

NOVA SCOTIAN FISHING FAMILIES COPING WITH THE FISHERIES CRISIS¹

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Abstract: The fisheries crisis has severely affected Nova Scotian fishing families. These fishers and their households had developed strategies to cope with the work organization and schedule of the various fisheries prosecuted in this area. Critical reductions in catches of groundfish have led to lay-offs or work reductions, to changes in work organization and to exploitation of other fisheries, some of which previously had been under-utilized. This article focusses on one area of southwestern Nova Scotia to describe how new adaptations have been developed and how these previously beneficial adaptations conflict with the new situation these households now face.

Résumé: La crise des pêcheries a profondément affecté les familles de pêcheurs en Nouvelle-Écosse. Les pêcheurs et leur familles ont su développer les stratégies pour faire face à l'organisation du travail et aux horaires des diverses pêcheries touchées dans cette région. Les sévères réductions des prises de poissons de bas-fonds ont conduit à des mises à pied ou à des réductions d'heures de travail, ainsi qu'à des changements dans l'organisation du travail dans d'autres pêcheries qui n'avaient pas été utilisées à capacité auparavant. Cet article, portant en particulier sur une région de la Nouvelle-Écosse décrit les nouvelles adaptations et comment celles, autrefois bénéfiques, sont à présent en conflit direct avec la nouvelle situation économique que rencontrent ces familles.

Introduction

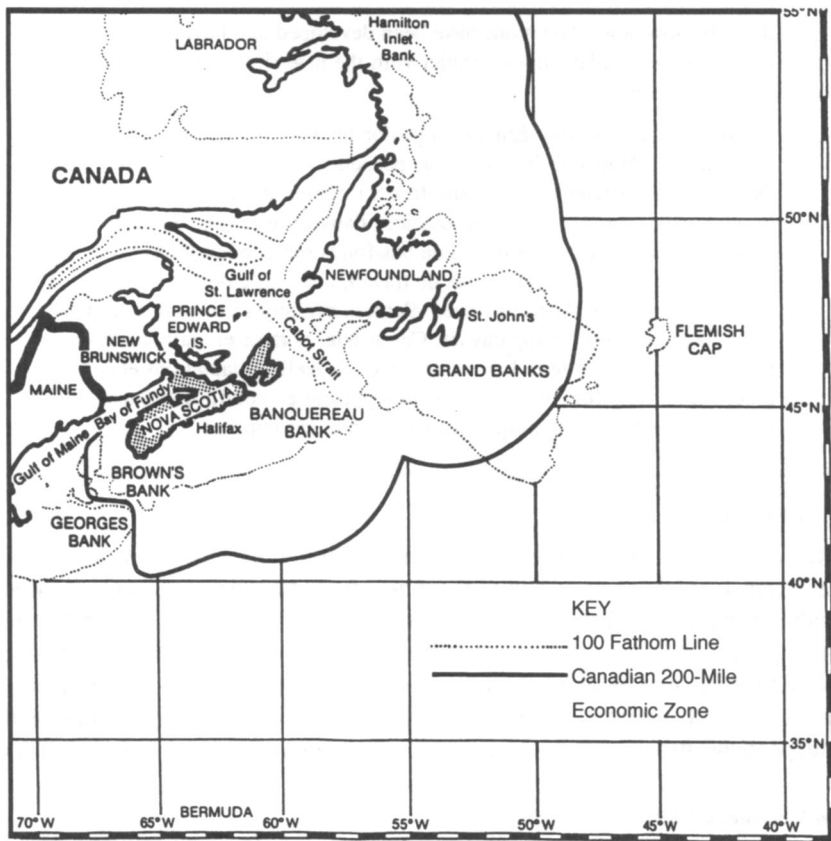
This article focusses on families of Nova Scotia fishermen² who live in or sail from Lunenburg and Halifax Counties. It studies their strategies to cope with the changes brought about by the current fisheries crisis. Although fishers have prosecuted many different types of fisheries off Nova Scotia's shores, these fisheries can be divided on the basis of employment into two groups— industrial and independent. Industrialized fishers work for companies, and independent fishers work as, or for, independent operators/owners. This

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distinction—industrial/independent—roughly coincides with the division between the off-shore and the in-shore fisheries respectively.³

In February 1992, the federal government halted off-shore harvesting of northern cod in the northern waters of Newfoundland. In June of the same year the government expanded its moratorium to include in-shore fishers in that area. It subsequently issued a groundfish management plan limiting all fishing of northern cod off Newfoundland as well as in specific areas of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, including Sydney Bight, and in waters off Nova Scotia north of Halifax (see Figure 1). On August 31, 1993 the government closed five more areas, virtually halting all cod fishing off the Atlantic shore north of Halifax except for fisheries off the Labrador coast. Groundfish quotas in those areas remaining open were severely cut. The latest groundfish plan has severely limited catches in the remaining open areas.

Figure 1
Map of Atlantic Canada



Source: Redrawn from Jensen 1980:113.

As of 1993, the northern cod closures have eliminated over 40 000 fishery jobs (Kelly 1993:14-15). Through The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS) and in conjunction with early retirement packages for plant workers and retirement of groundfish licenses by fishers, the federal government has compensated plant workers and fishers for lost earnings and offered them retraining programs, but the future for those people, their families and their communities appears bleak. Declines in the fishery of southwestern Nova Scotia have inevitably restructured the economies of the local communities, and the government has not offered any relief to the local retailers or other people indirectly affected by the fishery closures. Men who have been laid off, or have left the fishery altogether, must find other employment or collect government assistance such as the "fisherman's package" (TAGS), unemployment insurance or other social benefits. Many full-time fishers are reluctant to sign on to TAGS, because it requires them to give up their fishing licenses. Most of these men plan to return to the fishery once the "stocks bounce back," and are unwilling to give up these hopes now. But the compensation packages cannot go on forever, and even if the fishery does rebound no one expects it to support the large numbers of vessels and crews that had previously exploited this resource. Moreover, in a region of chronically high unemployment, many fishers and plant workers with relatively poor education are sceptical about what jobs they can retrain for and where those jobs will be located. In fact, in the summer of 1996, the federal government stopped the retraining component of TAGS.

In Nova Scotia, particularly in the area south of Halifax and along the Bay of Fundy shore—including the study area—where the fishery is more diverse, the impact of the moratorium has been recessionary rather than catastrophic. Many companies in this area have downsized their operations. Companies have tied up their vessels, have sold off surplus vessels, have retired aging vessels and have refitted groundfish trawlers to fish for other species such as shrimp, shark or surf clams. The *Cape North* and the *Cape Adare*, factory freezer groundfish trawlers, have been sold. These actions have led to a reduction of the off-shore groundfish fleet (vessels over 100 feet) from 37 vessels in 1986 to 15 vessels in 1993, and of the off-shore scallop fleet (vessels over 90 feet) from 68 vessels in 1986 to 43 vessels in 1993 (personal telephone communication with Leo Brander, Policy and Economic Branch, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, April 16, 1996). With fewer vessels to operate and to maintain, the companies need fewer men and lower plant capacity. Some fish plants have been closed while other plants have shortened their work time and/or extended their vacation period. Some companies laid off the whole crews of redundant vessels, while other companies run two crews that alternate trips on a single vessel. For those employees who still have a full-time job, life continues much as it did before. However, for those men who now work on doublecrewed vessels, time on shore has increased from an average of two days to

two weeks, and their wages have been cut in half. Those men who have been laid off must find other employment or collect government assistance.

Changes in the in-shore sector are much more difficult to document. In this sector some fishers who held groundfish licenses have stopped fishing, but are retaining their licenses for when the fishery rebounds. Those groundfish fishers who are still fishing sail farther off shore within their traditional fishing area, or go beyond their traditional fishing grounds farther along the southwestern shore as far as the Bay of Fundy in search of the elusive cod and pollock. Many have let go their hired help and rely on family members to take up the slack.

Those fishers who hold a variety of licenses, although they are costly to maintain, are the best off. Many in-shore fishers have reactivated licenses, which had remained moribund for years, thereby increasing their fishing effort on valuable species, such as tuna and crabs, or exploiting underutilized species such as shark, dogfish, mackerel and surfclams. Many have returned to catching lobster and scallops, two of the most lucrative stocks. Lobster fishing, already a mainstay for many fishers, has taken on increased importance. Since the groundfish moratorium, lobster fishers have increase their fishing effort, but the total seasonal catches have remained the same. But in all cases incomes of in-shore fishers in this study have dropped dramatically. In order to retain their vessels and licenses, and to make ends meet, some fishers have even sold their homes. A few have simply given up and taken the package.

The Study

Data for this article come from a study which compared and contrasted the adaptations of off-shore versus in-shore fishermen's wives with the extraordinary pressures put on their households because of the changing nature of their husbands' work. The study focussed on independence and the perception of independence, social networks, social attitudes and finances. Although particular attention was paid to the transition between living with and living apart from their husbands, the study examined the complete work cycle. One of the major areas of inquiry, and the focus of this article, was the impact of the decline of the fisheries on fishers' households. The populations under investigation were the wives of off-shore fishermen, who sail out of Lunenburg, the largest Nova Scotian deep-sea port, and the wives of in-shore fishermen living in Lunenburg and Halifax Counties. In addition to the fishing industry, the Lunenburg/Bridgewater region offers employment in tourism, light industry and the service sector, while Halifax, the largest metropolitan centre in Atlantic Canada and less than an hour's drive from Lunenburg, offers work opportunities in a wide range of industries.

Phase 1 of the study consisted of a literature review and a series of in-depth interviews with selected key informants including a number of wives of off-

shore and in-shore fishers, wives' support groups, community support workers, fish company managers and elected officials in Lunenburg and other Lunenburg County communities. We used information from those sources to generate statistical profiles, demographic and socio-economic parameters and to identify areas of residential concentration for the populations. Relying on the preliminary information obtained in this phase and from previous research, we developed the interview schedules and sampling plans for the subsequent phases.

Phase 2 consisted of a general survey administered to 150 off-shore fishermen's wives from late August to November 1993 and 150 in-shore fishermen's wives from late August 1993 to May 1994. These data were analyzed in turn (Phase 3). Each survey stood on its own. During July and October 1994 we conducted 25 taped in-depth interviews with wives from each group and analyzed these data (Phase 4). Quotations used in this article are drawn from these interviews. The number after the quotation refers to the interview number. The first 25 interviews (Interviews #1-#25) are with off-shore fishermen's wives while the last 25 interviews (Interviews #26-#50) are with in-shore fishermen's wives. All the names are pseudonyms.

What Happens When a Fishery Declines

The moratorium or cutbacks in the groundfish fishery has made no direct impact on a few exceptional fishermen's households; they have maintained their jobs and their incomes. But most come from fishing families and many have brothers, fathers or cousins who have been affected. Although there is a real fear that their husbands' off-shore fishing job could be affected in the next round of quota cuts, wives try to be optimistic about their future. Here is how Elizabeth, who has been married for 30 years and has three adult sons, feels about her household's present situation as they near retirement:

I am somewhat [worried]. I don't dwell on it a lot, you know. I feel that for the most part we have to live for the present now, and prepare for the future—we have been saving for many years, . . . but, there is that fear that Eric's job will disappear in, say, a year . . . two years, whatever. Just about every year when the new season starts in January, the company meets, and this boat is old, and we know that it's a limited time. . . . So it's more or less, which year will it be? And when it goes, I don't think there'll be anything there for him. . . . That company only has four boats right now, and it's not likely that there will be a job there. (Interview #5)

For most fishers the effects of the crisis continually reshape their daily existence. We will look at those changes wrought by the fishery crisis from three perspectives: changes predominantly affecting off-shore fishing families, changes predominantly affecting in-shore fishing families and challenges common to both fisheries. Before discussing how fishers' households have

coped with the current crisis, it is necessary to review how these types of fisheries—*independent and industrial*—affected fishers' household and family life prior to the collapse. It is also important to note that viewing off-shore and in-shore fishers as two groups with separate identities is in some ways to create a false dichotomy. Our survey took a snapshot of one moment in time. If at that moment a woman's husband was fishing off shore, we identified her as an off-shore fisher's wife; if at that moment a woman's husband was fishing in shore, we identified her as an in-shore fisher's wife. But some men move from one fishery to another, while others spend their whole working lives in only one fishery.

Impacts of the Fisheries Crisis on Off-shore Fishing Families

In the industrial fishery before the crisis men worked as deckhands or officers on large, vertically integrated, company-owned scallop or groundfish vessels over 65 feet in length. They normally spent 10 to 14 days at sea and 48 hours at home. Men moved between the scallop and groundfish fishing fleets, depending on the level of fish stocks and the need for workers. Of these men, about a quarter had jobs in the wheelhouse as officers, eventually becoming mates or captains. Since deck work is physically demanding, few men stay on the deck after 45 years of age. Often when these men "retire" from the off-shore fishery, they move into the in-shore fishery. (A few men, called engineers, worked in the engine rooms of very large [over 100 feet] fishing vessels. These men generally worked on ferries, off-shore oil rigs, Coast Guard or the merchant vessels as well.)

The fishermen's work schedule dominated the organization of his wife's work. While her husband was away, a wife had the sole responsibility for the household for 10 to 14 days and then shared this responsibility with her partner for only two or three days before he sailed again. Up until recently this schedule continued throughout his working life, with short respites when he took off from specific trips for vessel refit, vacation, deer hunting, training course, illness or accident and Christmas. For most couples, the time on shore was the most important time in their family life. Women yearned for the two or three days when their husbands were home. Men talked about living ten days in two.

When her husband was away, the household generally functioned smoothly. Each day followed a routine—getting the kids ready for school, going to work, cleaning the house, making the meals and paying the bills. She spent time with the family, got caught up on her work and got a good night's sleep. As issues arose the wife dealt with them—she disciplined the children, she got the car fixed. She was independent and autonomous but at a price. Lonely, constantly worrying about his safety and with all the responsibilities of the home and family falling upon her, she went about her daily routine

waiting for his return. When he came home chaos broke out, the daily schedule broke down and they “crammed ten days into two.” She had more work to do around the house, but it was an exciting time. They went out. They saw movies. They had friends over. Then he went back to sea. Life returned to normal and the routine began again.

These schedules meant that to varying degrees wives of industrial fishermen spent their married lives alternating between being a single parent/person with primary responsibility for the household and being part of a couple jointly responsible for the household. In these households, the husband’s work sphere did not overlap with the wife’s domestic sphere. Each maintained separate control over his or her respective domain—he made the money to run the household and she in turn made a home for him and their children. This situation set up a co-dependency between the partners, where each supplied an essential component for maintaining the household. With the crisis in the fishery, this co-dependency has broken down.

The strategy of off-shore companies to meet the fisheries crisis has been downsizing—lay-offs or reduced work for continuing employees. Those capacities that enabled a wife to be a supportive spouse to a fully employed off-shore fisher may conflict with her fulfilling the role of wife to an unemployed, laid-off or part-time fisher. At the same time the husband must develop ways of coping with living ashore with no job or decreased employment and a reduced income. In past studies (e.g., Horbulewicz 1972; Poggie 1980), off-shore fishers have described the three worst features of their job as health and safety hazards, high stress and extended separation from home. In my study of off-shore fishers (Binkley 1995a, 1995b), we found that the most common reason for leaving the off-shore fishery—after injury and economic concerns—was the long time away from home. Many couples look forward to the prospect of having the husband home for longer periods of time. It gives them a chance to get to know each other better. When asked how her relationship with her second husband had changed, Cathy, a woman in her mid-40s with two adult children, replied:

We may be a little closer than what we were when he was [gone] . . . when somebody is gone twelve days and home four, and twelve days and home four, that type of thing, it doesn’t give you a chance . . . to get close and talk over things that have gone on in twelve days . . . like he’s gone another twelve days and you’re thinking, “Oh, I forgot to tell him, you know something happened, you know, twenty days before that.” Of course then by the time he comes in, it’s gone all together. (Interview #3)

The longer time at home gives the husband an opportunity to rest from the pressures of being at sea and to be re-introduced into family life. It relieves the wife of the sole responsibility of running the household and making family decisions, and opens the opportunity for the couple to develop a common life.

But this new-found “closeness” is not without a psychological price for both spouses. Many women talk about their loss of independence, of having another child to look after or of their husband being underfoot. For some women having their husband home all the time can be frustrating. They are used to being on their own. What once was an accommodation for a few days has now become a way of life. As Holly, who has been married for over 20 years and now works part-time in the local hospital, remarked:

I'm not used to the last six months, I mean even when I crawl out of bed in the morning, and . . . if he's around . . . sometimes I go in and I look, and he's even making the bed. It's like every step I make, he's at my feet type of thing. But when I'm working nights, and he's here by himself, you know, and he's making the meals, and doing the laundry, and whatever . . . then when I get up in the afternoon and sit for a few minutes, and then I usually have my bath once I get up, and I look and he's going and running the water for my bath (laughter). . . . Sometimes you think, well I like to do these things myself . . . but you know, he's even doing that (laughter). (Interview #8)

But Holly's uxorious husband is an exception. In most cases the fisher's adaptation to life at sea conflicts with their perceived role of husband and father, and their integration into a land-based way of life proves difficult. As Janet, a mother of five who recently stopped working in order to look after her ailing mother, remarked:

I think it's hard for him to adapt to it because, he's so used to filling everything into four days that when he's home that month . . . he's just getting used to a normal time for sleeping and a normal time for doing things, when he's got to turn around and he's got to change everything again and go out. (Interview #10)

When the fisherman comes ashore he must adjust to his family and leave the male world of the ship behind. He enters a matri-focal household where he may feel the outsider. He has to cope with an unfamiliar shore routine. Often he finds he has little in common with non-fishers and has no role in the community other than husband and father. But being home for a longer period of time opens up opportunities to get involved with the family and the community which were not possible before. Some men, particularly those on the double-crewed vessels, have taken advantage of this time to join a sports team or to become involved in community, school and church activities. They have taken courses to enhance their fisheries credentials or to upgrade their education. Others, most notably those who have been laid off, do not take advantage of these new-found opportunities. Rather they feel that they have let their families down by not fulfilling their side of the household equation—supporting the family. These feelings of inadequacy erode their self-esteem and self-worth, which may lead to depression or other psychological problems.

Impacts of the Decline in the In-shore Fishery

Unlike the off-shore fishery where wives' and husbands' work spheres were traditionally separate, the in-shore fishery wives' and husbands' work spheres may overlap, to varying degrees. In in-shore fishers' households the degree to which the wife contributes to her husband's fishing enterprise determines the organization of her work. Until recently, during the fishing season the husband sailed for short periods of time—through the day, overnight or for a few days—and he returned only to sleep and eat. Although he might be physically at home, his work schedule limited his ability to take part in everyday life. When the fishing seasons ceased he might have spent between two to six months ashore. Thus the extent to which the rhythm of the in-shore household revolved around fishing depended on the level of integration of the husband's and wife's work.

In some cases, these households make no concession to the fishing while in others the household routine and the wife's work are dominated by the needs of the fishery. If the fisherman worked on another person's boat as a helper, his wife may have done nothing beyond washing his fishing clothes or preparing his meals to take aboard. If the fisherman owned and operated his own boat, his wife may have been involved in the shore-based side of his business. For example, she might have kept the books, bought supplies for the boat, checked fish prices or even sold the fish. She took on those chores in addition to her own work inside or outside the home. In a few exceptional cases the wife may have fished with her husband or another man. During the off season, the fisher remained at home for long periods of time or he may have signed on to one of the off-shore vessels. In these households the husband's work sphere and the wife's domestic sphere overlapped. Each maintained control over their respective domains, but each "helped" the other out. This situation set up an interdependency between the couple, leading to a more balanced economic exchange within the relationship.

With the crisis in the fishery, the balance between the spouses' work spheres has changed. Fishers have used three strategies to meet the crisis: (1) staying out longer and exploiting resources farther off shore or in richer fishing grounds; (2) exploiting as many species as possible; and (3) employing as much household or family labour as possible. Fishers employ these strategies individually or in tandem. Each stratagem exerts different forms of stress on household and family adaptations to the in-shore fishery.

In a few cases fishers have not employed any of these strategies; rather they have continued to exploit their traditional fishing grounds but increased their fishing effort. One example is Stewart, a gill netter who still fishes out of a port close to home rather than going farther away to Georges Bank, a richer fishing area. Although his catches are modest, they are consistent and he can still make a living and have a home life. His wife Susan, a mother of four who works full-time, explains their trade-offs for this modest result:

There's only a couple guys that stayed around these shores to fish. A lot of them have moved on up to Georges [Bank] to do their gill netting up there. Stewart didn't make that move. He felt that . . . [although] he's not catching the fish like them fellows are, . . . he's consistent with his catch. I mean, them guys go up there and they could fish for a month and . . . the total at the end of the month could be thirty-five thousand. I mean Stewart won't catch thirty-five thousand, but he might get twenty, eighteen or twenty thousand. But they've had to work a lot harder, their gear gets ruined, the tides and stuff. . . . But he's making a living, that's what counts. He said it's got to be really bad for him to make that move all the way up there. Because you're never home, and when you do come home it's long enough to do your laundry, stay overnight in your own bedroom one or two nights, and then you're gone again for another month. (Interview #44)

Most of the women we interviewed reported that their husbands were now fishing farther and farther away from home, and staying out longer and longer at sea. In order to make economies, many boats do not return home for days or weeks at a time. Of course, fishing farther off shore and in unfamiliar waters aggravated another worry—safety at sea. Here is how Dorothy, a woman in her mid-30s with two pre-teenage girls, characterized the trade-offs made between economics and personal well-being:

He's trying to go for longer periods of time. Instead of going like for one or two days, which he normally would go, he's trying to go for a week because it cuts back on the expenses. . . . And I find that if you talk to other fishermen, they'll probably tell you the same thing. You'll find a lot of the smaller boats going farther and farther off shore where it's more dangerous, because their boats aren't equipped for it. It's unsafe because if a gale wind came up, they can't get in fast enough, they gotta have the engines in their boats. . . . It's just to the point where either they're going to be out of a job, or safety's going to be compromised because it's just at the limit. . . . So instead of going, from side to side, you're going straight out in the ocean. You're going to the continental shelf in a 38-foot boat. And that's what they're doing up to the Bay of Fundy. They're getting fish up there now, so you're seeing boats from here, from Tancook Island and places, are going up there, going 25 miles off, almost to the American line in small boats—till something happens. You're going to see the wind breeze up and these boats aren't going to be able to get in. They're not going to be used to the tides, because we don't have the tides down here to do it. And somebody's going to lose their life before they realize what's going on. That's what's going to happen. (Interview #29)

As Dorothy and Susan noted, fishing in strange waters can set up a number of hazards for fishers—strange tides, different types of sea bottoms and unknown navigational obstacles. All of these hazards increase fishers' stress and anxiety and may also contribute to additional expenses, such as costs to replace gear, time spent on repairs and additional fuel costs. The two basic questions then for these men and their households are: "Are the monetary

benefits sufficient?” and “Is the erosion of the non-monetary benefits (e.g., long time away from home or less safe working conditions) worth it?”

This is the first time that some in-shore fishermen’s wives have had to cope with running the household completely on their own. They must develop the independence that is necessary for the task. For some like Gilda, who works full-time and has two teenage sons, this is an opportunity to be seized, for others it is something to fear. As Gilda comments: “See I’m independent. . . . Some people, oh they don’t want him to go or what-not. I’m not that personality [type]. I’m not scared to stay alone. . . . It doesn’t bother me” (Interview #32). Being on their own with no other adult to help with household chores means taking on additional work and responsibility. Dorothy’s comments illustrate these concerns:

I’m even more conscious of the time that he’s gone. Everything has to be done and it has to be done just perfect. I find that I have to get the lawn mowed, I have to keep the kids well looked after and see to their things, I have to get the house spotless until he gets home. You know what I mean, on a daily basis I don’t want him to come in a day early and have anything in a mess or whatever. Or if he wanted me to pick up things for him I have to. . . . I have to just organize my life. . . . Sometimes I find it hard, and I think the kids find it hard, to adjust to the change more than I do. (Interview #29)

Many of the comments made by in-shore fishers’ wives are reminiscent of comments and adaptations made by off-shore fishers’ wives when their husbands were at sea for extended periods of times.

With the decline of the groundfish, many in-shore fishers rely on other fisheries to supply their income. For most of our sample, lobstering had become their main source of income. But lobster stocks, like other marine resources, are cyclical. Now, there is nothing to fall back on. Brenda, a woman in her early 30s who works at sea with her husband, voiced these fears:

Bruce just mainly depends on lobstering, but he has other fishing licenses. He hand lines, sword fishes and things like that. If anything goes wrong with the lobster season, with the catch of the lobsters, sometimes that runs in cycles, we’ve got nothing else to fall back on. There isn’t any other fish out there to catch. And he’s got a \$75 000 boat sitting down there, and a \$20 000 license, piece of paper or whatever. And if the lobsters go, if he wanted to get out of the fisheries, the way the fishing is we could never get the money that he put into it. (Interview #27)

The real economic problem is the reliance on one species as the mainstay of their household economy and of the fishery as a whole. The fisher who holds a number of licenses is able to spread the risk—if one fishery is down then another could be exploited; however, all fisheries are cyclical and few fisheries in the North Atlantic are rebounding back as quickly to baseline stock levels as in the past. Fishers recognize the cyclical nature and the need of fish stocks to rebound in the future. As Brenda remarks:

Our income—we depend and live off just lobstering. So that's been okay. If you come [to] interview [me] maybe in another three or four years, I might be pretty sad looking. I'll have a nine to five job somewhere, and I'll be the working spouse [laughter]. . . . Lobstering took a cycle one time before. Bruce just got into it when the boom came back up. But I think we can look for a cycle, another few years that we won't be able to live on lobstering. I'm thinking about food and bills, not just all the frills, right. But I don't know, really, like the other fish aren't going to come back. (Interview #27)

Another concern is the market. Many fishers fear that the price of lobsters will fall. Since they are putting more and more effort into catching each lobster, they want to be rewarded for this effort. That is to say, they want to make the same profit or do better than they did before, once the expenses are subtracted from their sales. Comments by Rosemary, a wife of an in-shore fisherman for over 35 years, illustrate this point:

I would say with the lobstering, the price is a major part, and if you don't get the price, you don't make anything. And it seems like every year it's getting more difficult because it's the waiting till they sell, and do this and do that, and the uncertainty is just so great. It's always on your mind, what's going to happen. (Interview #43)

One of the strategies employed by fishers to cut costs is to take their wives, sons or other family members on as "helpers." This strategy is most frequently used in lobstering and in the salt-fish trade where fishers still return home most evenings and has been a common way to cut expenses in the past as well as now. As Dorothy explains: "So the difference is the odds really. Like he can pay somebody else, say nine/ten dollars an hour, just to wash fish boxes and salt fish, whereas if I do it, the money stays with us, type of thing. So, the difference is the odds there" (Interview #29). But even in these situations some fishers still cannot make a living.

Many of the women we talked to spoke of how the amount of work they did in the fishery has dramatically increased, particularly those chores associated with the lobster fishery. However, in some cases women spoke of being excluded from the fishery. Longer fishing trips associated with the groundfishery are not conducive to wives working as helpers since they have competing family and household commitments (e.g., looking after children, day-to-day running of the home). Some women who used to go out with their husbands had to stay at home. Even those women whose work for their husband's fishing enterprise was restricted to shore-based activities (e.g., baiting trawl, selling catches) have ceased their contributions because of the distances involved. In order to sustain economies, most of these tasks were then taken on by the husband himself rather than by a "hired hand."

Like those who fish off shore, in-shore fishers see their self-esteem and self-worth defined by their ability to fish. Giving up the fishery is a difficult thing to do, but, unlike the off-shore fisher who is laid off or has his work reduced by the company, the in-shore fisher must make the decision himself or be closed down by the government through fishery regulations. Some women say their husbands will fish, no matter what, until the government closes them down and then will wait until the fishery re-opens to start fishing again. Other women say their husbands are seriously considering leaving the fishery if the government closes it down. Still other women report that their husbands are entertaining the possibility of leaving the fishery because of the mental and economic stress. But none of the woman we interviewed said that their in-shore fishing husbands would voluntarily leave the fishery. The following comments are representative of the feelings of the women we interviewed. We will begin with Dorothy's comments:

He doesn't want to ever give up fishing. Like I said, it's in his blood . . . like that's what they say. . . . He enjoys it. He loves the ocean. But, it's getting to the point now, it's just so much stress. You know, the regulations are changing daily. There's no fish. You're going all over the place for them, and making more expenses just to try to find the fish. It's hard to get anybody to work for you because with the fishing so slack and your expenses so high, you have to still be able to operate and yet pay a man for what he's worth. And a lot of the younger people, like I'd say from 30 down, they just want to go long enough to get unemployment stamps, that's all they worry about. They don't have enough expenses and things in behind them to make them want to go and work. . . . But honestly, no I don't think he'd ever want to give up fishing. He could do other work but he wouldn't be happy at it. (Interview #29)

For many fishers the economic considerations are secondary to their desire to fish and to be at sea. Taking on the package (TAGS) is a possibility that some couples think about, but only in the abstract—because they and their extended family have too much invested in the enterprise. Consider the comments of Claire, a new mother in her mid-20s:

The worst scenario is the fishery being closed completely. But then, if we have to, he'll have to go on the package . . . the aid package or whatever that they have. But if he does go on that, like to get re-training for something, you're not allowed to go back to the fishery. And, . . . his father owns his own boat and license and everything, and his father will never give it up. Never. Like, they can survive without him even fishing if they have to. But he fishes because it gives him something to do. And he wants Colin to take that over someday, so Colin can't leave the fishery if he ever intends on taking his dad's boat. (Interview #28)

For Quinsee, who owns her own business and has two adult children, and her husband Quintin, leaving the fishery is not an issue. She claims that, even

if the government closed down the fishery for four or five years, her husband would patiently wait for it to open again. He would not give up his licenses or his desire to fish. Here are some of Quinsee's comments on this topic.

It's entirely up to the Fisheries Department what they decide. So long as he can go fishing that's fine, because Quintin's one that has to have something to do. And, of course, if they said there's no more fishing this year, there's not going to be any more fishing for five years, well he'd do his nets all up and be ready to go when they say you can go now, you know. And then he would work on his traps and get ready for lobster season and maybe have a little more time to set nets for bait, for lobstering and that kind of thing. And, other than that . . . maybe in the summer we might be able to have a little break and go on vacation somewhere or something. (Interview #42)

Common Considerations—Financial

Being home for longer periods of time has an economic cost. Fishers whose boats are tied up, have been laid off or who work on a vessel with a rotating crew suffer a decline in their wages. Finances, which were always uncertain, impose an additional constraint. It generally falls on the women to reorganize the budget to make do. Most fishing households, which are used to having a "good income," are now just trying to make ends meet. As Gilda explains:

You're used to making big money, right. You can contribute to an RRSP [Registered Retirement Savings Plan] every year; you pay your . . . insurances; . . . you go to the grocery store, you buy whatever you want to buy. School time comes and you take the kids and you buy brand names. . . . Now it's get yourself a job, because I can't afford your brand names. You go to the grocery store, you buy all the sales, and you don't contribute to the RRSPs any more because you don't have any money to contribute and you're worrying—do I have enough money to make my boat payment in September? . . . You come down quite a bit and you change your lifestyle a lot. Not that you were a high-roller or anything, but you just don't have a thousand, a couple thousand dollars sitting in your bank account any more. (Interview #32)

Families use savings put away for a home, children's education or retirement to pay the daily bills. But dipping into savings is the last resort for many—as Ina puts it—"we have some savings in the bank, but you can't keep dishing into them, or they'll be gone" (Interview #9). Sources of credit are limited. Banks, which only a few years ago were giving fishers' loans with little trouble, will now not even consider fishers for loans. Where once it was a minor inconvenience, the breakdown of a household appliance or a part on the fishing boat now takes on catastrophic implications. As Dorothy explained:

You don't know where you're future's going to be. Like before, a couple, say even two years ago, you knew that you had money in the bank. You were paying your bills on a regular basis, you weren't behind in anything. Fishing was good.

You could plan for your children's futures with putting money away for their futures and things, whereas now you, there's just nothing left. By the time you pay your bills and you pay on ones that you haven't got paid, and you keep your payments going, there's nothing left for the future. . . . In fact, the last couple years, fishing's been so bad that we've been using the money we had saved, just to keep our heads above water, which is going to get you into trouble. Because, if you had a major breakdown, for instance, that could cost—that could make it over right there. Because everybody has their limits to how much . . . money you can go in debt. (Interview #29)

Younger couples who are just buying a home and/or boat and starting a family find the financial crunch harrowing. For them, there have been no good years to fall back on. Eunice, who is in her late 30s with a nine-year-old daughter, compares her and her husband's situation as a "middle-aged" couple with those just starting out:

I see a lot of fishermen are worse off than us because they just got a new boat lately, they've got bigger payments, or they've just got married recently and they have a house mortgage and I see them struggling. Because we've been at it longer, we had money saved so we're sort of more secure, you know, our house was paid for, no big bills, other than the boat. And where we only have two years left, that payment's not as big as somebody who has a new boat. And there's quite a few of them around here that I know are more depressed and more seriously thinking about what's going to happen than I am right now. . . . I know a couple women that are scared, really scared. (Interview #47)

How much money can you go into debt? How much are you willing to sacrifice to continue fishing? These are strategic questions for many fishers. For the fisher with no mortgage and no car payments, the day-to-day bills are relatively low. But if you are paying for a house and one or two cars your expenses are substantial. Add boat payments, as in the case of an in-shore fisher, and the payments can be staggering. Older couples, who have paid off the mortgages on their home and boat, are better off, but it is still a struggle to meet the daily bills.

No matter where fishing households are in their family cycle, budgeting and setting spending priorities dominate. As Linda, a young mother with two small children, points out "Your priorities have changed one hundred percent" (Interview #12). In order to make ends meet, women buy second-hand clothes, take no vacations, stop eating out or going to movies or plays. They can no longer afford to fix up their house or buy a new car, clothing, furniture or appliances.

For the husband, a decline in his wages indicates his inability to provide for his family and erodes his self-esteem. Nova Scotian fishermen are proud and independent men. They consciously traded off being at home for financial well-being. They wanted respect from the community and their family, and sought it through financial means—expensive consumer goods such as new

cars, modern houses, all-terrain vehicles and other leisure goods. As in other industrial settings, conspicuous consumption indicates success and validates their choice of working in the fishery rather than in other employment. Those items "proved" that they were good providers, husbands and fathers. But now most laid-off or unemployed fishermen no longer have a "good" income; they collect UI (Unemployment Insurance) or the "fisherman's package." Once their UI has been exhausted they will have to rely on welfare or other types of social assistance packages and/or their wives' earnings. They are desperate to get onto another boat or to get another job, if only to have enough stamps to continue to collect UI and to not go on welfare. Ina, a woman in her mid-40s with two children, describes her husband's search for a job:

There is no work. He's tried, he's went in. . . . Like, it's the same. . . . if you go to another firm. Like, what he was worried about and which he's still worried about, is setting up enough stamps for another year. . . . And he tried to get on boats, . . . like he went for two weeks straight, every day into Lunenburg, but with being on unemployment you can't use no more gas up than what you really can, you know. So, he was doing that for two weeks and then he just stopped 'cause there was just no chances [jobs] to get. None whatsoever. (Interview #9)

With no work, they feel lost. Their sense of worthlessness resembles that of workers who have left the fishery because of injury (Binkley 1995b). Ina continues describing her husband's situation:

Some days, you know, [he's] a bit contrary. And you could tell what it was over. Especially, like, the days that he went to Lunenburg and he would come home and . . . it seemed like nobody wanted to talk to him. And he said it seemed as if he was there and they didn't even see him because . . . they knew what [he] was there for. They knew [he] was there to ask for a chance. But he said, they wouldn't even talk to him. So, you know, that puts you down in the dumps. (Interview #9)

Opportunities for these men are limited. Most have never done anything except fish, and they have no training for anything else. With high unemployment rates, the prospect of employment in the fishery or in other industries in the local area appears bleak. Couples must choose between staying in the community or moving elsewhere to attempt to find employment. This is a difficult decision. Barbara, who has been married for over 20 years and is the mother of five boys, discussed the difficult possibility of moving:

I don't think I'd want to move. . . . He's already mentioned to me about going to Vancouver. There's scallop fishing there and he wanted to go there to live, and I wouldn't even hear of it. Because I done that one time before. He uprooted mom and dad and all of us when we went to Newfoundland to live. And he done a different kind of fishing down there. . . . Yea, well he said that if it came to it that he would have no other choice, so if it came to that I would. But right now I'm

not just going to uproot my family to move somewhere and it not work out. No I couldn't. I lived here all my life. (Interview #2)

Yet in an area of high unemployment, moving may be the only real opportunity for most of these men to find work.

In our interviews it became apparent that the current fisheries crisis affected women's attitude to work outside the home. Current workers saw their present job take on greater importance. Many women said they no longer worked to supplement their husbands' wages. Instead their wages were now the crucial ones. Older women spoke of staying on working rather than retiring as they had planned. Women who were not currently in the labour force spoke of returning to work. Wives who previously worked only in the home now take on outside employment. But for some, with no experience and little education, this is a daunting prospect. As Ina muses:

Well you try and think about other possible things. Like the only solution . . . would probably be for me to go out and try to get some kind of a little job. Like I don't have no high education, so I can't expect to get too much. And it's the same way with him, like the only other thing that he done before he went fishin' was pump gas. (Interview #9)

The lack of financial security increases the anxiety within the household, putting additional responsibility on the wife, who is now the sole "breadwinner." As Holly remarks: "I always say to him, . . . I love my work, and . . . I wouldn't do without it, but I just don't want to be obligated to having to be the one to be the breadwinner, you know that type of thing, so" (Interview #8).

As the wife takes on these financial responsibilities, there is more pressure on the husband to take on some traditionally male household chores. Ina explained this process

He can cook . . . say maybe, three times out of a month. . . . Nothing big and elaborate, but it's a meal (laughter). And when the winter was, looking after the snow. I never had to go out once and do any of the snow, he had looked after all that. And the same way with the mowing, he sees that all the mowing is done. And the garbage, he looks after the garbage. And he done up a lot of other little things that he never had time to do before, but with being home he done up them. We got our septic tank pumped out here just two weeks ago, we done that. (Interview #9)

Most men mow the lawn, take out the garbage and shovel the snow, but taking on chores such as the laundry, the cleaning, the cooking and child care is generally resisted. A few men like Harry, Holly's uxorious and compulsive husband, take on all the household responsibilities while she increases her work outside the home. This is how Holly's household is organized:

I work part-time, which sometimes involves full-time work, and with extra shifts . . . I'm gone for 12 hours/13 hours at a time, and . . . he takes over the household duties. He does the laundry, the cleaning, everything, so it's good that way. It's really hard to keep the bills paid and . . . there's no extras, and it's like, you're used to a pay cheque coming in and . . . well it's two pay cheques, mine and his . . . and now it's just mine, so you learn to [adjust]. (Interview #8)

As we noted earlier, for some fishers being at home represents an unique opportunity to get to know their children, to do the repairs they have been promising to do for months or to take up an old hobby they have set aside. But the more common response is for men to simply hang around the house, sleeping, watching TV or videos, reading novels or drinking with their buddies. No matter how well the fisherman is integrated into the household, he's not happy being home, and he looks forward to going back to sea or getting a job. This sense of uselessness and boredom further erodes the fisher's self-esteem and may lead to depression and other psychological problems. Even Harry has problems coping with shore life. He feels worthless and unproductive. For some men, communicating their fears and anxieties is not easy. As Eunice says, "men are just not talking about it like the women are. They're keeping it maybe more to themselves, you know. I hear a couple of them once in a while saying how they wished there was more fish" (Interview #46).

Moreover, as the couple becomes more anxious about meeting financial needs, they may forget about their spouse's emotional needs. The tension associated with uncertain finances may lead to disputes where emotional responsibilities get confused with monetary responsibilities. The husband's frustration at not working and his loss of self-esteem, combined with the wife's frustration over the erosion of her autonomy, can lead to an unbearable tension between the couple. Amy, a woman in her early 30s with no children, described her life over nine months while they waited for her husband's off-shore scallop vessel to be readied:

If he's home for an extended amount of time like he has been this year, it's like we both get on one another's nerves because we're not used to it at all. . . . [T]hey sold the boat he was on last year in November and he's waiting for the new one to get ready to go and that should be the end of this month, or the first week in July. We're going to raise the flag. . . . It's like every move I make it's like "Where are you going? What are you doing?" When he's out to sea I don't have anybody to answer to and ask those questions. It's just . . . well right now it's driving both of us crazy, because he's been home since November the sixteenth and this is the longest he's been home ever. Till he goes away, well, if we don't have one another killed it'll be fine. . . . One night we were sitting here and we were talking about when he retires. I said that when he retires I hope I'm dead. Because there's no way the two of us could live together. We couldn't live together everyday, day in day out. (Interview #1)

Although this woman's statement appears to be extreme, many other women echo her feelings. In this case, the couple recognized the difficulty, discussed it between themselves and have tried to deal with it in a constructive way. For them the end is in sight. But other couples just shut down any attempt to communicate. As Vera, a woman in her late 20s, who left her husband because of his drinking, stated: "We used to argue about stuff like that, and then it just got to the point it was a waste of time to argue. It was easier just to say nothing. So eventually he just did his thing and I did my thing, and—well you see what happened" (Interview #22). Once communication between the couple ceases, the probability of marital break-up is high.

Table 1
Comparison of Frequency of Consequences of
Other People's Drinking Based on Data
from This Study (as percentages)

Activities	In-shore sample	Off-shore sample
Serious arguments	30.9	36.7
Being humiliated	29.5	36.0
Marital or family difficulties	18.1	25.3
Being disturbed by loud parties	34.9	22.0
Being pushed, hit or assaulted	4.7	8.7
Having friendships break up	12.1	9.3
Having property vandalized	4.7	4.7
Having financial troubles	2.0	2.7
Passenger with a drunk driver	17.4	18.7
Accident because of a drunk driver	1.3	2.0
Sample size	149	145

Many wives fear that the stress that their husbands are under will lead them to drinking. This was Ina's predicament. Similarly, Isabel, a woman in her late 20s with a three-year-old child, said that her husband turned to drink rather than discuss issues; only after a few drinks would he say what had been bothering him. In some cases, frustration can lead to violence, especially when one or both of the partners drink. The consequences of others' drinking impinged on most fishermen's wives' lives, and a number of these problems were identified both in the survey and the in-depth interviews. These problems included "having serious arguments," "being humiliated," "having marital difficulties or family difficulties," "being disturbed by loud parties," "being pushed, hit or assaulted," "having friendships break up," "having property

vandalized” and “having financial troubles.” Table 1 compares the frequency of reported occurrence of these events in the last year between in-shore and off-shore fishers’ wives. With the exception of being disturbed by loud parties and having friendships break up, the off-shore sample appears to experience a higher frequency of these problems associated with others’ drinking. Between 17 and 19 percent of women from fishing households reported being a passenger with a drunk driver and between 1 and 2 percent reported being involved in an accident involving a drunk driver.

In the major fishing centres in Nova Scotia, a disproportionately high number of fishermen’s wives and household members receive counselling at local transition houses and abuse centres. In some areas over 65 percent of clients come from fishing households. Although these high numbers may simply reflect the demography of the community, the characteristics of the fishery, particularly the off-shore fishery, have increased the probability of spousal and family abuse: a matri-focal family life, a high-stress, industrialized workplace and little time to work out differences.⁴ Lenore Walker (1984) argues that risk factors for battering occur in families where insecurity, jealousy, alcohol and substance abuse aggravate conflicts for men holding traditional values concerning women’s roles. The cycle of long separation and short reunion strained the husband-wife relationship, but functional adaptations prevailed. Now those adaptations are themselves sources of marital strain. The erosion of autonomy and the high-stress, high-risk environment of the off-shore fishery increase the anxiety and erode the self-esteem of fishers regarding their family relationships. They work hard to provide for their families. But when they return from the sea, they enter an unfamiliar world. They have even less control there than at sea. With the reduction of the fishery, levels of anxiety for these men has not decreased but increased. Their self-esteem has been further eroded now both as fishers and as fathers and husbands.

Discussions and Conclusions

Oriel, a wife of 18 years who works outside the home, summarizes the effects of the fisheries crisis this way:

A lot of people have gone elsewhere for jobs, or gone into other programs. Some people are trying to stay on in the fishing industry. Those that really want to stay on will stay on. Like my husband said, the strong will survive, the weak will pass on and find something else. I think it’s going to make a difference in our neighbourhood in the sense that the younger generation, the young guys, the young boys or whatever coming up, won’t really have summer jobs, say, handling the fish like they did in previous years. They’ll have to either go to the city or find some other way of making money. When I grew up, all the young guys worked on the fishing boats, and that’s gone. You can see that. There’s no extra hiring because they don’t need them. The three-man crew that actually gutted the fish out there, when they came in off the nets, are the ones that are

salting them, are the ones that are doing everything when they come in. They've got no choice because they've gotta try to make a living at it. Where in previous years, if they had such a good catch, they could hire the younger kids to do some of the in-shore work that got done, where the fish got salted or whatever. So, that's gone. And it's gonna have an impact on the next generation, not my generation which is older, but my kids and that generation. It's really going to be affected by it. (Interview #40)

The fishery that Oriel describes is substantially different from the one that existed while she was growing up, and the fishery of the next century will be substantially different from the current one. Changes being wrought currently will lead to a smaller, more professionalized fishery concentrated in a few large ports. But the decline in the fishery does not only affect fishers. As Dorothy points out: "If fishing gets any worse, how is the whole community going to survive? . . . Everything we do is pretty well in the town of Lunenburg, so it's the little people, I say, little people like us, with the shore boats and things, that actually keep the town going" (Interview #29). As fishing families cut back on their spending, local merchants feel the effect. Grocers note a decline in "luxury foods" and a return to basic produce. Second-hand clothing stores such as Frenchy's or Bob's reported increased business, while ladies' wear and men's wear stores along the shore have declined. The small stores and amenities in towns such as Lunenburg depend on the fishers for year-round sales. Financial belt-tightening also means less socializing outside of homes as well. People stop going to movies, lounges, taverns and restaurants. Even events at community centres and church socials suffer from lack of participants. Communities rely more and more on the four-months-long tourist season to take up the economic "slack."

Although communities like Lunenburg and nearby Bridgewater will thrive because of their ability to maintain their fisheries enterprises while developing tourism and light industry, other fishing communities will not. Already, during the winter months, some small fishing ports along the shore more closely resemble ghost towns than the lively centres characteristic of the shore only a few years ago. This restructuring of rural Nova Scotia, which forces the young and middle-aged to move to the larger urban centres in search of work, will result in many coastal areas largely becoming retirement communities, rejuvenated only by summer visitors and tourists.

The fishery is an industry of boom and bust cycles, and many of these men have been unemployed before and have developed strategies to cope with short-term unemployment, such as fixing up their houses, repairing cars and other appliances. However, as it becomes apparent that employment in the fishery may not be possible, these coping mechanisms no longer function. Options which existed in the past, such as getting to know their family, developing social skills or taking on more family responsibilities, now hold no appeal. Instead, the erosion of self-worth, in some cases leading to profound depres-

sion and alienation, plagues many men as they search to find new meaning for their lives.

In all these cases, financial well-being has been eroded. More and more women are going out to work or are increasing their work outside the home. They are now taking on the task of "breadwinner"—a task that most do not strive for and one associated with increased stress. Many women still retain their traditional household duties, although some men may take on some household chores, most notably lawn mowing, garbage removal and snow shovelling. Moreover, the decline in wages, or the loss of work, erodes fishers' self-esteem and aggravates their anxiety. In some cases this can lead to drinking and family violence. As the crisis deepens, and as more and more people are affected, these types of behaviour may increase. No matter which situation these fishing households find themselves in, their previously beneficial coping strategies no longer meet the demands of their current situation and may actually hinder the development of new survival skills. They must now struggle to develop new ways to meet the challenges of fishing for a living.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this article focussing only on off-shore fishing families was published by the *Dalhousie Law Review* (Binkley 1995b). This project was supported by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grants #410-92-0518. A number of colleagues were extremely helpful at different stages in the research, in particular Richard Apostle, Jack Crowley, Jennifer Jarman, Victor Thiessen and *Anthropologica's* anonymous reviewers. This research could not have been done without the help of the women and men who provided the crucial information, and to them I am very grateful.
2. I use the term "fishermen/fisherman" when I want to be gender specific or when quoting or paraphrasing informants; otherwise I use the term "fisher." I was constantly reminded throughout my research that the term "fisher" refers to a bird, a kingfisher, not to a person who fishes.
3. Some researchers further separate the independent fishery into mid-shore and in-shore fleets based on length of vessel and gear type. The in-shore vessels are under 35 feet in length, while the mid-shore vessels are over 35 but under 65 feet in length.
4. As in-shore fishing households take on more and more characteristics of off-shore fishing households, the incidence of violence may also increase. These questions were addressed in another article, "Household Response to Work Stress and Alcohol use Among Offshore Fishers" (Binkley 1996).

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