

**WIFE THE DECKHAND, HUSBAND THE SKIPPER. Authority and dignity among fishing couples.**

**Abstract**

This article describes the interaction between wives and husbands in Norwegian small-scale family fishing enterprises. It examines what happens in the power relationship between skipper and crew when women board a fishing vessel. How is the issue of the skipper's authority dealt with in the context of gender-equality characteristic of Norwegian society? I show here how men's authority is actively created by their wives as they fish together. Furthermore the article discusses the analytical tools appropriate to the analysis of gender-based human interaction on board fishing vessels. The data were collected by participant observation among fishing couples in northern Norway during the fall of 1993 and the spring of 1994.

**Introduction**

Studies of fishing communities that include a discussion of gender relations, have often been structured around the land/sea dichotomy as corresponding to female/male spheres. One important issue that has been addressed is how male absence from the domestic arena (while at sea) affects gendered power relations in household and community life (Andersen & Wadel 1972; Thompson 1985; Nadel-Klein & Davis 1988; Davis & Nadel-Klein 1992). Women's absence at sea has not attracted the same attention from scholars, however. Some researchers in maritime anthropological studies have focused on interaction among men on board fishing vessels. Such accounts consider the issue of power on board with regards to authority, decision-making and socialization. Often, interactions between skipper and crew, or among crew members, are seen as integrated with kinship and community ties which influence power relations and social behavior on board. In the accounts of interaction in all-male crews the issue of gender is nevertheless rarely touched upon (Andersen & Wadel 1972; Barth 1966; Cohen 1977; Dyer 1988; Nilsen 1980; Zulaika 1981).<sup>1</sup>

Women's presence in some contemporary commercial fisheries has not been ignored, however. Allison (1980) reports women's life stories and careers in the Pacific North West, while Kaplan (1988) discusses women's limited participation in commercial fishing as rooted in a lack of anticipatory socialization. In the context of Norwegian factory ships the dynamics of maintaining or subverting a gendered work hierarchy is a major issue in a study of the interaction between crew members of both sexes (Munk-Madsen 1990). This article pays special attention to the relations between fishing wives and husbands in Norwegian small-scale fishing.

In 1994 the Norwegian official register of fishers counted 22,920 fisherfolk. 561 of

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these (2.4%) were women (Directorate of Fisheries, personal communication). A questionnaire was distributed to the 590 fisherwomen who were registered in spring 1988. The responses showed that fisherwomen fall in two main groups: women working on factory ships, and women working in small-scale coastal fishing (Munk-Madsen 1990, 1991).

The results of the survey showed that in all Norwegian counties where fishing takes place, women participate in small-scale fishing. The majority of the small-scale fisherwomen live in northern Norway; most of them in Nordland county (34%). This is in accordance with the regional fleet structure, as the larger part of the small-scale fishing fleet is based in Nordland. Fisherwomen in small-scale coastal fishing have a mean age of 42.6 years. Their average number of children is 2.2, of which the majority are in their teens. The motivation these women give for participating in fishing includes "fishing as the best or only income opportunity", which ranked highest, followed by "family reasons". "Liking the work for its challenges and excitement" also had a high score among all kinds of fisherwomen (Munk-Madsen 1990, 1991).

Coastal fisherwomen typically fish together with their husband or common-law partner (Munk-Madsen 1990).<sup>2</sup> Women's participation in small-scale fishing is generally an adaptation to fishing as a household enterprise, sometimes based on the extended family. Pettersen (1996) reports wives' participation as crew to be one of several economic responses to the crisis in coastal fishing enterprises in Lofoten (Nordland).

My concern here is the interplay between gender relations (woman-man); work relations (skipper-crew) and family relations (wife-husband). My perspective is feminist in the sense that I see the gender hierarchy - male superiority economically, socially and culturally, in work and family relations - as a basic organizing principle (Hirdman 1988). This leads to my interest in investigating aspects of power and love<sup>3</sup> in the relationship between deckhand-wives and skipper-husbands. Fishing couples combine a work relation, which is supposed to be organized hierarchically, with a family relation supposedly based on love.

First, I will present my methods and analytical framework. Then I proceed to describe two fishing couples and their interaction. Secondly, I interpret the constitution of "Man, The Skipper" as women's creation. Finally, I discuss the possibilities and limitations of transaction analysis and feminist theory on gender hierarchy, care and sexuality in the understanding of this phenomenon, the relationship of deckhand-wives and skipper-husbands.

## **Methods**

Qualitative fieldwork, consisting of in-depth interviewing and three periods of

participant observation among small-scale fishing households in Nordland, was carried out in the autumn of 1993 and spring of 1994. The criterion for selection of households was that it should include a registered fisherwoman. My sample includes twelve fishing couples, with whom I have been communicating directly and three couples who have been the subject of conversation among others and/or been observed without direct contact.

My fieldwork also covered relations between fathers and daughters fishing together and enterprises run by an extended family, for instance a couple, the younger brother of the woman and their oldest daughter, or mother, father and son fishing together. Every family contributes to my understanding by providing context for my interpretations. It is, nevertheless, the relationship between wife and husband in the family enterprise that is the focus here.

My analysis of power and love in these relations is based on interpretations of close interaction between me and fishing couples. Such interpretations are fully subjective in the sense that I build on my experience and awareness of details, as well as subtleties in human interaction situations. To give my readers a chance to understand and evaluate the basis of my conclusions, I rely on thorough descriptions of experienced events.

### **Analytical framework**

Davis & Nadel-Klein (1992) systematized three different ways in which gender has been approached by scholars in the maritime arena: as separate spheres (either complimentary or oppositional), as a macro-level system, and lately also as culturally constructed and locally applied roles, statuses and positions. The latter approach is micro-level oriented and "looks at gender from an interpretative, reflexive and highly personal perspective" (ibid.:137). My approach in this article falls in the last category.

This study transgresses the spatial gender division of land and sea. It introduces gender as an important aspect of interaction on board and queries the issue of power between men and women in a fishing context. Rather than assuming female subordination, as criticized by Moore (1988), the gendered relationships are open to interpretation.

Barth (1966) claims transaction analysis to be a necessary tool if we want to understand the processes by which social forms are generated. Transactions are structured as strategic games where participants systematically try to insure that they gain as much, or more, than what they yield (Barth 1966). Transaction analysis is illustrated by a detailed study of the interaction among crew and skipper on Norwegian purse-seiners fishing for herring. Barth (1966) analyzes behavior on board and the fishing strategy as social forms determined by transactions of

authority and submission. The statuses of skipper and crew members are recreated by role performances in which the actors give and receive symbolic values to and from each other (Barth 1966). Thus his study has both theoretical and empirical interest for my analysis.

How the plurality of ties between members of a fishing crew, i.e. kinship-, neighborhood- and local community ties, may influence interaction on board and the performance of the skipper role has been discussed by Cohen (1977). While family or neighborhood relations on shore are structured in an egalitarian form, work relations on board have a hierarchical aspect. Not only his kinship relations, but also how a skipper's personality is perceived on shore, frame the way he can act out the necessary authority connected with the skipper role (Cohen 1977).

I am introducing gender into the issue of authority and submission in the interaction between skipper and deckhand on board a fishing vessel. Barth (1966) has highlighted transaction, Cohen (1977) kinship, community and personality, in the power relations on board. With the gender dimension, especially that related to wives and husbands, I am focusing on intimacy, sexuality and care in the skipper-crew hierarchy on small-scale fishing vessels.

Feminist theory contributes insights into the construction of the meaning of gender, gender roles and gender identity necessary to an understanding of the intersection of work- and gender roles among fishing couples. Haavind (1985) claims that, in the formally gender-equal society, as in the Nordic countries, women now have to perform their gender role so as to hide male dominance and female subordination. A hierarchy is no longer considered an appropriate relationship between the genders. The more highly valued status of womanhood is that of gender equality (Haavind 1985). This perspective poses an interesting opposition in relations on board, as the status of the skipper is that of authority.

How women enter a hierarchical skipper-crew relation may not be adequately grasped in a transaction analysis inspired by game theory. Feminist studies have paid much attention to the caretaking roles of women. Rationality of care (or rationality of responsibility) is a well-known concept in Norwegian feminist research (Sørensen 1982; Wærness 1984; Skjønberg 1995). By rationality in caring Wærness (1984) means the values most of us perceive as essential in caring relationships. She makes a theoretical distinction between: 1) caring for dependents, 2) caring for superiors, and 3) caring in symmetrical relations. She concentrates on the first. "In such relations the receiver of care is subordinate in relation to the caregiver. These groups are dependent on some people who feel an obligation or desire to care for others" (Wærness 1984:189).

The relation within fishing couples has aspects of care. Are skipper-husbands dependent on the care of their deckhand-wives, and thus subordinates? Are they

superiors who exploit their wives' care? Or do the fishing couples engage in a symmetrical care relation? The kind of care relation that exists between deckhand-wives and skipper-husbands is crucial for the interpretation of dominance and subordination.

Jonasdottir (1985) suggests that the explanation of continued patriarchal institutional forms in the formally equal Nordic societies has to be sought in male exploitation of women's caring and love. She is thus also viewing sexuality, the field of human needs and desires for pleasure, as a field of transactions, an area of unequal transaction between women and men as socio-sexual beings. Sexuality (sex, intimacy and play) plays a basic role in the wife-husband relation among fishing couples as in other couples.

Benjamin (1988) discusses the problem of domination in intimate relationships in a gender perspective. Mutual recognition requires acceptance of both separation and connection, of difference and sameness. Culturally, separation (the autonomous individual) is ranked higher than connection (interdependent individuals) and the split between these forms of relating is gendered. The ranking of separation over connection, matching an oppositional perception of masculinity and femininity, prepares the ground for relationships based on dominance and submission rather than mutual recognition. Benjamin (1988) claims that women are active agents who submit to being rewarded indirectly by the power of the other. She asks what kind of recognition women may gain from submitting to male domination, a key issue in this article.

I shall describe the interaction between wives and husbands in fishing in this framework before asking whether it is a game of power and transaction, a synergetic field of care and love, or both. In all the variations of the social form of a family fishing enterprise one can detect both desire and need as the basis for this adaptation. This is nevertheless, unevenly distributed. Britt in the first couple serves as an example of the predominantly desire-guided fisherwoman, whereas Tone in the second example belongs to the group of women fishing mainly out of necessity.

### **Britt and Bjørn: Fishing for fun**

When I first visit Britt and Bjørn they are at home. "Home" is a typical Norwegian detached house, clean and with nice furniture and a good deal of knick-knacks. We have coffee with three different homebaked cakes and a most delicious homemade marmalade made from wild berries that Britt herself picked in the forest. As Britt says, "if I could not keep up standards at home while fishing, I would definitely quit". She performs housework in the evenings and at the weekends. She may be tired, but it has to be done. It is important for Britt to run a proper home. She likes fishing, but will not allow this to be at the expense of her duties as a proper

housewife.

Britt started fishing for salmon as a child with her father. When she met Bjørn he had a small vessel and they started to fish together. Their companionship on board continued after the birth of their daughter, Hanna. They lived in Britt's parents' house in the early days of their marriage. Thus they could combine the irregular working hours of fishing with parenthood, as Britt's mother looked after her grandchild. Bjørn's parents and sister-in-law, have also been much involved in caring for their daughter when they were out early or late getting in. However, they also adapted their fishing so as to have opportunities to spend time with their daughter. Hanna is now 19, has moved away from home, and lives with her boyfriend in town. The lack of caretaking responsibilities has given Britt and Bjørn a greater fishing mobility. They live more on board and can explore other fishing grounds.

Britt seems to have an open nature and confidence in dealing with authorities. She was the one to talk with the fisheries advisor when they wanted to apply for subsidies for experimental fishing techniques. Thus, the application and licence was in her name. She also has the reputation of being a competent fisherwoman: I heard about her from others. Yet some areas of responsibility are Bjørn's only: care of machinery, vessel and gear. When I ask her about the reason for this she does not come up with an answer. I try out several explanations: she is not interested, she has enough to do with her housework; but she confirms none of them. Finally I leave the question with the understanding that there is something in this issue that I am not able to get hold on yet.

I visit them during the winter cod fishing season. They pursue this from their usual location, a small harbor in Lofoten. I want to go to sea with them. "That is for Bjørn to decide", says Britt promptly, "he is the skipper". And she looks openly at Bjørn without giving any opinions on the issue. Bjørn takes his time to decide. He turns to me to question me a little bit about my experience and we discuss safety matters. "Well, it's okay" he concludes, I can join them at sea the next morning. That night I slept on the couch in their living room at the quayside. This kind of hospitality is a matter of course. The fishing is a different matter.

Britt is amused by the situation and makes it publicly known by boasting on the radio about Bjørn having TWO women on board today. My presence seems to be a proof of his masculine virility, and she is proud of him.

Together we are deckhands, Britt and I, so today work runs faster than usual. As on most small vessels Bjørn can steer the vessel from the deck, which allows him to work with us. Britt is competent, of course. Once Bjørn reprimands me in a harsh voice, in a truly authoritative skipper's manner, for the way I take fish out of the nets. He never needs to reprimand Britt. It is an open question if he ever does

demonstrate his skipper's authority to his wife. The authority-submission game needed to make an example of the skipper-crew relation may be best performed by her, to avoid ill feeling between them.

On breaks in the wheelhouse, while moving to haul the next row of nets, they complement each other in explaining their fishing strategy and actual decisions. Bjørn always steers the vessel. Today we will prolong the buoy ropes. It is hard to distinguish the decision to change the rope length as HIS decision, because they both agree that this is the right thing to do under these conditions. Nevertheless, I am sure that Britt would never question his decision, if in doubt. As the skipper he has the authority in these matters, but also the responsibility for any mistaken evaluation.

Today I take Britt's place when we are in the wheelhouse. I sit at the chart table and press my feet against the edge of Bjørn's skipper's chair, so as not to fall with the rolling of the boat. Britt nestles close up to Bjørn's back, standing motionless between his chair and the wall. The atmosphere in the wheelhouse is warm and intimate. The narrow space creates a physical intimacy, although they are at work and dressed in oilskins. Britt is breathing in his hair. In our first interview Britt explained that working together on board made a married couple good comrades. Thus, being together all the time did not create tension and conflicts, as many people would tend to believe.

The wheelhouse is the stage for the continuous drama of the skipper-crew relation. On this stage Bjørn sits at the steering wheel and Britt stands close behind him. They interweave intimacy and discussion of fishing gear. As such, the site seems to be a very appropriate one for intertwining the roles of wife and husband in love and workmates in mutual respect.

Although the next wife presented may have a different motivation for fishing, power and love, authority and submission are still significant. Let us turn to Tone and Johan.

### **Tone and Johan: It takes many a strong woman**

I found them at the pub. I had looked for them first on board and then at the fishermen's welfare center. They go to the pub every night during the winter spawning cod fishing season.

I ask if I can join them at sea. Tone does not even answer, just nods her head in the direction of Johan. That question has to be posed to him. It is no problem with Johan. I can join them at sea the next day, and he offers to buy me another beer, but I decline and go to my living quarters at the harbor to have a good night sleep before we leave.

I climb on board the following morning at a quarter to six. Looking in through the door to the steering house and the cabin, I decide to wait a minute, as Johan is just getting out of his bunk. Before he is quite dressed, Tone tells me to come into the warmth and have some coffee. She hurries him and tells him to clean up the table after he has eaten what he wants. Every morning Tone rises first and gets herself a cup of hot coffee, sitting alone in silence in the steering house. Then she wakes up Johan, offering him hot coffee in his bunk. This morning he is late due to a hangover from yesterday evening's drinking, she says. "He should get to know his limits", like she knows hers: "Two pints of beer a night, one for each leg to walk on board in balance". There is no anger or resentment in her voice, but she wants to be ready to leave at six sharp.

On our way out of the harbor Tone and I put on oilskins. It is not far to go to their nets. Johan is steering and talking to their partner boat on the radio. He cannot find their buoys. Tone and he discuss the position. He claims a nearby buoy to be one of theirs and steers towards it, while she denies it. To get a better view, Tone goes out on deck. Having located the correct buoy, she grabs the outdoor steering wheel, which overrides the wheel inside. Without no comment to Johan inside, she corrects the course, and we soon start hauling the nets. Her act of taking over the wheel is not at all demonstrative. It seems that further argument would have exposed his mistake. Her correction of the skipper's course is undercommunicated by the silence around it.

While hauling, Johan comes out on deck. To my amazement he does not put on oilskin. With two deckhands, he is going to be the Grand Skipper, says he. The sea is rough, but the catch is small. Due to the weather conditions, we go to calm seas behind some skerries to clean the fish. Yet we are back in the harbor before noon.

Johan prepares coffee and lunch while Tone and I clean the deck. We eat and talk as we wait for the quay workers to be ready to unload us. Finally, Tone and Johan decide that we can do the unloading ourselves. Johan wants to get finished and get back to bed.

Tone checks the weights and the invoice from the fish buyer while Johan takes the vessel to its berth. Once the catch has been delivered Tone and I climb on board again and clean the nets together while we sing, chat and joke with the fisherfolk on the other vessels who are also on deck cleaning nets. Johan is already in his bunk. Tone always wants to finish work before she rests. She says she often cleans the nets alone, but that does not bother her, she likes to be alone in her own thoughts or chatting and joking with her colleagues on the neighboring vessels.

Until two years ago Tone used to cook dinner for them every day after fishing work was finished. This has changed. Johan is also responsible for food on board now. Tone decided that she did not want the sole responsibility. They now take turns



cooking every other day. He may take her out to eat on his cooking days sometimes, if he prefers.

When Tone and Johan met she had a two-year-old daughter. Tone and her daughter both went on board the vessel, and since then Tone has been fishing with Johan. They live on a small island. Tone's daughter has now just left home to go to secondary school on the mainland. Tone's mother stays at home with their ten-year-old son. Tone's mother has lived with them for the last 7 years. This arrangement is of mutual benefit, and neither Johan nor Tone have any complaints about living in an extended family: they have privacy when fishing. Her mother lost her job when the fish plant closed where she lived on the mainland. She was widowed early and is single. Now she has part-time employment at the post office on the island, and can take care of the children. "We do not live in a castle, instead we like to have a good time", says Tone. They prefer to spend their money on the good life than on keeping up housing standards. "We do what is necessary", says she, "like replacing rotten window frames". It is no secret that they visit the pub every day during this season, and also like to have some beers when at home where there is no pub.

Johan has been fishing all his life. He is the skipper and sole owner of the boat, as they are not married. It is evident that he drinks to the limit and that Tone keeps the work going on board. Her mother is at home with the children, she herself is on board his vessel with him. "It takes many a strong woman to keep life and soul together along the coast", says Tone. She knows her worth.

### **Man, the Skipper - Woman, the Creator**

As fieldwork progressed my confusion evaporated about the areas of knowledge and responsibility which Britt left entirely to Bjørn, in spite of her genuine interest and competence in fishing. Something must distinguish them to constitute HIM as the skipper and HER as a deckhand, I believe. How the gendered social forms of deckhand-wives and skipper-husbands can be explained is the subject of the following analysis.

If authority and submission among skipper and crew cannot be played out on board, by his command over her, because they are wife and husband who are basically supposed to be equals within the family, it has to be symbolized and acknowledged in other ways. However, it remains to be explained why it is so important for them to confirm the husbands' skipper status when both wife and husband are on board. To understand her over-communication of his skipper status (Goffman 1969), one has to see the skipper-deckhand relation in a gender perspective.

One explanation may be that the skipper status is powerful component in establishing male identity, including male authority. Fishing and masculinity are culturally closely related. When women start fishing, the symbolic value of

masculinity gained by being a fisherman diminishes. As masculinity is also connected to authority, the skipper status may then be of more importance in the construction of masculinity when a woman is on board. Yet it cannot easily be played out in an authoritative manner on his side towards his wife. She has to submit voluntarily, and apparently she finds some ways to signify this.

One way is to leave the steering wheel to him in all fishing and harbor operations. Tone violates this when it is too impractical, but without saying anything. Another sphere has to do with decisions on taking passengers. Every time this has been the issue it has been a clear occasion for underlining skipper authority. It is in sharp contrast to the hospitality norms on shore. The home is usually the domain of the woman, but inviting guests here is not guarded with this kind of gendered territorial symbolism. I have been invited to dine or to stay overnight in their home also by husbands, not only by wives.

Whereas I as a researcher have focused on women's work and adaptation, all wives have communicated their husbands' skipper authority to me in several ways. Torill and Pål push their playing of the roles Man the Skipper, Woman the Deckhand, to the very limit. I met them in the Lofoten fishery. On the quayside, Pål held forth concerning fishing strategies and Torill actively supported him by under-communicating her own contribution (Munk-Madsen 1995). Joining them at sea, it turns out that she told him what to say in the radio, showed him how to fix the gear, advised him in where to put the nets, yet left the final decision to him. Later it was also revealed that Torill was the owner of the boat, and that she fished on her own for six years. Now they have been together for four years. He has quit being a sailor and signed on her vessel as the Skipper.

Contrary to Haavind's (1985) argument on women hiding male dominance to present themselves as equal partners, the fisherwomen are actively seeking to support a picture of their own submission to male skipper authority. Women are nurturing the masculine identity of their husbands, by avoiding threatening the symbolic values of authority, and by supporting their chances to show their skipper status through their decision-making power in front of the world outside the family. The puzzle concerns how this fits together with being an equal non-submissive wife. If we are to analyze this as a transaction of symbolic values, what do women gain by being submissive?

Having a masculine husband may prove one's own femininity. To support his skipper authority in front of others is to pay tribute to his masculinity, which again reflects her femininity, as they are related as wife and husband. The social construction of gender takes place in relationships, and the partnership is a central one in this respect. A fisherwoman may be in need of confirmation of her femininity, as she is doing men's work in a male arena. Her competence as a deckhand cannot help in this respect. Whatever she is doing well on the fishing

vessel carries cultural symbolic values of masculinity, not femininity. Many women appreciate access to these values, but their femininity is at stake. Britt is not alone in her strategy of acting as a good and responsible housewife. However, this is not visible as confirmation of femininity at sea or on the quayside where much of daily life takes place. The vessel is an arena which is devoid of positive symbols of femininity.

Creation of her husband's masculinity is an indirect way of presenting her own femininity. It makes her presentation of self dependent on him. Thus, as he is dependent on her creation of his authority, her femininity is dependent on his masculinity.

Visiting these family enterprises does not leave an impression of women's submission to male authority, although men have the first and last say concerning fishing, i.e. men are skippers. The women are aware of their indispensability in making this a meaningful life economically as well as socially. They act self confident, but they also act as if they are aware of the fragile character of their husbands' male identity being dependent on their behavior. They care about his masculine identity which is threatened by their presence on board. Who holds power in such a constellation?

#### **Discussion: Transaction or interdependence?**

In the Barths' transaction example (1966) the skipper must provide maximum fishing output and/or an honorable ranking position among competing vessels in return for a stable and competent crew. Authority and submission on board is based on this deal. This argument falls short with regard to the fishing couples. She will not leave to be crew on another vessel next season if he is a poor skipper, and he will not hire another deckhand, even if he could find somebody even more competent than her. They are bound together in a personal relationship of stronger ties than the work relation. Wife-the-deckhand and husband-the-skipper do not economically depend on a gendered authority/submission relation. The rationality behind women's creation of male authority on board may be better understood in the light of a rationality of care than of a rationality of efficiency.

Recognizing the need of the other (the confirmation of authority and masculinity), acknowledging this need, and acting to fulfil it, is characteristic in caretaking. To be receptive to the needs of others is traditionally part of feminine behavior and essential in caretaking relationships; it may be confirming femininity (Wærness 1984; Benjamin 1988).

The fisheries crisis has been an economic threat to fishing families and communities. Women were the first to raise it as an cultural crisis as well. Fishing families lost income, but fishermen lost their identity as hardworking breadwinners

and providers with the restrictions on their fishing activity. Women's role as providers increased in importance (Pettersen 1994; Gerrard 1995). As a feminist I have been surprised by (and at times disliked) the eager concern for masculine identity women have expressed as one of their major concerns in the wake of the crisis.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, there is a parallel between the fisheries crisis, which threatens the representation of male supremacy as providers, and women's participation on board, which threatens male supremacy as fishers. In both cases, women care a lot for the masculine identity of their husbands through under-communication of their own contributions in what has been his field of responsibility. Is this to be understood as an anti-feminist position, or is it a position of a powerful loving wife?

The strategies which I have identified here are challenging to both transaction analysis and feminist analysis. We might say the fisherwomen act out of love. We might say that they are powerful, as their husbands' gender identity is dependent on their behavior and care. We might say that they are powerless, as they are bound to present their femininity through submission to male authority.

If the relationship is analyzed as a transaction of symbolic values, both have to give and take. Men gain the symbolic value of authority and masculinity. Women, on the other hand, gain confirmation of their femininity through voluntary submission to male authority; they are caring. The representation is women's creation. Women are submissive but active, whereas men are authoritative but passive.

A transaction does not have room for synergetic effects, like love. To get something, one has to give something. It is a cost-benefit analysis which is centered on the individual benefit, not the relational one. The relational aspect, the interdependence of the perception of self, is central to Benjamin's (1988) analysis. Mutual recognition is indispensable and rewards both; it is synergetic. What characterizes the relation between deckhand-wives and skipper-husbands is that it is a relation of interdependence. The individual benefit cannot be separated from the relationship.

Acting out of care or love is giving something without giving up anything. The equal caring relation is a relation of mutuality. Thus, the aspect of care in this gendered relationship disturbs the transactional framework. It also disturbs the feminist analysis of the gender system as an order of male dominance and female subordination resting on gender difference and male supremacy (Hirdman 1988). Gender difference becomes rewarding.

Whereas Jonasdottir (1988) suggests investigating the field of sexuality as a gendered field of unequal transactions, my suggestion is to at ways in which sexual difference may create synergetic relations and how this generates social forms. The relationships under study seem to be ruled as much by the power of female care as

by that of male dominance.

The sexual tension present on board may be connected to the aspect of gender difference. The construction of masculinity and femininity in the field of sexuality needs difference. Femininity is not present in external material symbols on board. Deckhand wives dress like male workers. The affection and attraction between the partners has to be expressed directly between them, inside the framework of co-operation on board.

Working together on board seems to create friendship and mutual respect in which intimacy is nourished. The intimacy between the couples may develop on the base of their link in the comrade- and partnership. The friendship grows out of being a family and being workmates in a narrow physical space, facing fishing and nature together, and coping with these demands in co-operation.

When sexual difference and intimate friendship come together, then the vessel is running on love. The maritime hierarchy and the cultural perceptions of superior masculinity, however, are facts that these couples have to deal with. They face the myth of gender equality widespread in the Nordic countries, but more important in the fishing context is the myth of male dominance that is so important for male identity.

#### **Notes**

1. See Andersen & Wadel (1972), which includes several essays on the topic as well as further references to earlier works.

2. 87% of the coastal fisherwomen fish together with their partner.

Common-law partnerships are common and they are not differentiated from marriages in everyday life. What differs between the two types of partnerships is the legal right to custody of children and ownership of fishing capital. In the following, I use the terms wives and husbands for the sake of simplicity.

3. I use the notion of love in the kind of relationships under study as a synthesis of intimacy, sexuality, care and respect.

4. This was clearly expressed at the coastal women's conference held on Sørøya in January 1990 as a response to the crisis. It is also strongly expressed at gatherings of the Norwegian Association of Fisherwomen (originally in the meaning 'fishermen's wives').

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fishing practices  
fishing women

fisherwomen

women in fisheries

gender

fisheries management

conditions of work

labour

Norway Smallscale Fisheries

103

16 pages

