiped them out. A lot of it wasn't commercial fishermen, either, it was divers. So, everyone suffered." Today, with the protections in place for the marine reptiles, even imported meat is not found on the island. Fishermen who may have otherwise harvested the animals now assist them if they become stuck in their gear. Long-liners are required to be certified on such turtle rescues, and shrimpers have turtle exclusion devices built in to their nets.

Like the sponge and turtle industries, the shrimp fishing industry has been through peaks, lows, and struggles. Presently, it is at a low in Key West. While in the past, there were numerous, even hundreds of shrimp vessels, today there are but a handful in Key West harbors depending on the time of year. A 2004 article from YaleGlobal Online reflects these notions, discussing a

shrimp captain out of Key West who reported profit for a year as a mere \$3,700 (Hoag 2004).

Fourteen years later, the situation has only worsened for shrimpers. While it was difficult to find historic information on this fishery, a life-long captain had input on it during his lifetime. “Most of the shrimp boats now, they’re out of Fort Myers, or other places with more harbor space. No room for them here anymore. Hell, there’s barely room for us.” I asked him what he thought the impact of it all was, and he indicated that “things are quieter now, less busy. Can you imagine a time where you’ve got 50 boats all coming in at once, trying to unload, the chaos?”

Due to the protected status of many species, some fisheries have become too costly or too difficult to obtain requisite permits or closed off entirely. Many methods of harvesting—such as longlining for grouper—require specialized equipment. This equipment is expensive and often the allowed harvest does not make its purchase justifiable. With the harvest of turtle illegal, sponging severely declined, several varieties of fish protected, and issues facing the shrimp industry, a great deal of Conch fishermen have turned to Spiny Lobster as their primary harvest.

The Spiny Lobster differ from Maine Lobster in appearance and taste. They lack claws, instead having large, spiny antennae referred to as “whips”. Conch refer to them as Crawfish, and to those who have yet to reach legal harvesting size as Monkeys. Depictions of the crustaceans may be found littered amongst t-shirts and merchandise in the Keys, and they are arguably a cultural centerpiece. However, their harvest in the Keys is fairly modern, mostly arising after World War II.

In more recent years, namely the last two decades or so, the fishermen of Key West have stopped harvesting certain species, due to either legality or simple cost of operations. Shark operations, in business in the 2000s, have shut down entirely. Relics from this fishery in the form of dried shark jaws decorate many fishermen’s homes, with others electing to wear shark’s teeth

as charms. Part of this practice stems from a superstitious belief that if one wears a shark's tooth, sharks will not attack them in the water.



Figure a: An example of "protective" jewelry. This one incorporates a blue eye, a symbol of protection as well. It was given to me on my 12th birthday as a gift from my brother. 2017.

Methodology

The commercial fishermen of Key West are part of a unique subgroup of both Americans and fishermen. This study is the first of its kind conducted on this community. To collect the data required, I utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods. For my quantitative data, I composed a survey¹ designed to be taken by both Conch fishermen and their families. As I have spent much of my time abroad during my degree work, it was difficult for me to conduct adequate in-person individual interviews. This survey, along with asking basic statistic questions

¹ Appendix 2: Survey Questions

such as age and level of education, asks the fishermen's opinions about various elements of their lives and profession. For my qualitative data and methods, I used my time in Key West to conduct observations as a member of the community, conduct a few quick interviews, as well as document my first-hand experience as a family member of commercial fishermen. This fieldwork was conducted in the summer months of 2016, at which point I was able to accompany a captain for a pull, conduct port-of-call observations, and witness the funerary rites of a departed fisherman. I also analyzed a subject's language using Praat, a phonetic analysis, to find unique elements in how fishermen speak in comparison to the rest of Florida, using a national dialect survey as a basis.

For my analyses, I draw upon the knowledge gained during my coursework at the University of Florida, and various studies and sources that discuss important tenants of ethnography along with cultural anthropology. In discussing the rites of the commercial fishermen of Key West, I have elected to use Arnold Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1960) as well as Ronald L. Grimes' *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (2013). I also call upon concepts explored in Tim Ingold's *Biosocial Becomings* (2013) in discussing the environment and the fishermen's reciprocal impact. Several studies are also utilized in relevant areas.

[The Fisherman's Calendar](#)

When approaching the lives of the fishermen at present, I find it prudent to first discuss the fisheries and their calendars, along with what a typical day for a fisherman looks like during the lobster season. Some information here is taken from my survey results, which included 25 fishermen, and some of it is taken through long observation and involvement in the community.

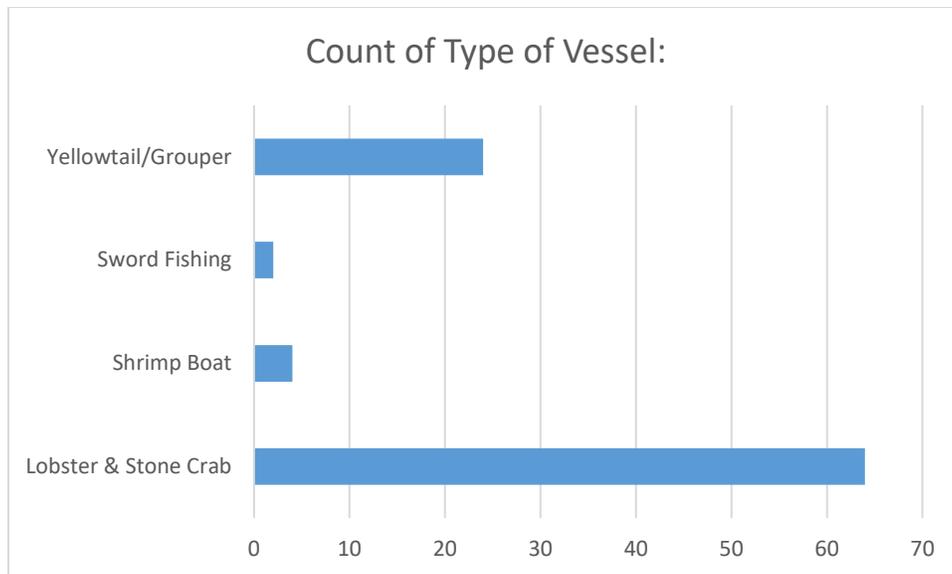


Figure b: Types of vessels observed during Port of Call observations.

The calendar of most commercial fishermen in Key West revolves around the spiny lobster season, which runs from August to March. Out of the vessels observed, over 60 were lobster boats, as seen in figure b. In response to the question of their primary fishery, 90.48% of fishermen survey participants indicated it was spiny lobster. Tags (or legally held trap numbers) varied from 250 to 5000, with the median number of traps being 1909. The total number of lobster tags possessed by respondents was 34,356. The time between harvesting seasons is just as important as the season itself. For some, this is a time when secondary work in general is pursued, such as carpentry or truck driving. These months are typically spent repairing gear and performing vessel maintenance, or sometimes pursuing a secondary harvest. This involves going through lobster traps, scraping barnacles off, replacing broken slats and funnels (respectively made from wood and plastic, somewhat unique in comparison to other lobster fisheries that use wire traps), attaching that year's tags, as well as prepping bait (typically squares of cowhide) for the first throw. Floats, marked with the vessel's trap number either by stamp or by paint, are also painted or re-painted in colors unique to that vessel. This paint identifies floats in the water, and

generally consists of two to three different colors in either solids or with stripes. Additionally, these colors are sometimes passed from down from fathers to sons if they pass away or retire.



Figure c: A Spiny Lobster trap accompanied by floats. The plastic funnel is visible, as is the cement in the bottom of the trap. This one is in need of repair, evident by the missing slat of wood on the right side. 2016

New traps are also built during this time. During the last stage of construction, weighting, the fishermen will have a cement truck come to their boatyard in the morning. Wheelbarrows at the ready, each captain and his crew add cement to the spread-out traps. Afterwards, the cement is usually stamped with the boat's trap number. This task is typically delegated to a crew member, or in my experience, younger siblings who eagerly anticipate helping. While this is a day of work, it is also a yearly ritual for the fishermen, providing a sense of completion and adding to the anticipation of the season's opening. An annual blessing of the

fleet, to be discussed in a later section, occurs immediately before the boats are loaded for the first throw of the season.



Figure d: Traps are stacked in a vessel in preparation for a throw. 2016

On the eve of the first day of the lobster season, each captain and his crew is bustling to make last minute preparations. Some prefer to load their vessels with traps the day before and devote this time to stock their ice chests with groceries. Others have everything done in advance, and instead spend the day with their families celebrating the beginning of what they hope to be a season of plentiful harvest. Similarly, some leave at midnight, the earliest possible legal time, while others prefer to get a good night's sleep and leave in the early hours of the morning. The day is spent with a fair amount of excitement among captain and crew alike. The ship's radio is abuzz with conversations and laughter. Once all the ship's load of traps is thrown, the vessel returns to the dock to reload and do the same thing the next day. This continues until all of the traps have gone out, by which time the first throws have soaked long enough to yield a catch.

These traps are hauled aboard, emptied, and have their bait replaced. The rest of the season plays out in a similar fashion—traps are moved from place to place to yield a better catch or to avoid the battering waves of a hurricane or rebaited repeatedly until the season's end.



Figure e: A "livewell" of Spiny Lobster. Lobster are placed in these water-filled tanks to preserve freshness. Most fishermen prefer livewells, as live lobster sell for a higher price. 2016

The throw location part of fishing can be incredibly kin-based and territorial. As there are many father and son duos—often with each serving as captain of his own vessel—the father's throw locations are passed on to his child and so forth. As a result, many fishing families have preferred throw locations that have been in use for several generations. Most older captains keep a notebook of GPS coordinates in their cabins, in addition to plotting them on their GPS units. On occasion another captain will fish someone's "spot". Those who are perhaps new to the community or who are especially territorial will sometimes cut the buoys from traps, making them impossible for their vessels to retrieve. This is an act that is highly frowned upon. It is considered as an act of breaking brotherhood, and as such, is taboo. Even rumors of such an action often result in ostracization from the core of the fishing community. Buoy cutting is generally only excusable when the floats are inextricably tangled with the other vessel's, in

which case a cut will occur, and the captain will immediately inform the owner of the other traps. Pulling another boat's traps and harvesting the lobster within is another taboo act.



Figure f: The captain of this vessel pulls up a trap using the hydraulic winch his vessel is outfitted with, while his crew prepares the other traps to be thrown back over. 2015

Other important harvesting seasons beyond that of spiny lobster occur as well. One is kingfish or net season, which lasts just a few days in January or February. A special roller is added to some boats during this time, allowing the retrieval of the net. In order to make the most of this short-lived harvesting period, many of those who participate stay awake for its entirety, picking kingfish out of the net and preparing to go out for another throw. In the past, kingfish season was much longer, lasting about two months, and more fishermen held the appropriate permits. Now, however, even a fisherman who can sew net is reportedly rather rare, as fewer fishermen participate. An older fisherman told me that he no longer participates, despite doing so continuously in the past.



Figure g: A kingfish net being stored in the off-season. 2016



Figure h: A haul of kingfish. Part of the roller attached to the vessel for hauling in the net can be seen. 2016.

Two other fisheries that can overlap somewhat with lobster are stone crab and yellowtail snapper. Stone crab traps are constructed differently than lobster traps. They are small and made of plastic, rather than quite large and made of wood. Stone crabs are not harvested in their

entirety. Rather, one claw is removed, and the animal is thrown back. Perhaps it is notable that it is legal to harvest both claws, but these fishermen generally only take one so that the crab is left with a defensive mechanism and a way to hunt while its other claw regenerates. Lobstermen often supplement their income with a small number of stone crab traps, thrown closer to shore. Yellowtail season is the third major fishery to constitute the fishermen's calendars. Some vessels primarily fish yellowtail, while others utilize it as a secondary fishery.

During the 2016 lobster season, I was able to accompany a captain and his crew for a day of pulling traps. Preparation started the day before, as the captain took his vessel to fill it with fuel. He also filled several ice chests with ice, drinks, and sandwich meat. These are important staples for the day, as hydration and energy for the crew is paramount. The day of the pull, we woke up around 4 AM. Crew was told to be at the dock ready to depart no later than 5 AM. Before heading to the docks, we stopped at de Luna's Café, a small establishment on Stock Island. The usual purchase here is either Cafecito (a type of Cuban espresso drink, served in an approximately 8-ounce cup with smaller $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce "shot" cups provided, and called Buchi by many Conchs) or Café con Leche (essentially Cafecito with steamed milk and sugar), along with a guava pastry or Cuban bread with cheese. The captain for this trip purchased several Cafecitos, enough for himself and his crew. Other captains and crewmen were also at the café, in what could certainly be called a daily ritual. After this collection of coffee and breakfast, we arrived at the dock and boarded the vessel. We departed no later than 5:15 AM, and it took approximately two hours to reach the coordinates for the first pull. By this time the crewmen had put on oilers (essentially overalls made of vinyl at an attempt of waterproofing) and no-slip water boots. For the pull, one crewman used a gaff to catch the float attached to the first trap. The float was passed to the other crewman, who secured it on the hydraulic wench and turned it on. When the

trap neared the surface, it was pulled onto the gunnel of the ship, which was reinforced with metal to prevent damage to its otherwise fiberglass and wood construction. The lobster that are harvestable were then removed from the trap and placed into a crate in a large chest filled with ventilated saltwater, a form of livewell. Fish, crabs, and illegal lobster were then removed from the trap and thrown back. The trap was re-baited and thrown back over. Because they were in lines (a float marks the first and last trap, they are all connected together), the next trap was already on the gunnel while the first was being rebaited. This process repeated until the line was complete, and then we moved on to the next one. A break was taken during a lightning storm, and again for lunch. Crewmen were also welcome and encouraged to take breaks for water. The pull was completed around 3 PM, somewhat delayed because of the storm as well as difficulty finding some lines. The captain brought the vessel to be unloaded at the fish house, a task completed in about an hour. The live lobster were weighed and their amounts were put on a slip as an invoice. The crewmen left and the day was complete around 5 PM. The captain described this as a typical day in length. He did indicate that catch amounts varied, and occasionally, overnight trips did occur, but these were more frequent in the past.



Figure i: The crew on a lobster vessel prepare to move traps, rebaiting them during the travel time to the new throw location. 2016



Figure j: The crew collects spiny lobster from a trap. 2016

Culture, Rites, and Ritual

The commercial fishermen of Key West have always been a unique element of the island's sociopolitical spectrum, as well as a vital component to its economy. Out of 96 commercial fishing vessels observed, just two held a port-of-call outside of Key West, and only one was from outside of the state of Florida². In fact, only 9 survey respondents, out of 25 fishermen respondents, indicated that had ever fished elsewhere³. There is a noticeable difference between fishermen who are based out of Key West, and those who come from elsewhere. At times at the island's fish-houses or marinas, vessels from a multitude of ports can be observed, some from as nearby as Marathon or Key Largo, with others from as far away as Oregon. While these men (and occasionally women) are united by a common occupation, this is often the limit. The general attitude with outsiders is caution. However, this being said, there are definitely many cases of them being welcomed into the community over time, shown by the previously discussed "fresh water Conch" title.

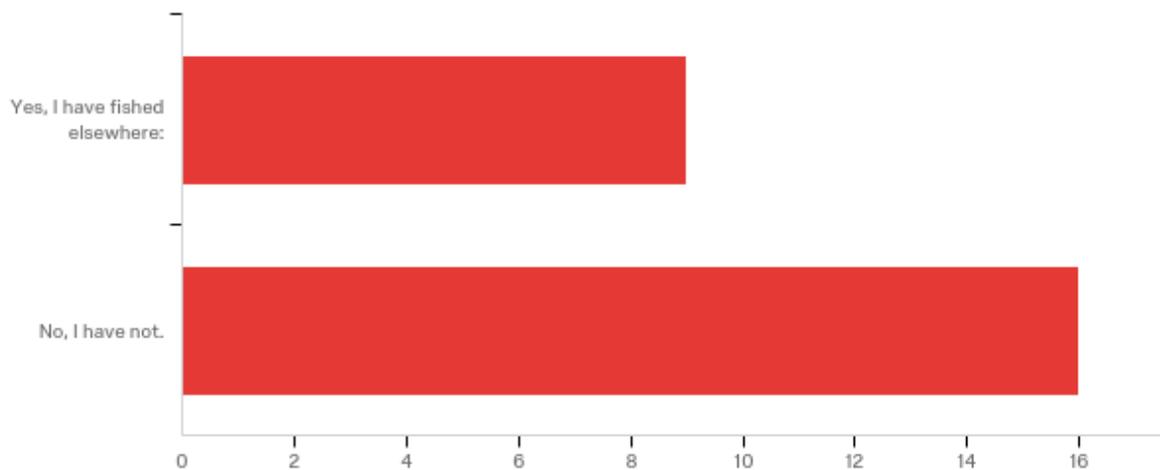


Figure k: "Have you fished elsewhere commercially? If so, where?"

² Figure k: "Have you fished elsewhere commercially? If so, where?"

³ Figure L: Port of Call data

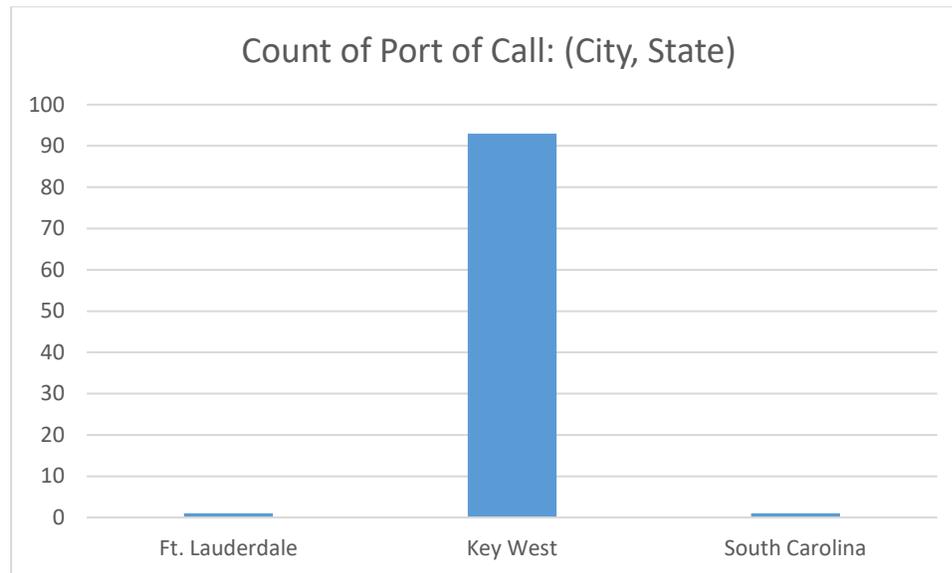


Figure 1: Port of Call data

This being said, the culture and customs of the modern Key West commercial fishermen are very much syncretic between that of the Conch and that of Cuban immigrants and refugees from the mid-20th century. Language is perhaps the most obvious indicator of this, with even the most Caucasian-appearing fishermen using Spanish slang words. The Conch accent on its own is fairly unique, with a good portion of phonological elements that are different from that of the typical Floridian. Food is another very clear contribution, with Cuban dishes being the cuisine of choice at celebrations (further discussed later). Deeply beloved and well-rooted establishments such as El Mocho and DeLuna’s Café serve both Cuban and classic Conch foods.

One major element seen in the community is the use of nicknames. It is a seldom day indeed which someone is referred to as their proper name. Many nicknames are Spanish words, a reflection of the integration of Cuban cultural elements. Others are ironic, or are old titles that have stuck, such as Captain Grass from the “square grouper” days (Bacle 2013). “Bubba” is a catch-all nickname, often assigned to those too young to have earned a unique nickname, or to

those who are new in the community. It is also used in conjunction with other nicknames during conversations. These nicknames are an ideal example of the brotherhood that the fishermen feel, as their use denotes a degree of closeness that would not be met in a less connected community. It should be noted that heavy use of nicknames, however, is not isolated to the fishing community. A book published by Donnie Williams lists nicknames used by the Conchs of Key West in general over the years. While it is impossible to entirely isolate fishermen within the list, there are many nicknames that at least allude to the occupation, such as variations of Captain, Jewfish, “Fishing Fool”, Fish, Loggerhead, and Needle Gar (Williams 2000). This is another reminder of how significant the fishermen are within Conch culture as a whole.

The barter system is very much alive within the fishing community, though this is likely only unique to the Conch fishermen in what is used in bartering. Vessels will often swap supplies when out on multiple-day trips if needed. Sometimes, catch is traded, for example, lobstermen might trade a certain number of lobster tails for a crate of shrimp. If the vessels are friends, they may tether together and share a meal. At the docks, this system can continue, but involves services. A quick hydraulic repair might be paid for with a bag of stone crab claws, or a dozen lobster tails may be taken as payment for a future service.

Notion of family—both actual and social—is also quite important within the community. Family and feelings of brotherhood were cited the most in response to the question, “what do you feel is the best feature of the commercial fishing community?”, with responses emphasizing the close-knit nature of fishermen, as well as willingness to “help one another”. As mentioned previously, trap-throw locations tend to be passed from father to son and so forth. In fact, out of the 25 respondents who indicated they were fishermen, 14 indicated that their father was also a commercial fisherman, suggesting that the occupation is quite patrilineal. Only 6 respondents out

of the 25 who were fishermen indicated that they had no other family members that were commercial fishermen⁴. Survey respondents were asked what the role of family plays in commercial fishing. Their responses ranged from the function of support and stability to heritage to “everything”. One responded stated that commercial fishing itself is a giant family, and his actual family “helps keep me grounded”, while another stated that “I lost my family because I work too much.” Another who identified as an immediate family member mentioned that family often helps repair traps and clean boats, which is certainly a reality—I spent much of my childhood helping paint floats, prepare cowhide, and scraping barnacles off traps. Out of the 25 fishermen who responded, 21 indicated that they felt stressors were placed on their family. A fairly consistent type of stressor was that of inconsistent income, or as one respondent replied, “you never know when you get a paycheck”. Another fairly consistent response was having to do with being away from home and spending massive amounts of time at work, leaving significant others and family members to tend to duties at home.

⁴ Figure m: “Who in your family is a commercial fisherman? Check all that apply.”

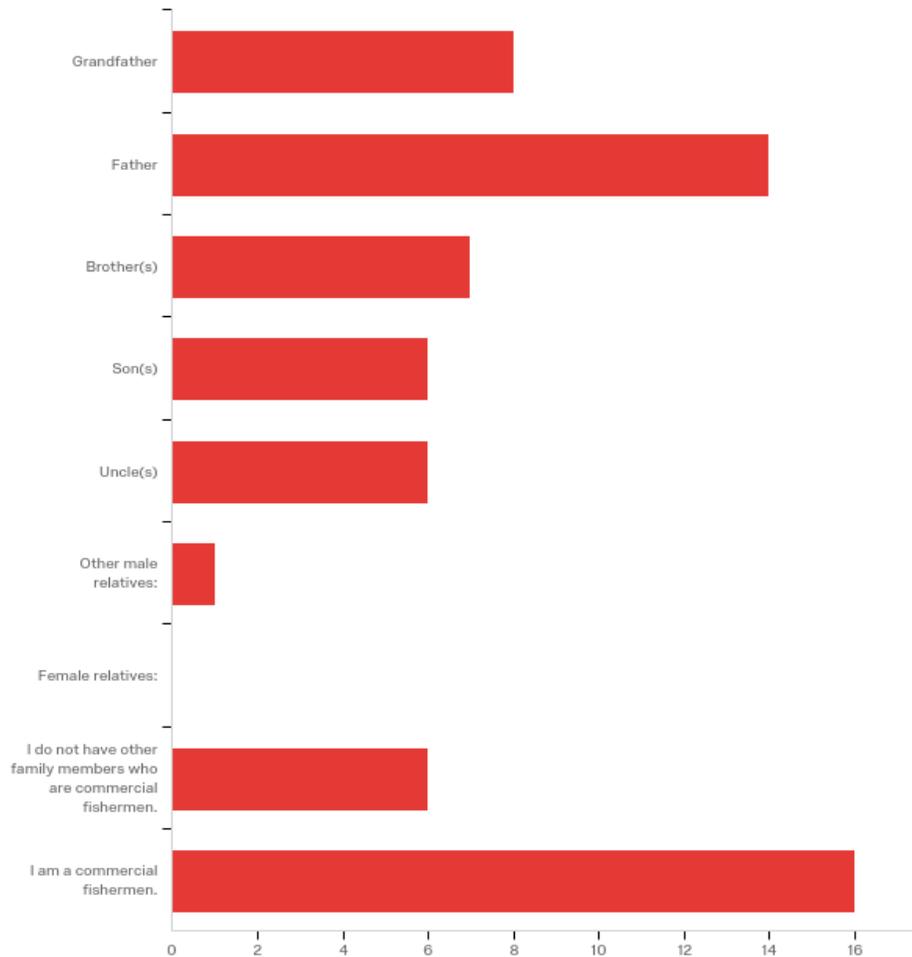


Figure m: "Who in your family is a commercial fisherman? Check all that apply."

Before beginning the discussion on ritual, I would like to indicate that almost any celebration or recognition of rites among the fishermen has several consistencies. Firstly, it will almost always take place at a boatyard or a fisherman's house. Many homes in the Keys are built on stilts (a precaution for flooding and hurricanes), with a sizable patio area directly under them. These are ideal for large, outdoor celebrations. Secondly, they are family events. Everyone from the fishermen themselves to infants are present. Thirdly, cuisine is almost always Cuban-American. A major component of this is the pig roast. There is major pride taken when the roaster is hand-built, be it out of brick or welded from metal. Other dishes served alongside the roasted pig include black beans and rice, fried plantains, yucca with onion and a garlic-butter

sauce, and Cuban bread. Desserts will often consist of Key Lime pie or guava pastries. Gennepe (1960) frequently discusses eating together as a basic and vital ritual, and it certainly applies to the fishermen. Food is arguably centric to any of their celebrations.



Figure n: A typical celebratory feast. This one was during the Blessing of the Fleet. 2017.

Rites of initiation are typically casual, and depending on their level, may or may not warrant a celebratory feast. One occasion in which new or young members of the community find official acceptance is during kingfish season. If the initiate is able to “keep up” with the more experienced crewmen in picking fish out of nets and survive on little sleep, it is considered an admirable mark of mettle. Obtaining a captain’s license is quite major. It carries the intention

of running a vessel for multiple purposes, and therefore the desire qualities of dedication, motivation, and a certain work ethic. However, it is worth note that this is something pursued by few members of the community. Most captains do not intend to use their vessels for charter purposes, and as a result, do not obtain the captain's license which allows them to do so, and instead only hold the permits that allow them to run the vessel for commercial fishing purposes.

Weddings are, expectedly, also occasions for celebrations. Some ceremonies are quite traditionally American Christian, and take place in a church, officiated by a priest or pastor. Others are more casual, officiated by notaries or other able officials. Births are treated similarly. Both involve the usual pig roast-style party, as well as outpourings of gifts and community support, from both the fishermen and their family members. Women, especially family matriarchs, play an especially big role here, both in support of brides and of new mothers. They sometimes offer assistance during the wedding planning process, and in the case of childbirth, they may offer meals to the new parents, or care of older children.

A ritual of christening of a new vessel existed historically, though this has not been done in some time as a result of fewer new vessels being built. The captain of the vessel would typically name it after either his wife, if he had no children, or his first daughter, if he had one. One captain, who had two daughters of similar age and not wanting to imply favoritism, named his vessel *My Girls*. Another, having a single daughter, named his *Destiny Lynn*, and named a vessel he owned at a later time *Miss Sharon*, after his wife. The christening would be complete when a bottle of Don Perignon was broken over the bow, a symbol of the wealth and prosperity that the vessel would bring.

The blessing of the fleet has been mentioned previously, but I will assign it more detail here, in its relevant location. It is a particularly fascinating ritual, as it is fairly recent for the Key

West fishermen, only being done in the last decade or so, but having been done globally since ancient times. The insular, change-resistant nature of the Conchs may be the reason for this, or perhaps there was another version of the blessing that evolved into a simple feast over time. A more senior member of the community, who had been fishing for around fifty years, stated that he only remembered feasts for the beginning of the season, or perhaps more individualized rituals, but never a fleet-wide blessing. I have personally observed smudging of vessels using sage, a practice Native American in origin, but this was in conjunction with the overall blessing.

The modern blessing involves a Catholic priest asking captains to orient the bows of their vessels towards the dock, and said priest subsequently dousing each with holy water while reciting a prayer. Someone blows a conch shell, and then a feast follows. It is one of the few overtly religious practices unique to fishermen and suggests an element of sympathetic magic in that if there is some sort of blessing, the yield of the harvest will be favorable. The docks where the fishermen tie their vessels are turned from a utilitarian to a ritual space for the duration of the Blessing. It should also be mentioned that this particular ritual has a significantly positive impact on group psychology. After the blessing, fishermen can be overheard talking about how excited they are for the season, that they have high hopes for “the price” (meaning the rate lobster is sold at, which translates to their pay), and they generally appear happier.



Figure o: A priest prepares to speak during the Blessing of the Fleet, and then begins the blessing. 2017.



Figure p: The priest continues the blessing. 2017

Gennepe's final rite of passage, for all groups, is death and the funeral. Death, like any other rite of passage for the fishermen, is approached with all of the quirks and specialness of the Conchs. In 2016, the Key West commercial fleet lost a respected captain. His celebration of life was attended by friends and family stretching from Key West to Alabama. A poster board, featuring photos of him, his dog, his catches, and his iconic vessel was set up on a central table, accompanied by his urn. His boatyard family came together to supply food and space for this celebration. The usual meal of celebration—roast pig, black beans, rice, plantains, and yucca, amongst other Cuban dishes—was served. The reading of his eulogy was accompanied by the distribution of shots of Captain Morgan rum throughout the adult population of those in attendance, a nod to his alcohol preferences during life.



Figure q: A friend of the captain's pays his respects. 2016

The act of laying the captain to rest was an equally unique event. One of his lobster traps was inscribed with his name, birth date, and date of passing. A small amount of his cremains were placed in a metal tube and attached to the trap, which was then taken out to sea and thrown overboard. For someone whose entire life revolved around the sea, it seemed only appropriate that it should be his resting place as well. This method of burial also reflects a notion on the environment and the role fishermen play within it. The trap and tube are meant to, one day, serve as a basis for reef growth, almost an aquatic equivalent of burial pods. I also feel it is an incredible example of how the environment shapes the fishermen, and how they shape it in return.

All of this being said, it is important to recognize other rituals that are not necessarily celebrated or major. Visiting deLuna's for Cafecito every morning is, as an example, a ritual; as is the yearly pouring of cement into traps, among other things. Another point to discuss would be

superstitious beliefs of the fishermen. I know of one captain who, upon discovering that a new employee had brought bananas on his boat, promptly fired him and tossed the bananas. The taboo of bringing bananas onto a fishing vessel has a rather long history, but there is no isolated or definite origin. Suggestions range from bananas being home to spiders and other insects, thus causing infestations, to the peels of the fruit causing catastrophic slips and falls (Ronca 2008). Leaving the dock for a trip on a Friday is quite the taboo, along with leaving the engine box cover upside down. Finally, many captains keep a dried-out seahorse on their vessel for good luck.

Fishermen, the Government, the environment, and their lives: Interactions and Issues

One issue present within the community—or rather, between the fishermen and tourists, is the dissonance between sport fishermen (often referred to as “sporties”). Before the commercial lobster season opens, there is an annual three-day mini-season, in which harvesting the crustaceans is legal for whomever wishes to participate. Divers must adhere to similar guidelines as the commercial fishermen, perhaps the most important of which is the size requirement, which says that the carapace of the lobster must be at least 3 inches long. However, many participants in the sport season disobey this, harvesting undersized lobsters (“shorts” or “monkeys” as known by the Conchs). They also sometimes harvest gravid females, identified by the peach or orange colored fluff under their tails. Harvesting these lobster is strictly forbidden at all times. This is something strictly adhered to by most fishermen, as they understand the legal implications as well as the moral ones, and the potential loss in future populations that would result. Often, the ocean floor is littered with the carapaces of lobster, with divers illegally wringing their harvest apart in the water in an effort to increase their yield. While breaking these

laws carries the punishment of heavy fines and occasionally jail time, divers are often not caught. Many of the commercial fishermen feel that the divers' harvesting in this fashion have a major impact on lobster populations and also adds to their own villainization, with the general public blaming them for these acts. Survey respondents were asked if they felt the practices of sport fishermen impacted the environment. Of the 25, 16 indicated that they did believe sport fishermen impacted the environment. A consistent comment—even in the responses who did not feel sport fishermen impacted the environment—was that sport fishermen are not respectful of ocean, “they are not good stewards of the sea”. These issues have led to an often less than friendly relationship between “sporties” and commercial fishermen, and a further strain in relations between environmental agencies and commercial fishermen.

Tourists present other issues for the fishermen. It is fairly common knowledge that Key West is a popular cruise destination. The tourists who visit the island (along with the rest of the keys) are a major part of the economy, and naturally, this is supported. However, with each marina dedicated to day-fishing vessels and charter fishing as well as other non-commercial vessels, the fishermen of Key West lose important dock space, both to work and to store their traps. Trapyards can be considered visually unappealing, and also take up space that can be used for oceanfront hotels and other amenities for tourism. This is a similar phenomenon to what drives up prices of housing on the island, which is another concern in the continuance of the commercial fishing industry. Some fishermen, especially those in the older generation, feel that excessive tourism has ruined Key West to an extent. One survey respondent, a retired fisherman, was very candid with his feelings on this topic: “The [explicative] tourists have ruined the fishing and my home town. I don't live there anymore and if it were not for the very few family members that remain, I would not even visit my home town anymore.”

Commercial fishermen are understandably wary of the government. Oftentimes limits are enacted that the fishermen feel are unfair, or that they feel directly attack them. There are also times when they feel harassed by Florida Fish and Wildlife or Coast Guard officers. The politics of small-town policing is not lost in Key West, nor in the locations dominated by fishermen. There is a Florida Keys Commercial Fisherman's Organization, meant to mitigate between the fishermen and the government, but the fishermen feel that it is seldom effective, often describing it as "submissive". Here, it should also be discussed that "government" constitutes both actual politicians and law enforcement groups, as well as scientists in employ of national or state agencies such as NOAA⁵. One survey respondent added that "The government (NOAA and other affiliates) keep adding more restrictions and taking things away and never give anything back", which seems to be a universal sentiment throughout the community. Many respondents expressed that they had stopped harvesting certain species in recent years, and cited government restrictions or regulations as the reason, and when asked what problems they felt plagued the community, many argued that "the government is our worst problem, always taking away", with one respondent addressing law enforcement as well, stating it is "too petty".

A positive relationship between these groups and the fishermen in Key West is vital. A 2017 study focusing on the Adriatic discusses the significant role fishermen can play in detecting invasive species "and other rapid biodiversity changes" (Azzurro and Bolognini 2018) This is certainly relevant in Florida in consideration of the highly invasive lionfish, which are often found in spiny lobster traps. If there is one thing these men and women know, it is the sea around them—they are well able to spot anomalies in fish populations as well as within other species, such as porpoises and turtles. Likewise, scientists can determine healthy, fishable populations, as

⁵ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

well as suggest management techniques to ensure continued survival of that particular species. Communication and understanding on both sides are certainly needed, as is respect for the fishermen's culture.

The fishermen interact with the environment in many ways, as it does them. As the species they are able to harvest change, so does the mark the fishermen leave on the oceans around them. In the past, throwing plastic bottles or cans overboard was not something of particular concern. Now, however, most fishermen recognize the impact of pollution. From observing them over the last decade, the amount of trash floating in the corners of harbors has gone down considerably, though almost no one would consider the water "clean" in those areas. Out of the fishermen surveyed, all but one indicated that they practice measures such as retaining trash during trips to throw out once they reach the docks and recycling.

As with anywhere in a marine environment, the Key West fishermen must be watchful of the weather. Particularly windy or stormy weather may impact lobster movement, and therefore impact pull rates, soak timings, and ultimately income. Fishermen must be specifically wary of hurricanes. In recent history, Hurricanes Andrew and George have wreaked significant damage on the lobstermen's gear and vessels. One powerful storm can be more than enough to end the season prematurely for the fishermen, even with adequate preparation. Therefore, preparing for such storms is no easy task, and when it must be done, is taken seriously. The first step taken is to secure traps. This can be done by moving traps away from rocky bottom and into muddy or soft bottom areas, or by bringing the traps in to the dock. Once traps have been moved or brought in, the fishermen prepare their vessels. Typically, they are situated several feet away from the dock, and tied in a way that they not too loose in they might slam into the dock, but not too tight as to allow no movement at all. Large buoys are put on the sides as to provide padding

of sorts if needed. This type of preparation has changed little over the years, as weather technology has advanced and more accurate predictions have been made. One change, however, has been the practice of the captain remaining on his vessel through the storm. Some captains still do this, but others chose to prepare their vessel and then evacuate, as they are given ample time to do so. In 2017, Hurricane Irma ripped through the Florida Keys. As of January of 2018, its total impact on the fishermen is unknown, though it is certain that it had a significant negative impact on total earnings for the year. This would not be the first time, and certainly will not be the last.



Figure r: Helpers look on as a vessel is tied in preparation for Hurricane Irma. Notice the length of the ropes to allow a small degree of movement, but not enough for the vessel to slam against the dock. 2017.

Study Limitations

Originally, the survey was meant to be provided in both English and Spanish. Due to time constraints and other difficulties, only a survey in English was provided. This may have isolated Spanish only members of the community. Additionally, the survey was distributed with use of social media. As such, fishermen who are illiterate or lack access to technology would be excluded from participation. While advertising my survey, I was approached by several people who told me it would be difficult for me to connect with the fishermen, as well as for them to trust me enough to take the survey. This proved to be correct to an extent. Some fishermen refused the survey out of concern that it was related to government data collection (even though I explained it was not in any way). This was somewhat problematic, as my possible population of eligible sample takers is quite specific, and very small as a result. It is possible to broaden the study to be inclusive of the Florida Keys as a whole, but I feel that the fishing community in Key West is very unique in comparison to those present in Marathon or Key Largo, for example. This being said, those populations would also be worthy of individual studies conducted on them, or perhaps as part of an inclusive study of Florida fisher communities as a whole. It would also be possible to extend the study to sport and charter fishermen. However, these men are generally not in the same community as the commercial fishermen, and their lives are arguably less shaped by fishing as it may not be their primary occupation.

Port of call data was collected during summer months. It is possible that the numbers presented fluctuate significantly during different fishery seasons. Therefore, it should not be considered an entirely representative sample. Data on drug addiction and usage was collected by self-report. As a result, it is very likely that this data is limited by the approachability and honesty of the participants. This is further reflected by the responses for the question “Do you

feel that substance addiction is a problem in the commercial fishing community? Do you feel that it is common?”, in which most respondents indicated they believed that substance addiction was both common and a problem.⁶

Finally, linguistic analysis is based off the participation of a single person with a particularly strong “Conch” accent. As I am not a linguist, the analysis I have provided may be considered simplistic or small in scope. Additionally, there may be significant variances in males versus females with this particular accent, as males are known to use “a higher frequency of nonstandard forms” (Labov 1990: 210) There are also generational differences to be observed. It is certainly a topic for extensive further research.

Results and Implications

There was a total of 40 respondents on the survey, which was open from October 2017 to February 2018. Out of these, 25 were commercial fishermen and 15 were immediate family members of fishermen. I will first discuss basic demographics and interaction with other groups as well as the environment. Secondly, I will discuss family dynamics and attitudes towards health within the community.

In correspondence with the very patriarchal and patrilineal nature of commercial fishing, 24 of the 25 fishers identified as male, and one identified as female. Out of these, one male identified his ethnicity as Mexican, while 5 males and one female identified as Cuban, and 18 males identified as Caucasian. Out of the 25 fishers, a total of 20 responded that they understood or spoke Spanish at some level, suggesting a degree of bilingual persons within the community. The majority of these individuals indicated that they fished casually outside of commercial

⁶ See figures w and x for drug opinion data.

fishing, with 16 indicating they did at least sometimes and only 9 indicated they did not. When asked how long they had been a commercial fisherman, an equal distribution had been for either 5-10, 16-20, or 31-35 years, but significantly fewer had been for other time periods.⁷

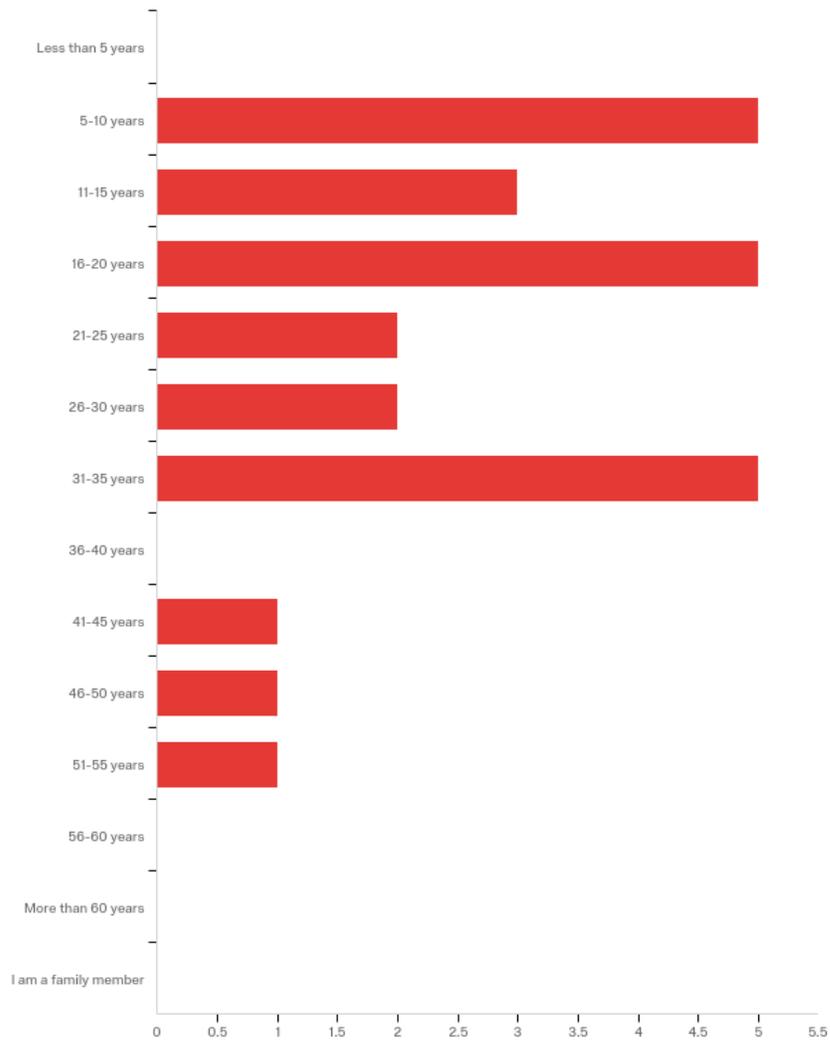


Figure s: "How long have you been a commercial fisherman?"

Respondents were also asked about their education level. A total of 10 fishermen indicated that they had a high school education, and 9 indicated that they had some college. None were educated below a middle school level or above a bachelor's degree level. While the

⁷ Figure S

majority of fishermen are not particularly highly educated, evidence suggests a slightly higher education level than folk stereotypes of the fishermen put forth. It should also be noted that those who indicated they were captains are present across each level of education, suggesting there is little or no difference if one has a certain educational level or not as far as becoming a captain goes. Of the total respondents who are fishermen, 19 indicate that they are captains, 2 indicate they were captains in the past, and 4 indicate that they have only been crew members. This suggests that crew members were possibly isolated from the study. Of those who responded as captains, 12 own their vessels.

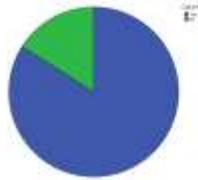


Figure 1: A visual representation of respondents who either are or have been captains at some point in time.

When asked if the lobster sport mini-season should continue, the overwhelming majority of 24 fishermen responded that it should be stopped, while only one opted for it to continue. It is clear that these fishers understand the importance of environmental concern. 23 of the fishermen responded that they enact practices that benefit the environment on their vessels, while one

indicated they did at home, and just one indicated that they did not engage in these practices at all. This reflects increasing environmental awareness on behalf of the fishermen.

Health was another major topic that the survey covered. It would appear that health insurance does not impact the fishermen's likelihood of seeking treatment. Only 5 fishermen have health insurance, and of those, 3 reported that they seek treatment within days of an ailment's beginning. Of the fishermen who do not possess health insurance, 11 seek treatment within days, and one actually seeks treatment within hours. However, a total of 17 fishermen report typically being influenced by a significant other or a family member to seek treatment, with 10 of those reporting that they are influenced by a significant other. This supports ideas put forth in the 2015 study on the impact of women in fishing communities. While 10 fishermen reported being single, 9 reported being married, 3 reported being divorced, and 3 reported being in a common law marriage. This seems to combat the widely held folk notion that commercial fishermen have especially high divorce rates.

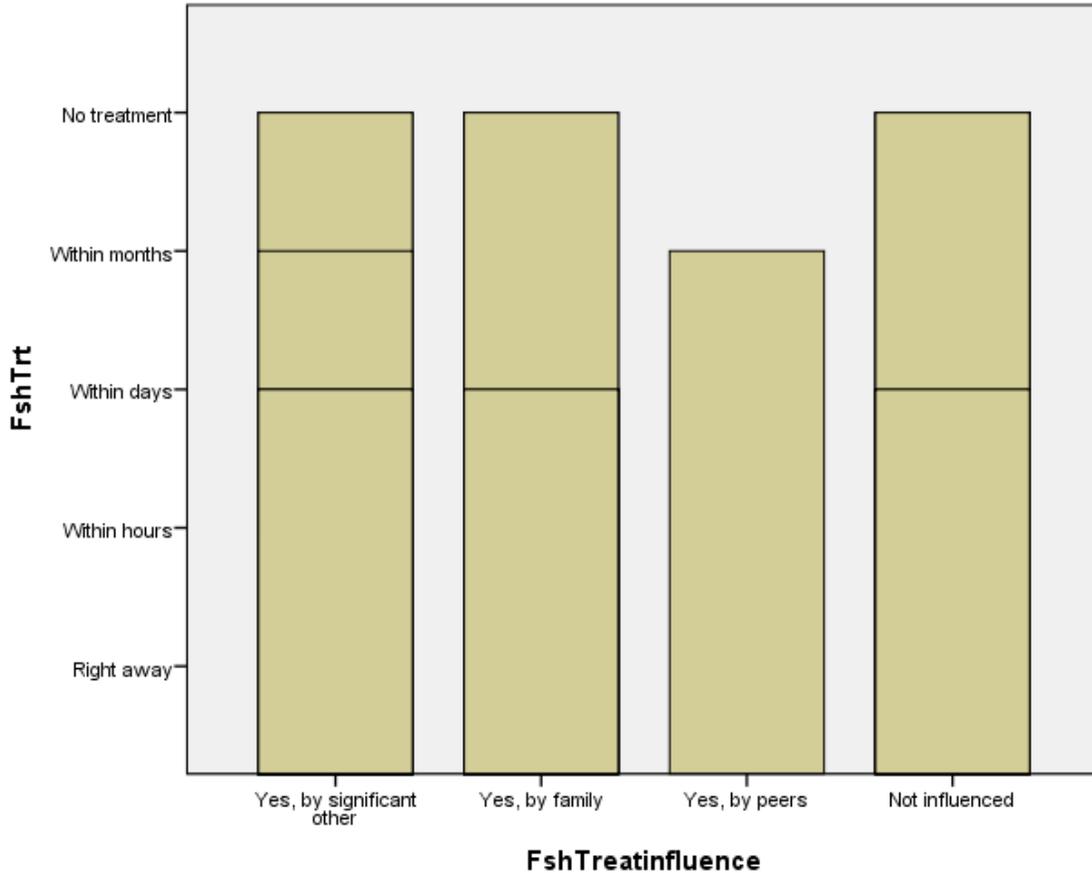


Figure u: *FshTrt* (when treatment is sought) and *FshTreatInfluence* (if treatment is influenced)

Results from drug-related questions must be examined with consideration that they were collected via self-report, and as such, are unlikely to reflect accuracy. The major piece of data here is community feelings towards substance abuse. Of the 25 fishermen, 6 indicated that they had not used any substances, while 8 stated they had used cocaine, 13 had used marijuana, and 13 had used alcohol. Marijuana had the highest use rate of substances currently being used, with 5 fishermen indicating they use it twice or more daily. Many fishermen indicated that they had used certain substances in the past, but do not do so any longer (figure s). Four indicated that they felt they were addicted to one or more substance at some point. When asked if they considered substance abuse to be common in the community, 18, indicated that they either

strongly agreed or agreed, and 5 indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed. When asked if they considered this abuse to be a problem in the community, 19 agreed or strongly agreed, while 4 disagreed or strongly disagreed (figure t). Of those who reported addiction, all 4 strongly agreed or agreed that substance abuse was common and provided identical responses for their feelings on substance abuse being a problem. This indicates that a majority of fishermen recognize, at the very least, that substance abuse exists within the community. Family members seem to be quite aware of it, as well; though to a lesser extent⁸.

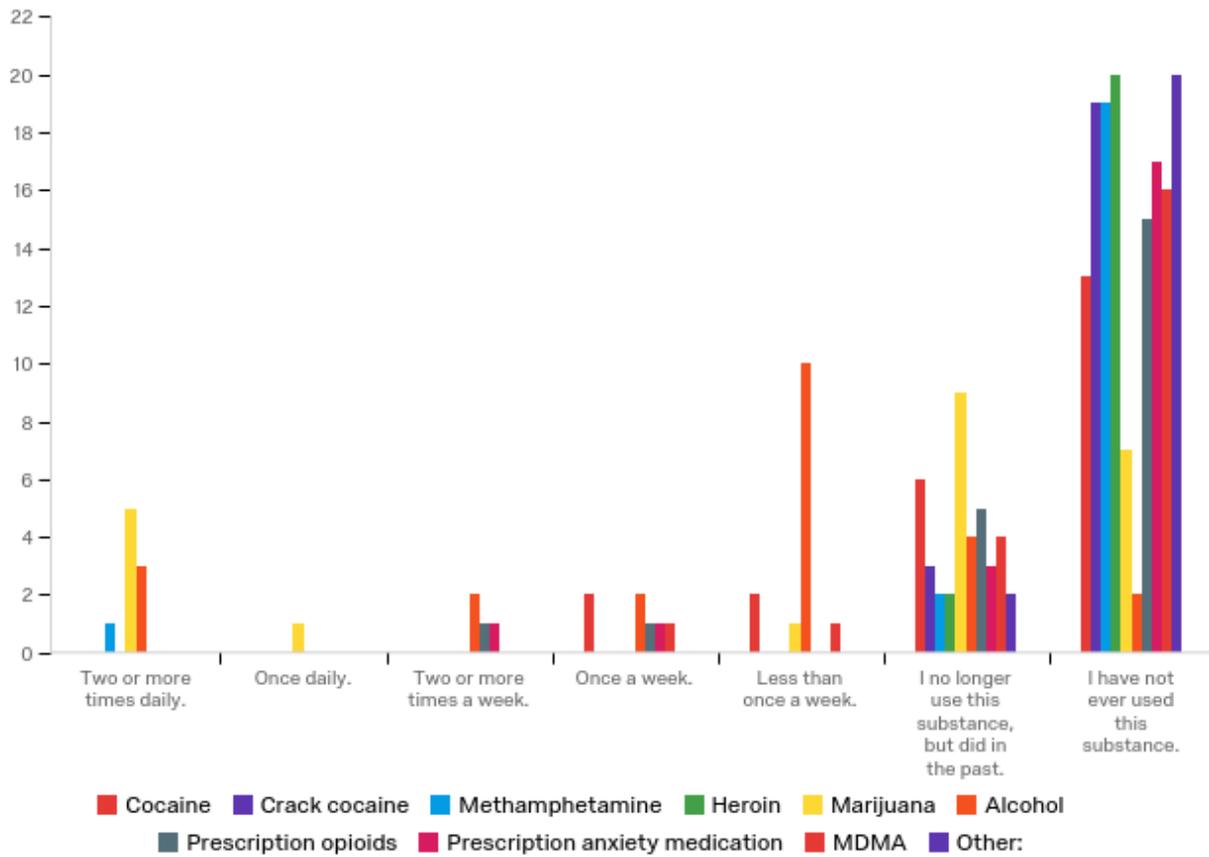


Figure v: "On average, how often do you use these substances?"

⁸ Figure W

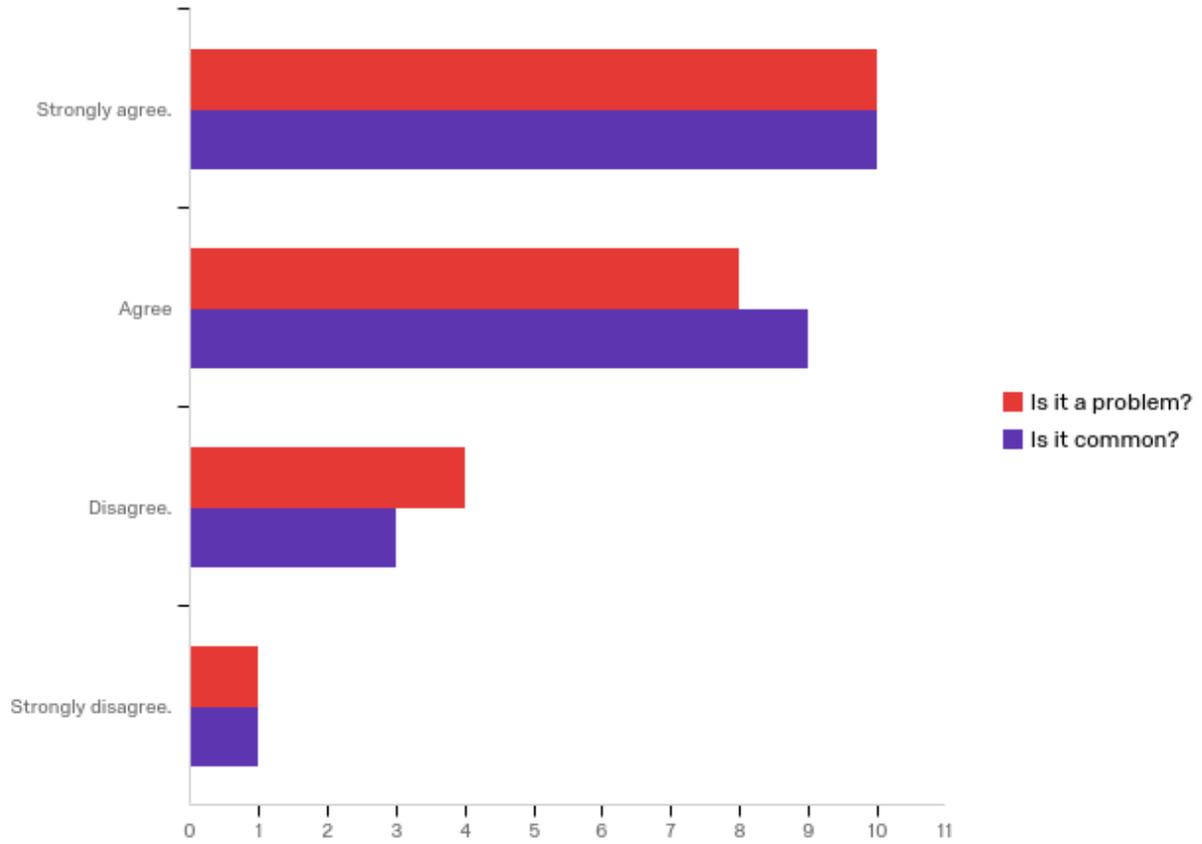


Figure w: Fishermen Only: "Do you feel that drug use is a problem in the commercial fishing community? Is it common?"

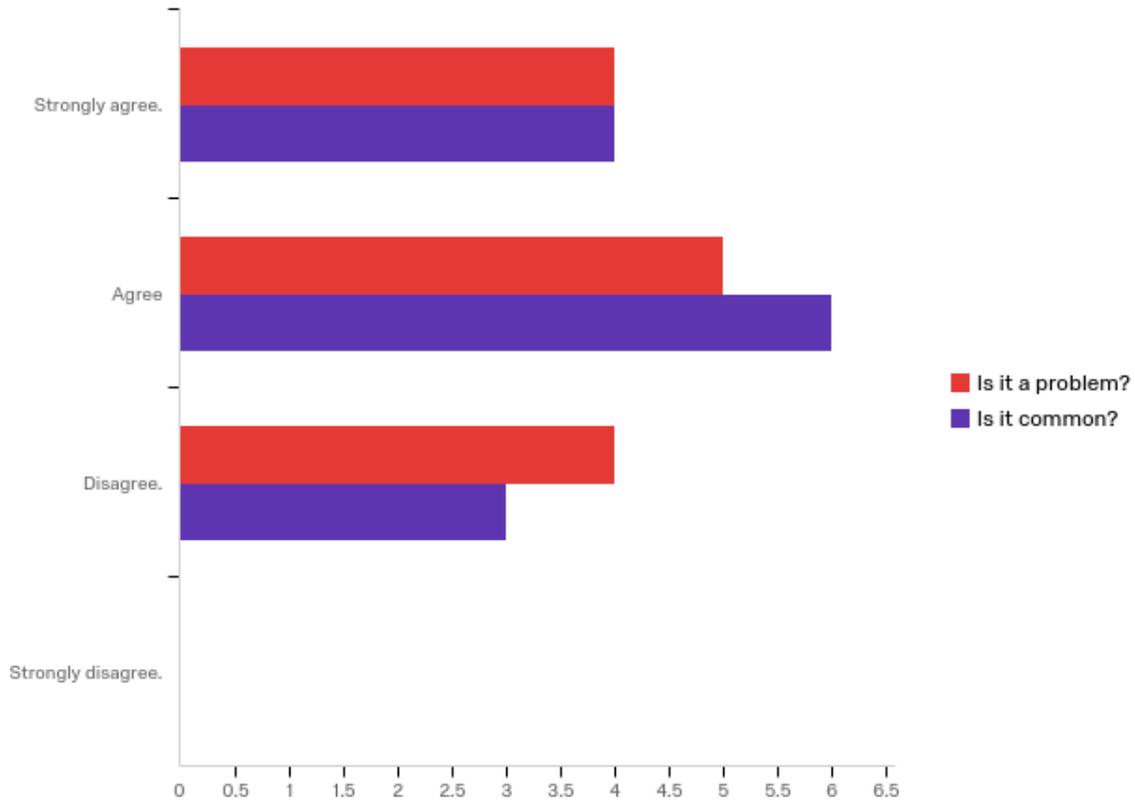


Figure x: Family only: "Do you feel that drug use is a problem in the commercial fishing community? Is it common?"

Another topic of interest is the “Conch” accent seen in the fishermen. My subject for this analysis was a 64-year old Caucasian male who has lived in Key West his whole life. I prepared a word list⁹ based off the Harvard University Linguistic Department’s 2003 Dialect Survey, and also used the Florida-specific results of the Dialect Survey to compare my data. Out of 59 survey items, 21 were non-majority, and 10 of those were found in 6.02% or less of survey participants. Of those, 3 were found in less than 2% of survey respondents (Harvard University Linguistics Department 2003). Words that were the most different in comparison to other Floridians were Thanksgiving at only .64% (pronounced with a tense high front vowel [i] as opposed to lax [ɪ]: [θɛnks'gɪvɪŋ]) mischievous at .76% (uses only one syllable, ['mɪstʃɪvəs]), and huge at 1.27% ([jʉdʒ]). A general trend present in these differences is the raising of vowels. For example, the

⁹ Appendix 3: Dialect test

word Monday is typically pronounced by Floridians using the diphthong [eɪ], whereas the subject pronounces the word using [i]. This equates to [ˈmɛndeɪ] for most Floridians, and [ˈmɛndi] for Conchs. There is also some demonstrated variance in the rhotic, or r. In the word “handkerchief”, the subject completely omitted the r ([ˈhæŋkətʃɪf]). A similar change occurred with the word “Florida”, in which the subject pronounced it [ˈflowɪdə]. In this case, the rhotic was omitted, and the ending vowel diphthong [oo] was strengthened to an approximant [w] intervocalically. Interestingly, yet not entirely surprisingly, the influence of Cuban cuisine is found yet again here. When asked “What term do you use to refer to a long sandwich that contains meat, lettuce, etc?”¹⁰, the subject replied. “Cuban mix!”, which is certainly a departure from the usual response of “sub” or “hoagie”. Cuban influence may go beyond terms used for food, however, and is certainly a topic for further research, as is this dialect as a whole.

What’s Next? Study Conclusions

The rich, unique existence of Key West’s commercial fishermen is threatened in some ways. These include internal issues within the community, and external issues in the form of changing environment and legislation.

The first topic here is the problem of addictions within the community. Participants were asked about their substance¹¹ usage. While few responded affirming addiction or usage, as may be expected in a self-report answer, most agreed that substance abuse was both common and a problem within the community. One survey respondent who identified as a family member added the comment “if you're someone who is dealing with one or is prone to addiction then I would

¹⁰ Appendix 3: #52

¹¹ Inclusive of cocaine, crack cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, marijuana, alcohol, prescription opioids, prescription anxiety medication, and MDMA.

recommend staying away [from] this industry.” This is not unique to the fishermen of Key West. The lobstermen of Maine are “plagued by opioid addiction” and face similar challenges (Overton 2017). Availability of the drugs is fairly high, while treatment can be both difficult to obtain due to lack of insurance or otherwise, lack of available funds or doctors who can give drugs such as Suboxone. The Overton article discusses the proud nature of the Maine lobstermen, which one easily matched by Key West fishermen. This level of pride creates the additional problem of the individual not wanting treatment, or perhaps not acknowledging substance addiction or abuse. Other studies discuss what seems to be a worldwide issue of alcoholism within commercial fishing communities.

Some captains, frustrated by the impact such addictions have on the work ethics and ability of crewmen, adopt low-tolerance policies for drug use, not hesitating to fire repeat offenders. Oftentimes, these men are friends, and captains will try to help steer suspected addicts towards recovery. It is certain that the problem exists and is often internally recognized, which is a step towards effective treatment and possible recovery. The next step is the implementing of programs and professionals that acknowledge and respect the inner culture of the fishermen. Another possibility is the role of family in overall health of the fishermen. A 2015 study discusses the role of women in Australian commercial fishing communities. Its results found that women are “vital points of contact and channels of communication with fishers”, especially in the realm of health-care (Kilpatrick, King and Willis 2015). This, by all observation, appears to be accurate for the Key West community as well. A majority of fishermen are influenced by spouses or family members to seek medical treatment. Perhaps this could carry over into seeking help for addictions as well.

A consistent concern expressed by survey participants was the involvement of future generations. Many mentioned the high cost and limited availability of housing in Key West, which has amplified since the destruction caused by Hurricane Irma in 2017. The involvement of younger generations is already somewhat low. Out of the survey population of fishermen, just 2 were under age of 30, while the largest proportion 12 were over the age of 40. Survey takers were also asked if they had children, and if they believed those children would be involved in the Key West fishing industry. Including participants who were immediate family members of fishermen, 7 indicated they believed that their children would become part of the commercial fishing industry, 6 said that their children were already involved, and 8 said they did not believe their children would be involved. While this appears to be a considerable portion of involvement, there was a point in time where those 8 would have believed their children would become fishermen. A possible decline in interest can be explained by concerns of inconsistent income. However, it may be worth note that out of the 25 fishermen who responded to the survey, 16 indicated that the vessel they worked on employed 3-5 crew (including the captain). So even if income is not consistent, the need for crew members seems to be. One survey respondent mentioned that all of their male family members were commercial fishermen, and that commercial fishermen are “some of the best people I’ve ever known”, but they learned that many were “uneducated”. Their experience working with their family inspired them to attend law school, and recognize the issues that lack of education bring, such as “hamper[ing] the commercial fisherman in their dealings with those affiliated with commercial fishing like buyers, banks (loans), sellers of commercial fishing supplies”. This being said, it is possible that children of commercial fishermen are less involved as commercial fishermen but may go on to be part of the industry in a different manner, such as representing fishermen in legal matters.

The commercial fishermen of Key West are a dying breed. A survey participant stated that “The most endangered species in Florida is the Floridian fisherman.”, and this rings especially true for those in Key West. Dealing with the changes in the environment and what they are and are not allowed to fish is not something new to this group. However, effective and considerate dialogues must be opened between them and the government, as well as scientists. Educational efforts would be ideal here. Harbor space is a more complicated issue, and if it continues to decrease, it may drive the community out entirely, as it essentially has for the shrimp fishermen.

My brother always used to say, “I’ve gotta believe in something. I believe I’ll go fishing.” I feel that this statement reflects the dedication of the Key West fishermen, their love of the sea, and their bonds through brotherhood. These men and women do not see their occupation as just a job, they see it as a way to carry on the legacy of their forefathers, and as a way of life to preserve. In order to survive, however, extended efforts must be made to solve the problems facing the community. A better relationship between the fishermen and the government, as well as between the commercial fishermen and sports fishermen, needs to happen. A dialogue must open, and it must respect the unique culture of these men. Secondly, the problem of substance addiction must be addressed. Family members of the fishermen can play a vital role here in helping their loved ones recognize the problem and helping them seek help. The brotherhood of the fishermen can also help each other in this way. The fishermen also need better access to doctors that distribute drugs such as Suboxone so they may have a more effective way to fight addictions. While Key West has a unique culture of fishermen that practices its own methods of fishing, traditions and rituals, I believe these results can be used comparatively to study other communities, who face similar issues.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Port of Call Data

<u>Type of Vessel:</u>	<u>Port of Call: (City, State)</u>	<u>Number Present:</u>
Shrimp Boat	Key West	4
Yellowtail/Grouper	Key West	25
Spiny Lobster/ Stone Crab	Key West	64
Sword Fishing	South Carolina	1
Sword Fishing	Ft. Lauderdale	1

Appendix 2: Survey Questions

1. What is your age in years? Please use numerals.
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnic affiliation?
4. What is your highest level of education?
5. What languages do you speak, and at what level?
6. How long have you lived in Key West?
7. What is your marital status?
8. Are you a commercial fisherman, or an immediate family member?
9. If you are not a commercial fisherman, how are you related to one?
10. Do you have children?
11. If you have children, do you believe one or more will become involved in the commercial fishing industry in Key West?
12. Who is primarily responsible for childcare in your family?
13. In your opinion, what is the role of family in commercial fishing?
14. Are there any stressors you feel that commercial fishing places on your family?
15. Do you have health insurance?
16. How likely are you to seek medical treatment for the following ailments? (cold or flu, minor injury, major injury, muscle or bone pain, chest pain, headaches, rashes or other skin issues, infections)
17. If you seek medical treatment, do you seek it right away? If not, how long do you wait before seeking treatment?
18. Is your decision to seek treatment influenced by family or peers? If so, who?
19. Who in your family is a commercial fisherman? Please check all that apply.
20. How long have you been a commercial fisherman?
21. Do you have another occupation aside from commercial fishing? If so, what?
22. For example, if you are a carpenter during the off-season, please write "carpenter, during the Summer".
23. Have you fished elsewhere commercially? (eg. North Carolina, Alaska)
24. Are you currently a captain or have you ever been one?

25. If you are a captain, do you own your vessel?
26. On the vessel that you currently work on, how many crew members are there, including the captain?
27. How long does your average harvesting trip last?
28. Please indicate the species you fish for primarily, and if you fish for other species. For example, if you are primarily a Spiny Lobster fisherman, but also fish Stone Crab and Yellowtail, please list Spiny lobster as your primary species, and stone crab/ yellowtail as your secondary.
29. If you fish for lobster or stone crab, how many tags do you have?
30. Are there species that you have stopped harvesting in the last decade? If so, why? (eg, fish trapping due to permit difficulties)

31. How do you feel permit limitations limit or benefit you?
32. Do you feel that the environment benefits from these limitations? Is there anything you have noticed in regards to species populations, etc?
33. Do you actively follow any practice that results in environmental benefits? (eg. Recycling glass and plastic containers used while out on a trip)
34. Do you fish casually outside of commercial fishing?
35. Do you believe the practices of sport fishermen affect the environment? If so, how much?
36. Do you believe that the lobster mini-season should continue? If so, how?
37. Have you in the past or do you presently use the following substances? If so, what? Your answers for this survey are entirely confidential, please try to be as honest as possible. (Cocaine, crack cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, marijuana, alcohol, prescription opioids without a doctor's prescription, prescription anxiety medication without a doctor's prescription, MDMA, other, I have not used any of these substances)
38. On average, how often do you use the above substances?
39. Would you consider yourself to be or have been addicted to any substance?
40. Do you feel that substance addiction is a problem in the commercial fishing community? Do you feel that it is common?
41. What do you feel is the best feature of the commercial fishing community in Key West?
42. What problems outside of addictions, if any, do you feel face the commercial fishing industry in Key West? Please write as much as you'd like.
43. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix 3: Dialect Test

Word List

Please say each word at a normal speed a total of two times.

Do not rush, and do not draw it out.

1. Aunt
2. Been
3. Bowie knife
4. Caramel
5. Cauliflower
6. Centaur
7. Coupon
8. Craig
9. Crayon
10. Creek
11. Florida
12. Lawyer
13. Flourish
14. Handkerchief
15. Mayonnaise
16. Miracle
17. Mischievous
18. Monday
19. Tuesday
20. Pajamas
21. Pecan
22. Poem
23. Realtor
24. Roof
25. Route
26. Syrup
27. Almond
28. Anniversary
29. Asterisk
30. Candidate
31. Garage
32. Huge
33. Quarter
34. Strength
35. Texas
36. Insurance
37. Thanksgiving
38. Umbrella
39. Cream cheese
40. Nursery
41. Especially

Please respond to these questions. You only need to respond once.

50. What word do you use to address a group of two or more people?
51. What term do you use for a sale of unwanted items on a porch, yard, etc?
52. What term do you use to refer to a long sandwich that contains meat, lettuce, etc?
53. What do you call the wheeled contraption in which you carry groceries at the store?
54. What do you call the activity of driving a car around in circles?
55. What do you call the box in which a dead person is buried in?
56. After doing yardwork, have you cut or mown the lawn or grass?
57. What is your term for a sweet, carbonated beverage?
58. What do you call the end of a loaf of bread?
59. What do you call food that you buy at a restaurant to eat at home?

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