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FILM: ORAL HISTORIES OF WOMEN IN THE MAINE LOBSTER INDUSTRY

by

Isabelle I. Vachon

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(Social Work)

The Honors College

University of Maine

May 2016

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Abstract

In the state of Maine, an average of 120 million pounds of lobsters are caught and sold each year. The lobster fishing industry in Maine is a large economic system that supports thousands of fishermen and helps attract over 32 million tourists to Maine every year. According to the Maine Department of Marine Resources, women hold only 4% of the approximate 4,200 commercial lobster fishing licenses in Maine. In the past, The University of Maine's Lobster Institute has conducted interviews with Maine lobster fishermen and this project augments that work by collecting oral histories of women in Maine's lobster industry. A 34-minute video documentary was created based on the interviews and this statement discusses the process of creating the video documentary chronicling the stories of four Maine women who currently lobster fish. Also included are discussions of how I arrived at this idea for the thesis, successes, failures, and what I have learned.

Acknowledgements

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I. ARTIST'S STATEMENT INTRODUCTION

For nearly a decade, women have made up only 4% of the approximate 4,200 fishermen in Maine who hold commercial lobster fishing licenses (State of Maine Department of Marine Resources [MDMR], n.d.). In the past, women in the family have taken on more domestic roles in the lobster industry, like bookkeeping, equipment maintenance, and picking lobster shells for meat (Allen, 2014). The Council on Social Work Education lists Core Competency 4 practice behaviors as: "Recognizes the extent to which a culture's structure and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power". Needless to say, illuminating the issues of minority populations is integral to social work. This makes women in the Maine lobster industry a perfect population to derive oral histories from.

Like many academic disciplines, social work has a research component. In the spring of my junior year, I started to think about what I wanted my thesis to look like. I met with the social work professor who specialized in research to see if she had any ideas of where I could start. She connected me with a social work company in New York called Sanctuary. After reaching out to them, I arranged to spend my spring break in Albany, New York. While in New York, I helped to conduct social work research. My plan was to base my thesis on this research. When I got to New York, I realized that the research project I was helping with was more business-based, even though the company was based in social work. In addition, I did not have a strong desire to pursue a thesis like this, so I decided to start over. From here, I had no idea what it was that I wanted to write my thesis about.

In the summer before my senior year, I was at a family and friends cookout. One family friend in attendance was Bob Bayer, who sat on the honors committees of both my brother and my sister. In the interest of tradition (and because I had not gathered a committee yet), I asked Bob if he would like to be on my thesis committee. He said yes, and then asked if I knew what I was writing my thesis on. I told him that I didn't have any ideas yet, and he suggested that I do interviews with lobster fishermen. Bob is the director of The Lobster Institute at the University of Maine, and he told me about how lobster fishermen interviews were conducted every few years as a sort of oral history/marketing strategy. He suggested that I conduct some interviews, and then turn the project into something unique to my own thesis. At this point, I knew that my social work field placement (internship) counted as my capstone, so my thesis did not have to align with social work. This gave me the freedom to write a thesis on any subject I wanted to, which was very liberating. The lobster interviews sounded like a really fun idea, and I knew that the interviews would allow me to be creative in a way I don't often get to be in my other course work. I agreed to take on the interview project, and so my thesis was officially started.

“Oral Histories of Women in the Maine Lobster Industry” does not sound like a thesis title that would make sense for a social work student. However, this process absolutely hit upon, developed, and nurtured a cornucopia of social work skills. First of all, this process has been incredibly multidisciplinary, requiring multiple sources of knowledge. Beyond that, many of the actions required in this process have directly hit upon the core social work competencies identified by the Council on Social Work Education, which I have referenced on the webpage of Wheelock College. I have worked

with a number of different technologies including, videotaping interviews, working with raw footage, video editing, and video converting. I have also had communications on many platforms where I acted as a professional (e-mail, phone and texts with multiple parties, networking with multiple tiers of people, and connecting with professionals for advice). I have been involved in practice-informed research and research-informed using books, old interviews, websites, videos, and even calendars. In this research phase, I have incorporated what I learned into my project. This thesis has also involved representing a minority population and giving them a voice, engaging diversity and difference in practice both through cultural considerations of the lobster fishing community and through doing interviews with women of very different backgrounds. Engaging in this opportunity helped me set the stage for lifelong learning, since I worked in an area I do not specialize in and have no formal education in. This project has also afforded me the opportunity to engage in ethical work, using both empathy and other interpersonal skills. Going into this project, the interviewees were very nervous. In fact, some of the interviewees did not even want to be on camera, and I helped make them feel brave and comfortable. I used some of my empathy skills to help them feel relaxed and trusting, and I think that made for a much better outcome.

This project has also integrated some of the most important skills and knowledge I gained in the Honors College such as cultural considerations, being a well-rounded human being, using creativity, asking important questions, integrating philosophy, and having a thirst for knowledge. One of the biggest themes I took away from the Honors *Civilizations* sequence was the often repeated question, “What does it mean to be human?” This question helped inspire the focus questions I chose for my project: “What

does it mean to be a female lobster fisherman from Maine?” and “What is the nature of the spirit of Maine?” I would like to conclude this section with something I asked my committee to consider before I played them my video for the first time. In researching what a social work Honors thesis might look like, I discovered that only a handful of social work-Honors students ever finished an Honors thesis, so this combination is something unusual.

When an audience gathers to watch a film, they expect to have an enjoyable experience. The goal of making a film is to make it look seamless and easy, and to not have your audience think about all the work that went into it. With that in mind, I would like to say that behind each minute of my video is lots of work and thought, not just filming.

Some of the work that went into this project would go unnoticed to audience members unless specifically pointed out. Namely, these steps are as follows: deciding which questions to ask the interviewees; research on the topic itself; using different mediums of communication; travelling; purchasing equipment; learning how to use equipment; considering music; and meetings to get feedback and advice. Finally, the last step was the editing process; the step that took the most meticulous work. This consisted of voice edits, audio edits, video altering, still photo edits, color alterations, and background noise edits. I began the editing process with 4.5 hours of raw footage, and I made choices on which parts to include in order to most accurately represent the interviews in a film that would be concise and entertaining. The interviewees spoke of lighter material, darker material, and even some mundane material. Each person was asked the same questions, but they all took the answers in different directions. An

additional struggle was working with what some people might call “Mainer sentences”: ones that start and end with ‘and’ or ‘so’, and turn out to be very long run-on sentences. This kind of speech was difficult to work with when I wanted the video to run in an orderly fashion, but did not want it to appear as if I had ‘cut’ anyone’s speech off.

Picking and choosing different video and audio parts to include in a 30-minute video meant that I had to leave out some very interesting material. Because of this, I have chosen a quote from each of the interviewees with something I think is interesting, but isn’t included in the film. The first one I would like to include is from Lesley Ranquist: “Our grandfather got electrocuted in 1959 working on an electric pole, and they had shut off the wrong wire, and he grabbed the wire and it zapped him and threw him right onto the ground, and he lost his one arm just above the elbow, and the other arm he lost the two middle fingers... but he did everything that a normal person would do. He didn’t let that stop him, and if you told him he couldn’t do something, he would do it just to prove you wrong. He went fishing on his own, actually, quite often,” (Lesley Ranquist, personal communication, March 2016). The second quote I would like to include is from Leah Ranquist, and it came right after Lesley’s quote, so I will discuss them together: “I have to point out that, even though he wasn’t one of the big hotshot fishermen, and I’m sure every relative would say this about their grandfather, I feel like we learned from the best,” (Leah Ranquist, personal communication, March 2016). I think these quotations are interesting because this family member not only carried on for himself after being injured, but this shows how strong lobstering tradition is within families, and the lobstering culture is within communities.

The third and fourth quotes I would like to include are from Stefanie Alley and Beatrice Amuso, respectively. “One time I had this guy with me from New Jersey, he and his wife. You know, they live in a city where it’s all highways and freeways. A trap came up and it had a huge lobster in it and he got really excited. You know, he said that was the best day of his life... It’s fun to see people’s reactions,” (Stefanie Alley, personal communication, February 2016). I think this quote is interesting because it shows the side tourism of lobster fishing. Stefanie does lobster tours in the summertime, and it is important to understand the parts of this career where lobster fishermen derive happiness.

Beatrice mentioned an interesting quote worth mentioning here as well: “When I’m on the boat, I find myself much more serious and focused than I am at home. At home, I am spacey... Sometimes I enjoy being a girly-girl, but it’s different when I’m on the boat. It’s more serious and focused,” (Beatrice, personal communication, March 2016). I found this quotation interesting because it shows how lobster fishing has impacted a young girl by teaching her the value of focus and hard work.

Initially, I began this project with the assumption that I would learn of many different types of gender discrimination and inequality within the lobster industry. I did not want this project to pitch that idea or have any sort of biased influence, but I certainly sought out that information. I wanted to ask the women a variety of questions about their lives, bringing stories out of them that would give the audience context into what being a woman lobster fisherman is like. I had hoped and imagined that I would hear stories mostly having to do with the influence of gender, whether those influences were good or bad.

As I began the research phase, I started to see a trend that women in the Maine lobster industry were focused on mostly in the context of their gender, rather than their individual stories and experiences. I decided that I wanted my research project to be different; I wanted to focus on each individual rather than only judging them for their gender. I decided to put the issue of gender as secondary to a more heavy focus on the topic of oral histories. Finding and illuminating discrimination was not the central focus of my work, rather, I wanted to focus on the information that the interviewees chose to share. This is not to say that I did not ask the women about their experiences with gender differences, because I did; but I did not make it my sole focus. All of the women spoke of gender issues in their interviews, from the youngest interviewee to the oldest.

The last topic I would like to discuss before delving into my ‘materials and methods’ section is the ‘why’ of this project. I believe that interviewing and learning about this population is a very new and exciting topic; one that has been represented before in calendars, testimonies, and movements, but rarely in a medium without a clear message or intention. The way I chose to represent this topic is such that the material is just the stories of the women, with no victimization, so that the audience can form their own opinions and conclusions. Awareness and advocacy for certain minority or subculture groups is often pitched with a goal in mind, but my project was not to force any opinions or objectives except that of awareness alone. Illuminating the population in this way affords the audience a type of independent thought worth appreciating.

Each woman came into her interview with her own personal background and experiences. The beauty of this project is that these interpretations are up to the audience to decide for themselves. With that said, in my interpretation, I choose to judge each

individual person on their own life experiences. I think it is important to acknowledge both the good and bad parts of each person's life, but to focus on the positive aspects. I believe that this viewpoint is reflected in how I edited the interviews for my final film.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

My vision for this project was to make a film that could be understood by anyone who watched it, not just people who are familiar with the lobster industry. When I reviewed past video interviews made by The Lobster Institute, I saw the trend that mostly older white men were interviewed. With an aspiration to highlight a different population and a background in social work, I decided to interview only women lobster fishermen from Maine (in the interviews, all of the women said they preferred to be called fishermen and not fisherwomen, so that is the word I will use to describe them in this document). Women hold only 4% of Maine's commercial lobster fishing licenses (MDMR, n.d.). This population is remarkable not only because women in general represent a minority in the industry and tend to hold fewer power and privileges than male lobster fishermen, but also because lobster fishing is a very special industry that few places have the pleasure of hosting. A combination of these two forces coming together to create an extremely interesting subculture is something I found very intriguing. I came to this final decision because of the gender studies I have learned about in both my social work and Honors backgrounds, my personal feminist values, and the social work topic of cultural competency.

As my audience views this documentary, I want them to be thinking about all the different life experiences coming together to create this piece, and to consider the question “what does it mean to be a lobster fisherwoman from Maine?” There is a huge gender component to consider, and certainly, the component that inspired this piece. However, other cultural implications such as birthplace, location, and community inclusion are very big factors in determining the experiences of these four different women. For example, the Ranquist sisters had were raised in the Swan’s Island community, and were taught how to lobster fish from a very young age. Beatrice Amuso started working on a lobster boat when she was nine years old after moving to Maine at age seven, and Stefanie Alley started working on a lobster boat when she moved to Maine in her 20s.

Thus began the research phase. I had a few areas of research that needed to be completed: research in interviewing, research in lobster fishing, and research in videotaping interviews. Melissa Ladenheim was a fantastic resource for experience in interviewing; and she connected me with other sources for information, like people to speak with, books to read, and websites to visit. Bob Bayer and Cathy Billings were very helpful for their experience in interviewing lobster fishermen specifically, and they gave me a few books and CDs with lobster fishing information, interviewing information, and past interviews conducted by The Lobster Institute. Research in how to physically videotape the interviews was a very complicated process because I had minimal previous experience with this area. Bob Bayer connected me with several people from the Innovative Media Research and Commercialization (IMRC) Center on the UMaine Campus who could help me start this process. I was eventually connected with Duane

Shimmel who was extremely helpful in teaching me about different equipment to use and how to use it, allowing me to borrow his equipment, use his studio, and showing me websites where I could purchase some of my own equipment. Duane actually recommended that I do all of the videotaping on my iPhone because iPhone cameras are so advanced and easy to work with, and high-level equipment is complicated and difficult to come by. I only ended up spending about \$14 on additional equipment (thanks to Duane allowing me to borrow some of his).

Finding connections for people to interview was probably the most difficult (or frustrating) part of this entire thesis, because my progress depended on other people answering my communications. As a result, this step was actually the one that took up the most amount of time. Coordinating with people over e-mail, phone call, text, and face-to-face discussions was the first step. The first string of people I spoke with gave me contacts of second-string people to talk with. Sometimes the connection came only after speaking with even third-string people. I ended up interviewing Stefanie Alley, Beatrice Amuso, Leah Ranquist, and Lesley Ranquist. I spoke with many people to find these four women, but the connections leading to them started with Melissa Ladenheim and my grandmother, Evelyn Foster. Once I found people to be interviewed, I had to coordinate with them where and when the interviews would take place. Before I started the interview process, I did a few practice interviews on my boyfriend to make sure that each piece of equipment had enough space to tape for about an hour; and to ensure that the internal microphones picked up enough sound.

Interviewing the different lobster fishermen was a learning process each time. As a result, each interview was smoother and more efficient than the last. My first interview

was with Stefanie Alley at a house in Ellsworth where she was staying. This was an easy commute because my parents live in Ellsworth. I chose to interview Stefanie first because I know her personally, so I figured that any mistakes made in my first interview would be better met by her than by a stranger. I brought three pieces of equipment to each interview: my iPhone (on which I planned to tape the entire video), my iPad (my first choice of backup incase something went wrong with my phone), and my computer (my last choice of backup incase something went wrong with both my phone and my iPad). I also brought charging cords for each piece of equipment so that they would not run out of battery during the interview. Setting up equipment in a stranger's house was difficult: I needed to find a place where Stefanie could sit facing the window (the natural light is the best alternative to professional lighting) that was close enough to three outlets so that my cameras could face her and be plugged in, and I also needed to be able to sit away from her so that she would face me but not face the camera directly. It took about 20 minutes to set everything up perfectly. We had to improvise and find some chairs to hold my iPhone up high enough; the tripod I bought for it merely held it upright. I had a paper copy of the interview questions and a pen so that I could write down additional questions I thought of during the interview. My intent was for my voice not to be present in the final video at all, so I tried not to comment while the interviewees answered. I got better at this as time went on. Stefanie's interview went smoothly, and I got some additional shots of her walking on a beach in Ellsworth to include in the final video. My iPhone stopped recording about 40 minutes into the interview, but my iPad videotaped everything that was missed here. The quality of the iPad camera is not as good as the phone, but the videos I got of Stefanie walking on the beach could be played during that

audio piece to cover up the poor camera quality. My laptop fell asleep after about 5 minutes of videotaping, so it stopped videotaping. Her entire interview lasted only about an hour.

My second interview was with Leah and Lesley Ranquist, who are sisters. They are from Swan's Island but were passing through Ellsworth, so I offered for the interview to be conducted at my house. This was a great setting because my equipment was entirely set up before they arrived. Additionally, this interview is the one with the best lighting and backdrop because of how much time I had to prepare. I was very excited to interview these sisters together because I predicted that they would build off each other and be much more comfortable in front of the camera than one single person. The interview went as perfectly as I could have imagined. The sisters were very bubbly and talkative. They were enthusiastic in both negative and positive stories, and they answered every question thoroughly, with additional tangents that led to some interesting topics. The cameras worked really well because I checked them every 10 minutes or so to make sure none of them had 'fallen asleep' or stopped recording. My laptop kept falling asleep, so I gave up on it at that point (my laptop is an older model, and the iPad and iPhone were sufficiently videotaping). The sisters were so talkative that the interview lasted a little over 2 hours, and I did not even get to all of the questions. My iPhone ran completely out of storage, even though I had deleted all of my pictures and most of my applications (even ones I use, which had to be replaced afterwards). My iPad recorded the rest of the interview after the iPhone got filled with space; but one can't expect a phone to hold more than 2 hours of video, so I was not surprised by this.

The third interview was with the young stern-girl of Stefanie Alley, Beatrice Amuso. For this, I traveled to Islesford, or Little Cranberry Island. I rode with Stefanie in a ferry for this, and I got to get some nice videos from the back of the boat. This was the day that I recorded most of my background 'ocean and nature' shots for the final video. The interview with Beatrice went well. It was the shortest of all the videos because Beatrice is only 13 years old and was somewhat shy, quite understandably. After the interview, her mother took us all on a tour around the island to see things. During this, I got lots of chances to videotape beautiful landscapes for the background of the final video. Beatrice's mother lent me a DVD that was made for the Islesford museum a few years prior. Watching it gave me some ideas on how to edit my interviews. It was kind of discouraging to see how well-done the video was, in comparison to what my final product will look like; but I had to remind myself that the video was made by a big filming company, and I had no background on videography before this project (for example, they had video shots from a helicopter, which is something I would not be able to access even if I wanted to).

After the interviews came the video editing process: my favorite part so far. I loaded all of my raw footage and pictures onto my laptop, which was the device I would be using in the production. As well, Duane Shimmel from the IMRC center said that I could come by the IMRC studio to access iMovie on their big monitor. He said that their computers work faster at video editing; plus he would be there to help me if I needed anything.

I ran into some issues with iMovie. I found out that I had to do all of the editing on my personal laptop instead of the IMRC center's desktops, like I had planned. I spent

a few weeks teaching myself how to use iMovie, while making lots of mistakes that costs me hours of work.

After that, I spent lots of time video editing. My vision was for my video to open with pictures of traditional lobster fishermen, and some statistics about commercial fishing in Maine. Then I decided to have it jump to the most important statistic of my movie, which is that only 4% of commercial lobster fishing licenses in Maine are held by women. The next section explains why I chose women to interview, and then onto their stories. I first have clips of each woman introducing herself and telling basic information about themselves like where they are from, how old they are, where they fish, how they got into the industry, etc. (this part is about 20 minutes). Then I have personal stories from each person, followed by rapid-fire sections on questions that each woman answered; such as work schedules, noticeable gender differences, and boat names.

The movie was difficult to keep organized; I would have liked for the movie to work in chronological order by interview questions (each question being its own chapter); but the women all spoke about different things, and some didn't answer the questions very directly if at all. Thus, organizing it chronologically by interview question would have been very choppy. I edited the video in the most natural flow possible, almost like a conversation between the four women. I chose several quotes that I thought were profound to use in the conclusion. These quotes were about the positive impacts lobster fishing had on each woman's life, and several comments of gratitude. I thought these were perfect closing remarks because they showed positive aspects of working in the lobster industry, which finishes the film on a heart-warming note. I started with about 4.5 hours of raw footage, so there were lots of parts that did not make it into the final video.

Deciding which parts to keep and which parts to delete was extremely difficult, but one helpful blessing in disguise has been process of elimination. Lots of good information had to be cut out because it was unintelligible, or because the sentences were incomplete, or because someone's dog walked by during the video. I considered making a bloopers part of the video, because some humorous things happened during the interviews that I could not keep, but I ruled out this idea because I thought it might make the video appear unprofessional.

Music was a huge consideration of mine. The problem with being a student on a budget and a time limitation was that I could only use music that had free rights for the public, so my music selection was very limited. Towards the end of the project, I consulted with Duane Shimmel about finishing touches to make the final product look more polished. He helped me make decisions about name labels, music, and screen width.

III. DISCUSSION

The information I gathered in the interviews was surprising to me. I thought that I would encounter a much bigger emphasis on gender issues. However, that issue actually took a backseat to what the women mostly discussed - topics like the details of their careers, families, and upbringings. They talked about these mostly without discussions of gender. Deciding how to edit the interview clips was a huge decision-making process for me, because I wanted to present the information as accurately as possible. Obviously, I only garnered information from the questions I asked and from the stories the women

chose to speak about. I feel as if this information was accurate to each person, and that each person was comfortable enough to share their thoughts and feelings. However, it isn't possible for me to acquire their entire life stories during the sessions I had with each person, and then accurately represent those stories in a 30-minute documentary. I do believe, though, that I included their factual information, and an accurate representation of the topics raised in the interviews.

The purpose of this journey was not to draw conclusions about the entire Maine lobster industry or even gender struggles within Maine fishing as I imagined it might be when I decided to interview women who fish lobsters. The purpose was to preserve the personal stories of the four women who were interviewed; however, I certainly gathered several very important morsels of information and thought-provoking insights into this subculture. For example, I did not expect to learn that these women often feel their male counterparts view them based on their threat level; a few of the women reported feeling like their male counterparts treated them like they were not threats. This could be because all of the women reported fishing mostly in shallow waters, partially on purpose to avoid controversy. Federal licensure is required for those who want to fish in deeper waters, and the women reported that these deeper waters are often where territorial confrontation occurs. Leah Ranquist reported that during her times in deeper waters, she was gently approached by male counterparts telling her that she was nearing on their claimed area, to which she responded by backing off. The other women in the interviews did not face this type of confrontation because they chose to fish further in-shore. Often, the women did not seem to think of their role in the industry in relation to gender, and maybe this is because women represent such a small percentage of the lobster fishing population,

which allows them to sort of ‘fly under the radar’. This is a phenomenon that could see a change if the female lobster fishing population grows.

Of the women I interviewed, I was also surprised to learn that the biggest gender difference they noticed was muscle mass and strength, which they saw as insignificant because they felt they could adapt. Although I had hoped to learn of some exciting secrets of big gender struggles, it actually speaks to the power of these women that they did not speak of many significant gender differences. During these interviews, they were mostly able to separate themselves from their gender instead of allowing it to define them.

Something really important to consider while pondering some of these discoveries is that the women I interviewed were from very different backgrounds: two of them were born and raised in the lobster fishing industry, one of them moved to Maine in her twenties and worked herself into fishing, and one of them moved to Maine with her family at the age of 7 and started helping on a lobster boat at the age of 9. It is possible that this may affect how their communities view them, and thus their social interactions.

The youngest and oldest of the interviewees (64 and 13, respectively) reported generally pleasant experiences, with no confrontation with other lobster fishermen; both of these women were born out of the state of Maine and moved here. The other two women, 23 and 25 years old, are from Maine and reported more confrontational interactions with their male counterparts. These two women were born and raised in their lobster fishing communities, which may have made their male counterparts see them as ‘equals’ and thus it was more acceptable to confront them.

One of the most important skills to learn in social work (and some may argue, the most important skill) is understanding the importance of how different backgrounds

shape life experiences. Even within a very specific subculture of two overlapping minorities (being lobster fishermen and being women), four women from a very similar geographic region brought very different stories to the table; and that speaks volumes to judging people on an individualized basis. This and the many other lessons I have learned throughout this process have reinforced all of the social work skills and competencies that I have been working so hard to learn for the past four years.

I am very happy with how this thesis has unfolded. Being from Maine is very important to me, and my entire family essence has to do with Maine culture. My father was a lobster fisherman throughout college to pay for his school, and my grandfather was a lobster fisherman for a time as well. Lobster fishermen make up a big portion of my community, including friends, family, and fellow students. Being a woman is something I am very proud of as well, and spreading the word of feminism is something I have felt passionately about but did not have a name for until my college experience at UMaine. Being a student at UMaine is something I am proud of too. When I announced that I would be attending college at the University of Maine, many people from my high school approached me with concern that I was not ‘reaching my full potential’ and that ‘I could do better’. As part of a UMaine legacy spanning three generations, I completely disagree that UMaine is a second-tier university. I believe that the college experience is what you make of it, and you get the results of the effort you put in. The University of Maine is an alma mater to my older siblings, my parents, my grandparents, many aunts and uncles, and many cousins. I am very proud of everything I have learned with the School of Social Work, the Honors College, and all other schools in which I was fortunate enough to take classes.

Like state universities, lobster fishing sometimes gets a bad reputation. People in Maine are often told that we have no diversity, but I disagree. I think that people from Maine should be very proud of our culture, and especially of the lobster fishing culture we cultivate. We should be proud to have (in my opinion) the best lobster industry in the country, one that is as interesting as it is hard-working. My experiences with the women I interviewed have left me with a strong sense of pride to have the privilege to document such stories.

I am overjoyed to have had the chance to work with a creative thesis. Pablo Picasso once said “Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up,” (Pablo Picasso Quotes, n.d.). This is something I agree with wholeheartedly. I think we all have creative souls, and the creativity in me has blossomed during my time at UMaine. I used to think that only illustrators were artists. I used to think that I was bad at drawing, so I never did anything remotely artistic or expressive. Today, I feel that art is an important part of my everyday life. I see art in seemingly insignificant things from the way people dress, to the colors in the sky, to the way people express their feelings in conversation.

I am humbled and extremely grateful to have had the chance to create a film for my Honors thesis, not only because it has allowed me to integrate my love for expression and stories but also because it has allowed me to interact with people in the way I think is most important: listening. Everyone has a story to tell. Most people are too busy in their daily lives to stop and listen to others with open ears and an open heart. I find people so interesting, and the type of therapy I want to pursue in my professional career is very similar to the interview technique I used during this process. In social work, we are

taught that everyone is a product of his or her environment. Instead of asking, “what is wrong with you?” we ask, “what has happened to you?” This encapsulates the essence of listening with an open heart, and I love that I did not have to make any final conclusions at the end of this thesis process: I simply listened and documented. Of course, each audience member make interpretations on the material gathered, but the beauty is that each person can draw their own meanings.

IV. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In 2017, UMaine’s Lobster Institute will be celebrating their 30th anniversary. I plan to show my video at this gathering, with the help of Bob Bayer (Director of The Lobster Institute) and Cathy Billings (The Lobster Institute’s Associate Director of Communications and Development). In the near future, I also plan to upload my video to The Lobster Institute’s website. The video will also be distributed to my thesis committee and to the four women who were interviewed. If I could continue on this project, I would be interested to hear more perspectives from Maine women lobster fishermen. I only interviewed four women, but interviewing another four from different age groups, backgrounds, and geographic regions could be very interesting. If someone else were to conduct research similar to this, I would definitely recommend visiting the homes of the interviewees. I found visiting Little Cranberry Island to be extremely beneficial in giving context to Stefanie’s and Beatrice’s interviews; it gave me a context of where these women came from, which helped me contextualize what their lives were like. If I had time to visit Swan’s Island to see context of Lesley and Leah’s interview, I would have.

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VI. AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Isabelle “Belle” Vachon was born in Ellsworth, Maine in June of 1994. She grew up in Ellsworth and graduated Ellsworth High School in 2012 with an Honors Diploma and a 4.0 GPA. She attended The University of Maine in Orono in the following fall. Four years later, she graduated with a Social Work degree and Honors.

Upon graduation, Belle plans to achieve her Master’s in Social Work through The University of Maine’s One-Year Advanced Standing Program, which she has been accepted to for the 2016-2017 academic year.

VII. APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me who you are and, if you don't mind, how you are.

Where did you grow up?

Could you describe what you do for work?

How do you prefer to be called: lobster fisherman, lobster fisherwoman, or lobster fisherperson?

Have you always been involved in the lobster industry?

What was your life like before you started lobster fishing?

How did you become involved in the lobster industry?

Were you from a fishing family?

Are your family members involved in the fishing industry?

How did you learn to lobster fish?

Tell us about your first boat.

Do you see a lot of other women your age in the industry?

Tell me about your crew.

Where do you sell your lobsters?

Have you always used the same dealer?

- Tell me about how that works.

Do you think there are any differences between being a man or a woman in this field?

Can you talk about the physical challenge of this job?

As a female, do you experience any particular challenges?

Was the lobstering community welcoming and accepting to you when you first started?

Do you ever get together with other fishermen outside of work?

How has lobster fishing shaped your family?

What is the biggest challenge you have faced as a lobster fisherman today?

What do you do for fun/how do you relax at the end of the day?

Has lobster fishing changed you?

What kind of personality do you think it takes to be a lobster fisherman?

Will you be doing this work for your whole life?

What will your retirement look like?

What is your favorite part about being a lobster fisherman?

*Please note: Not all questions were asked in the interviews, and some additional questions were asked in interviews.