

Yaffle Connects

Women on the Water: Challenges and Opportunities for Women in the Maritime Sector

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Women on the Water:

Challenges and Opportunities for Women in the Maritime Sector

For this Yaffle Connects session, we were joined by four women involved in NL's fishery. They provided us with a closer look at the challenges and opportunities facing women in the maritime sector.

As a major industry in our province traditionally dominated by men, what are the challenges still facing women in the industry? How can we overcome them? What else needs to be done to better recognize, increase, and improve the opportunities?

“Women have always been working in the fishery; the problem is that their labour is undervalued as ‘work.’” – Dr. Nicole Power, Memorial University



Some participants of Orren's Fishing for Success initiative

SESSION SYNOPSIS:

Kimberly Orren, [Fishing for Success](#), heads a panel of women involved with the NL fishery as they present their experiences and their understandings of the challenges that women face in the industry.

First, Jasmine Paul, Apprentice Fisher, draws attention to the negative comments and stereotypes she has seen on social media. Crystal Hanlon, Marine Engineer and Instructor at the Marine Insitute, goes through her career in the industry and some of the difficulties she has overcome. Dr. Nicole Power, Professor of Sociology at Memorial, summarizes two major themes in feminist fisheries research: the importance of recognizing the supportive work, typically done by women, that also makes up the fisheries, and the necessity of understanding how seemingly gender-neutral policies advantage men and disadvantage women.

Ms. Orren goes over the role that women currently play in more male-dominated fields, and offers solutions such as the increased presence of role models and targeted programming to increase female representation. She asks the panel a few questions about the barriers they've faced, as well as the relationships they've formed in the industry. To end, the panel answers questions from the audience, largely focusing on the importance of welcoming women into the fisheries and supporting more sustainable fishing practices.

[WATCH THE ENTIRE PRESENTATION HERE](#)



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Kimberly Orren, co-founder of Fishing for Success, an organization aiming to help connect people with their fishing heritage, plays a short video introducing “[Girls Who Fish.](#)”
- Jasmine Paul, an apprentice fisher and daughter of inshore small boat fishers, presents some of the negative comments she has gotten online about her presence in the fishery as an apprentice. She shows and disproves several negative stereotypes about the industry, including the conception that fishers are uneducated, that they’re only looking for employment insurance, and that the industry is dying.
- Crystal Hanlon gives a brief overview of her history with the fisheries: she has worked in a variety of positions, including heavy machinery operator, processing plant worker, marine engineer, and, currently, instructor at the Marine Institute. (It is a challenging career, but when someone told her she couldn’t do it, she did it anyway!)
- Dr. Nicole Power next presents a summary of feminist fisheries research, examining the gendered impacts fisheries restructuring has on men and women, and asking how we can reimagine equity in the fishery.
- The first theme she highlights is the importance of recognizing that fisheries are embedded in their larger social context: the industry includes in-boat harvesting as well as large amounts of unpaid support work, typically done by women, that allows others to do the fishing. Most existent research focuses on harvesting, but ignoring the other, invisible work can have unintended consequences; post-moratorium, when the federal government targeted individual fishers for retirement, in some small-scale operations women joined the efforts instead.
- The second theme is how seemingly neutral policies work to disadvantage women in the fisheries: women have a harder time getting and keeping positions since they’re also expected to do household work and men who inherit resources from male family members or friends are more advantaged in the industry.

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- The current goal is to reimagine fishing as a sector that includes all genders, connects generations, and sees fish as food as well as a commodity.
 - Ms. Orren discusses how women have historically had to do hard work related to fishing, and that they should have more of a say in policies today, as well as working on the boat.
 - Girls are less represented in STEM careers; we need female role models and targeted programming to get girls interested and keep them in these fields, as they may be missing out on opportunities by not doing so.
 - We need to rethink community structures so that women can have the chance to work and stay in industries such as the fisheries, while accounting for other expectations in life.
 - Ms. Orren asks the panel if any of the barriers they face on the boat are physical or gear-related, since the vast majority of fishing gear is designed by men, for men.
 - Ms. Paul agrees that gear is absolutely a barrier: she had to buy new gear and it was difficult to find gear that fit correctly; the environment and equipment are not very welcoming or comfortable to women, and while the physical work is not an issue ill-fitting gear can be a safety hazard.
 - Ms. Hanlon adds that she also had to buy her own gear, and that there are ways to get around the physical barriers; starting off, she was not accepted, but eventually people let her do what she wanted, which she says is a solution to getting women into the fisheries.
 - Ms. Orren asks Ms. Hanlon about her work mentoring girls in grade 9-12; since forming networks and relationships are so important in this industry, what has been her experience with that? She answers that the girls really enjoy getting to try some of the machinery that they never get the chance to use, and doing projects when they come in for the mentoring activities.

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- Ms. Orren asks Ms. Paul if she's formed a network since she's started work in the fishery, and she says that she has her parents as well as some fellows on social media, and interacting with them has been a great experience.
 - It is important to let women do what they want to do and to teach all children a variety of skills, as well as think about how to eliminate gender biases from what we assume people can and cannot do.



Jasmine Paul

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD:

AUDIENCE COMMENT: The problem of getting women into the fishery needs to include places other than the boat; there's discrimination in the academic and legislative side of the fishery too, but the women in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans do not think there is an issue, and the government needs to get the message that gender must be considered in policies.

ORREN: We do need to rethink how we think about women in general, as well as in the fisheries, and keep the boat open to them, as well as recognizing all the other work they do.

Q: CLIMATE CHANGE COULD BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER; I WAS DISAPPOINTED NOT TO HEAR ABOUT THAT OR THE SUBJECT OF BIODIVERSITY LOSS, AND IT SEEMS LIKE SUCCESS ISN'T POSSIBLE IN THE FACE OF THESE ISSUES.

POWER: Climate change is the current problem, and current economic perspectives worsen that; everything is connected.

ORREN: Success also means improving yourself; fishing helps you reconnect with the world, and involving more women everywhere in the fishery brings more perspectives, which can lead to less destructive practices

Q: I'M A WOMAN IN A LEADERSHIP POSITION, AND THERE IS A LOT OF DISCRIMINATION; WHAT ARE YOUR IDEAS ABOUT THE MORE STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN IN THE FISHERIES?

ORREN: I recently completed a master's in fishing and was often the only woman in the classes, but the biggest issue is getting the necessary number of hours logged in the boat.

PAUL: The culture on boats is typically all-male, and breaking into that as a woman is difficult; this is why we need female skippers who can help women get sea time.

HANLON: One of the biggest barriers in terms of young people is the cost; licenses can be obtained more easily with more money, and resources in general tend to go to the highest bidder.

POWER: This is a gendered problem, as men have more access to this wealth, and it may be that someone needs to challenge this in court.

Q: WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT CO-OPS AND SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES?

POWER: They're more ecologically and ethically sound when compared to corporate fisheries, and the closer food sourcing is to home, the better.

ORREN: Small-scale handline fisheries are great, but we do need to improve how we process fish, since we only use about 35% of the cod we catch.