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Staying in or getting out: social capital and occupational decision-making among Louisiana's Croatian oyster harvesters

Carl Marie Riden

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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**STAYING IN OR GETTING OUT:
SOCIAL CAPITAL AND OCCUPATIONAL DECISION-MAKING
AMONG LOUISIANA'S CROATIAN OYSTER HARVESTERS**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Sociology

by

Carl Marie Riden

B.A. University of Alabama, 1992

M.S., Virginia Polytechnic and State University, 1995

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ABSTRACT

Social capital-resources embedded in social structures that can be accessed or mobilized by individuals in pursuit of some goal- is the most prominent in a long line of concepts developed by social scientists who wish to incorporate social and cultural elements into models of economic behavior. The research presented here is a qualitative exploration of social capital, its forms and functions, and its relationship to the occupational decision-making of current and former oyster harvesters in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana. Within this close-knit Croatian-American community, oyster harvesting has a long and rich history. As a result, extensive social capital through which individuals can access the equipment, financing, and knowledge necessary to enter the industry has been readily available to most young men who chose to take up the work. While families in this community have historically encouraged their children to pursue oyster harvesting as an occupation, conditions in the industry have changed in recent decades leading many Croatian oystermen to question their future in the industry. For those who decide to leave harvesting, successful transition into a new occupation is often facilitated through relationships with individuals outside the oystering community. Whether acquaintances made during earlier work experiences, friends met while attending college, or family members in other lines of work, these individuals provide needed information, reference, and job opportunities. Finally, neither current nor former oyster harvesters interviewed for this study state that they would encourage their children to enter the oyster business, rather they report advising their children to focus on high school completion and college attendance. In several cases they even describe actively discouraging their children's involvement in the family oyster business. As a result, the occupational goals of the next generation, and thus the types of social capital they will need and have access to, are likely to be quite different than their parents or grandparents before them. This study demonstrates the importance of exploring each of these pieces- the formation of occupational goals and the availability and accessibility of social capital- if we are to understand how social capital operates within particular social contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Like other fisheries in North America, Louisiana's oyster harvesters are facing a growing array of problems including increasingly restrictive regulations and high operating costs. In addition, these harvesters must deal with the rapid loss of the state's wetlands, increasing industrial pollution, and declining water quality associated with a rapidly growing coastal population. Each of these problems is made more significant by the sessile nature of the oyster and the industry's historic reliance on private leases and mariculture.

While working on a project for the Louisiana Sea Grant Program concerning labor displacement in the Louisiana oyster industry, I was confronted by some interesting facts. This survey of a representative sample of Louisiana oystermen revealed that though aware of both the threats to their industry and the potential negative impacts on their operations, few oyster harvesters planned to quit. In fact, most stated that they would go into the industry again. Despite their high levels of satisfaction, and their families' long history in oystering, however, said they would not encourage their children to go into oyster harvesting. How can one explain this seemingly contradictory set of findings?

Sociologists have long been intrigued by instances where individuals appear to make economically irrational decisions. Rural sociology, in particular, has been confronted with many situations in which workers, in rural resource-based industries from farming to timber to fishing, have struggled to stay afloat despite seemingly insurmountable environmental and economic obstacles. Why do these workers continue in an industry that is in decline? A perusal of the available literature would suggest one of three factors: 1) they have few options in the rural economy; 2) the culture surrounding their occupation emphasizes values other than economic gain; or 3) they have a high level of attachment to their community and/or occupation. What is missing from this literature, however, is any mention of the impact of micro-level social structures on the occupational decision-making of such individuals.

The research presented here will address this gap by drawing social capital into the discussion. Social capital is the most prominent in a long line of concepts developed by social scientists who wish to incorporate social and cultural elements into models of economic behavior. It is most often viewed as a resource that "inheres in the structure of relations between and among actors" and that individuals can tap in order to achieve some goal (Coleman 1988: S98). It also encompasses information channels, norms and sanctions, and obligations and expectations that shape goals and influence behavior (Coleman 1988; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993).

Such a brief overview masks the vibrant debate surrounding social capital, however. There is considerable disagreement over the definition of social capital, its functions, and its outcomes. Even so, few studies have examined the ways in which it develops and operates in particular social settings. Most approaches to social capital use survey methods to count the number of person's in a household, determine who an individual knows, or measure participation rates in a range of organizations (see Bourdieu 1986, Coleman 1988, and Putnam 1993) . Such measures provide little insight into the nature and content of the relationships that comprise social capital nor do they reveal the processes through which it influences individual decision-making. To solve this problem, Wall, Ferazzi, and Schryer (1998) argue for a more qualitative

approach that could provide a more realistic picture of how social capital functions in a community, while clarifying some of the problems surrounding the concept itself.

The dilemma faced by Louisiana's oyster harvesters provides an excellent opportunity to do just that. Using an adaptation of McCallister and Fischer's (1978) "procedure for surveying personal networks," in combination with a non-scheduled standardized interview, I expand on the survey results discussed above in order to explore the occupational decision-making of individual harvesters, as well as the processes through which social capital influences such decisions. The discussion to follow will detail this research and the path leading to its design.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There has long been an interest among social scientists in how social structure affects the economic decisions individuals make. Of particular interest are situations where the decisions appear to be “irrational” or not aimed at maximizing economic rewards. Such instances have been acknowledged and investigated in many rural communities where industries such as farming, ranching, timber or fishing, continue to be of primary importance. Each of these natural resource industries faces an array of problems, both natural and human-made, that threaten both the vitality of the industry and its ability to support its workforce, yet study after study reveals that workers continue to be satisfied with their work, have no intention of quitting, and would make the same choice of occupation if they had to decide again (Apostle et al. 1985, Carroll and Lee 1990, Gatewood and McCay 1990, Garrity-Blake 1996). Research in the areas of farming and fishing also illustrates the many strategies adopted by practitioners in order to remain in the industry (Pettersen 1996, Binkley 1996, Salamon 1985). Why do individuals continue to work in an industry that is in decline? Why do they struggle to keep their farm or operation going when they cannot make a living in that industry without supplementing the household income from other sources? What enables/encourages others to follow a new path?

In exploring such questions, existing literature tends to focus on either macro-structural issues (weakening job security and increasing labor displacement) that leave resource industry workers with few options (Lasley et al. 1995, Lobao and Schulman 1991, Meril 1995) or on aspects of culture such as values and goals that de-emphasize profit (Barlett 1993, Gatewood and McCay, Salamon and Davis-Brown, 1986). Attachments to occupation and community that preclude or discourage exit are also frequently cited as contributing factors (Apostle et al. 1985, Carrol and Lee 1990). Little attention has been paid, however, to the role of social structure on the micro-level.

Granovetter (1985) argues that individuals do not act or make decisions outside a social context, nor do they simply follow a script determined by the set of social categories that they occupy, rather their actions are embedded in “concrete, ongoing systems of social relations”(487).

These relationships and networks of relationships then have the potential to generate trust, establish expectations, and create and enforce norms- all important components of what has come to be called “social capital”.

Social capital is usually presented as a resource individuals can tap, like financial or human capital, to facilitate production of some good or goal. In North American sociology, the concept most often refers to “mutual relations, interactions, and networks that emerge among human groups, as well as the level of trust (seen as the outcome of obligations and norms which adhere to the social structure) found within a particular group or community” (Wall et al. 1998:304). Such patterns of relationships, norms, and trust, are also seen as resources that facilitate coordination and cooperation, enhance the benefits of investment in physical and human capital, and speed the transmission of information and innovative ideas (Putnam 1993). Social capital may also encourage support of group members and their goals and create access to both economic and information resources (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Wall et al. 1998).

It is important to realize, however, that this positive/instrumental perspective on social capital, while valid, often fails to accommodate the diversity of goals and values that can exist in

human groups (Wall et al. 1998). As pointed out by Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993), the social structures that comprise social capital can “support, constrain, or derail the goal-seeking behavior of individuals” and can even redefine the content of the goals themselves (1321). Likewise, forms of social capital can subvert individual liberties in that norms and networks that aid some groups or individuals may obstruct others (Putnam 1993).

Different forms of social capital may also be at work. Portes (1998) argues that varieties of social capital can derive from different sources- including internalized norms; reciprocity transactions, bounded solidarity, and enforceable trust- which differentially impact economic action. The location, in both social and geographic space, of the relationships that, at least in part, comprise social capital has also been used to describe various forms that offer different possibilities for those who utilize them. Woolcock (1998) argues that there are two dimensions of social capital at the micro level. Intra-community ties, labeled *integration*, allow members to provide one another with services and resources such as job referrals or child care, while, *linkage*, or extra-community networks, opens up new opportunities. The presence or absence of these two components greatly impacts the role social capital plays for individuals in given communities. In addition, the goals individuals work toward vary and may require different types of social capital. Lin (2002) suggests that the types of social capital available to an individual in a given social context may not be those needed by that person in order to achieve his or her goals.

As this discussion indicates, there are several aspects of social capital that must be explored if one is to understand how it can impact the economic decisions made by individuals. First, there are the ties themselves. It is essential to understand what types of ties exist within a given group and where those ties are located within both social and geographic space. Of equal importance is an understanding of context in which social capital develops. What is valued, discouraged, encouraged, or expected? What goals are supported or subverted? Finally, what are the outcomes- the costs or benefits- of social capital? Such networks of relationships can provide access to information, economic resources (loans, job opportunities), and needed services (childcare, repairs) (Putnam 1993, Woolcock 1998), but they can also place constraints on individual action, limit receptivity to outside culture, and enforce demands on members (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993).

The most extensive exploration of social capital on the micro level has occurred in studies of ethnic entrepreneurship (Woolcock 1998). Researchers in this area have examined the way in which the patterns and nature of social ties influence economic behavior in tightly knit immigrant communities (Wilson and Portes 1980, Light and Bonacich 1988, Portes and Zhou 1992). While it is clear that social capital, in this context, provides privileged access to resources, preferences in economic transactions, and support of members' goals, research also supports the view that it can serve to reshape goals, restrain goal-seeking behavior, and restrict individual freedoms and outside contacts (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). While these researchers focus specifically on immigrant and minority communities there is no reason to think that the same arguments could not be applied to other tightly knit cultures/communities.

Communities associated with many rural, resource dependent industries, including fishing, have been described as occupational communities (Lummis 1977; Davis 1986; Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988; Carol and Lee 1990). An occupational community exists where work and private lives converge. In such communities, values and world views tend to center on the occupation and its culture (Salamon 1971, Lummis 1977, Blauner 1986). Likewise, the identities and self-images of members are rooted in their work (Salamon 1971, Carroll and Lee 1990). Such ardent attachment to a primary work group, combined with on and off the job friendships between members, leads to a strong group solidarity (Salaman 1975; Davis 1986).

As such, affiliation with an occupational community can provide powerful incentives for members to hang on during difficult periods. Cooperative reciprocal relationships among kin, neighbors, and friends, for example, help members stay afloat in the outports of rural Newfoundland by providing needed labor, equipment and expertise (Richling 1985). Little else has been explored with respect to social capital in such contexts, however. I would argue that such tightly knit communities, set apart by occupation, and often by culture and/or ethnicity as well (see Doeringer et al. 1986, Kennedy 1997), provide a good opportunity to explore the complexities of social capital.

The following literature review will detail the current debate surrounding the concept of social capital. Through a discussion of the problems faced by those who wish to use the concept and the solutions suggested by its critics, I will develop a framework for exploring how social capital operates on the ground. I will also provide support for my decision to study social capital in a rural occupational community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

MACRO-STRUCTURAL CHANGES

When trying to understand why workers in rural resource industries such as fishing continue in their current occupations, one area of focus has been the changing economic conditions in rural areas and the resulting lack of work alternatives. The post-World War II period in the U.S. was characterized by capital-intensive production techniques, high productivity growth and increasing real wages (Kenney 1989, Lobao and Lasley 1995). Escalating competition and the steady development of new technologies pushed industries throughout the economy toward the centralization and concentration of production (Lobao 1990). Natural resource industries such as of farming, mining, logging, and fishing are no exception (Swanson and Luloff 1988).

This process continued through the 1960's and early 1970's, a period during which rural America experienced extensive economic growth that resulted in diversity and the expansion of employment opportunities and increased earnings for rural residents (Duncan 1992). Resource-based industries boomed and growth in manufacturing continued. In rural areas, however, this growth in the manufacturing sector was mainly in low-wage, labor-intensive industries such as apparel, textiles, wood products employment (Brown and Deavers 1988).

The late 1970's and early 80's saw another shift in the national economic structure (Lobao and Schulman 1991). National recession, low commodity prices, rising real interest rates, and international economic stagnation (Duncan 1992; Lasley et al.1995; Adams 1994; Schulman et al.1994) resulted in declining real per capita incomes, escalating unemployment, and an increasingly unpredictable economy (Kenney et al. 1989). Rural areas saw the decline of durable goods manufacturing and other high wage employment (Labao and Schulman 1991). Natural resource industries, which had experienced growth through the 70's, underwent a sharp decline (Swanson and Luloff 1990; Duncan 1992) suffering steady losses of employment and adding few new jobs to the economy (Killian and Beaulieu 1995). Manufacturing industries that had moved to rural areas in prior decades, such as textiles and furniture, closed rural plants and moved to Third World Countries (Duncan 1992; Lobao and Schulman 1991; Pulver, Falk and Lyson 1988). The majority of job growth during this period was in the service sector. In rural areas, however, this growth was mostly in retail sales, food, and entertainment, where wages are low (Duncan, Labao and Schulman 1991).

Discussion of these macro-structural conditions illustrates why rural areas continue to lag behind urban areas with respect to skills, jobs, and wages. The lack of stable well-paying jobs in many rural areas could have a definite effect on fishers' decisions to continue in their current occupation. Townsend and Wilson (1985), for example, suggests fishers will continue in their current line of work only as long as their profits from fishing are greater than what they could earn in other occupations. Many researchers argue, however, that the decision to continue or discontinue fishing is much more complex.

Durrenberger (1996) found that small-scale shrimpers' decisions to keep fishing were anything but rational in the neo-classical economic sense. The Mississippi shrimpers in his study continued to harvest shrimp well beyond the point where it was economically reasonable to do so. Similarly, Garrity-Blake (1996) found that fishers in North Carolina were reluctant to leave

fishing completely even when other work was available. To understand the decisions of these fishers one has to move beyond standard economic and structural models.

THE IMPACT OF CULTURE

Research suggests that many fishers see their occupation as much more than a source of income. When interviewed, they will often describe fishing as a way of life; something that is “in their blood” (Margavio and Forsyth 1996; Garrity-Blake 1996; Meril 1995; Ellis 1986). Fishers describe the freedom they enjoy in owning their own boats and setting their own schedules. They take pride in their independence and express their pleasure in working outdoors in an occupation that is not predictable. Fishing, as Meril (1995) states, is “not just a job but a prescription for how to lead one’s life, defining who one was, is and will be.” Though discussed often in the fishing literature, the implications of such a strong attachment to occupation and lifestyle on fishers’ ability and/or willingness to continue fishing during difficult periods has rarely been addressed directly.

The same phenomenon has, however, been explored extensively in the case of family farming. Family farming has grown increasingly risky, yet those who operate such farms persist. Like the fishers mentioned above, many family farmers perceive their occupation as more than a job. Rosenblatt (1990:73) found that family farmers often see farming as a way of life characterized by “a sense of purpose, spiritual values, a sense that what one is doing is the right way to live and that alternative ways are inferior.” These farmers also value the freedom from supervision, flexibility of work pace, independence, and the challenges farming offers (Barlett, 1993; Solomon 1989). It has even been suggested that they operate under a different set of assumptions than their large-scale counterparts. Barlett (1993) found that many family farmers based their sense of success on their ability to maintain their farming lifestyle rather than on their consumption level or income. Similarly, Mooney (1983) argues that family farms survive by maintaining a rationality that does not focus on profit maximization. These farmers, he argues, retain an intimate relationship to their work in which there is no division between work, family, or culture. Here the farmer’s work determines and influences every aspect of life. This mind-set may enable family farms to withstand pressures that would drive a less emotionally invested person to leave the industry.

AFFECTIVE ELEMENTS

Another important factor that could influence economic decision-making is attachment. Fishers tend to have strong kin and community ties. The nature of their occupation tends to isolate them, both temporally and geographically, while reinforcing their connections to one another (Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988). Studies also reveal that fishers express an extreme reluctance to move (Apostle, Kasdan, and Hanson 1985; Deseran 1997). Such community attachments could have a serious impact on the decision to exit or remain in fishing. Research also shows that fishers often demonstrate strong attachment to their occupation (Apostle et al. 1985, Davis 1986, Lummis 1977). Fishers share a strong sense of occupational identity and their work and family lives are heavily interwoven (Margavio et al. 1996). Many also identify themselves as “fishermen” whether they are currently fishing or not (Margavio et al. 1996; Ellis

1986; Garrity-Blake 1996). In short, many fishing groups can be described as occupational communities (Lummis 1977; Davis 1986; Nadel 1984; Nadel-Klein and Davis 1988).

An occupational community is characterized by a high degree of convergence between work and non-work life. Members share a “common life” that is distinct from others in society and their values and world views tend to center on the occupation and its culture (Salaman 1971; Salaman 1975; Carroll and Lee 1990). They are highly satisfied with their work, demonstrate a high degree of job involvement, and express a sense of belonging that sometimes generates an “us and them” mentality (Davis 1986). This strong group solidarity leads to a shared identity- a distinct self-image- affiliated with the occupation (Davis 1986; Salaman 1975). Members see themselves as “ army officers”, “timberworkers”, or “fishers”. Their work defines *who* they are not just *what* they do.

Affiliation with an occupational community can provide powerful incentives for members to hang on during difficult periods. On the other hand, occupational communities may limit individual social mobility and prevent social action that could improve the lives of members (Davis 1986). As Carroll and Lee (1990:150) state, a strong occupational community can serve to “impede problem solving behavior that could lead to the creation of alternative livelihoods,” while leaving members unprepared for work outside the occupation.

Each of these three areas of research contributes to an understanding of rural resource industries and those who work in them. While, it is important to acknowledge the economic landscape in which today’s rural workers must operate, at the same time, one must keep in mind that many farmers, timberworkers, and fishers place great value on the lifestyle they associate with their occupations. The flexibility, independence, and sense of challenge they enjoy may weigh heavily in any decision to pursue alternative employment. Attachment to community and occupation can also influence workers’ willingness to explore available options. None of these strands of inquiry, however, directly addresses the potential impact of micro-level social structures on the economic decision-making of these workers.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Portes and Sensenbrenner argue that there is a pressing need for sociologists dissatisfied with individualistic and culturalistic analyses of phenomena such as socioeconomic attainment to examine how “social structure constrains, supports, or derails individual goal-seeking behavior” (1993:1321). The best way to do this, and the one Portes and Sensenbrenner undertake, is through the concept of social capital. In the following sections I will explore the evolution of the concept of social capital, its definitions, and the functions it is believed to serve. I will then discuss several problems that impede its effective use and some possible solutions. Finally, I will consider how exploring social capital in the context of fishing communities can broaden our understanding of the concept and the role such capital plays in economic decision-making.

The Path to Social Capital

Classical and neo-classical economics hold that individuals are rational and self-interested and that they act, with minimal influence from social relations, to maximize utility (Granovetter 1985, Coleman 1988). Edwards and Foley (1998) argue that this “rational actor model” has grown in popularity among contemporary social scientists. Those interested in exploring economic and political behavior from this point of view, however, continue to struggle with the influences of norms, values, and social networks; none of which are easily explained by

the pursuit of rational self-interest. In order to deal with this “human element”, a series of concepts- human capital, cultural capital, social capital- have been brought into the discussion (Paxton 1999, Woolcock 1998).

The term “capital”, originally used by economists to refer to “productive wealth which can be employed for creation of more wealth”, has come to represent a broader capacity to mobilize social and cultural resources as well as economic ones (Wall et al. 1998: 313). The first in a series of ideas to arise from this shift in understanding was human capital. This concept, introduced by Becker (1956) and expounded on by Schultz (1961), represents the notion that, through acquiring knowledge, skills and capabilities, an individual is able to act in new ways that facilitate productive activity (Coleman 1988). By foregoing present earnings to invest in education or on-the job training, for example, one is able to build a stock of human capital that enhances his/her current labor skills and productivity, thus augmenting future income (Beaulieu and Mulkey 1995). Human capital is not evenly distributed, however. That some persons are better able to invest in the acquisition of human capital skills than others is a major criticism of human capital theory. In response to this concern, the focus of research on both economic decision-making and community development has broadened to include the potential influences of non-economic elements outside of the individual.

As Woolcock (1998: 155) points out, most people live and work in social groups that shape their identities, values, and priorities and that “inform, correct, and guide” their productive lives. To address these external influences on the individual, two additional forms of capital have been explored. The first, cultural capital, refers to cultural characteristics that can, under certain conditions, be transformed into economic wealth (Bourdieu 1986). Unlike human capital, which resides in the individual, cultural capital refers more a mechanism through which individuals, interacting within a culture or sub-culture, are able to establish or achieve social or economic goals. Farkas (1996) argues, for example, that parents from diverse cultural backgrounds differentially influence the development of skills, habits, styles, and expectations in their children, which in turn impacts the opportunities available to, and choices made by, those children later in life. As Swidler (1986) states, culture serves both as a tool kit that people use to problem solve and a resource from which people develop strategies of action. For some, however, the term cultural capital has come to serve as a “catch all” for everything besides human capital that correlates with success or the lack there of (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1998). Proponents of social capital, the second term in this exploration of external influences, attempts to address this problem by focusing more specifically on aspects of the social structure.

Defining Social Capital

Social capital is appealing as a concept, like human and cultural capital, because it can be used to overcome the failure of predominant economic models to address non-market factors in their explanations of the economic behavior of individuals and groups (Edwards and Foley 1998). To do this, social capital incorporates Granovetter’s (1983: 487) argument that the actions and decisions of individuals are “embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations” while maintaining the idea that each actor has interest in and control over certain resources (Coleman 1988). Defining social capital in more detail, however, proves to be a complex task.

Social capital, as it is discussed in contemporary sociology, was first described in the work of Jane Jacobs (1961) and Glenn Loury (1977) and later extensively developed by Pierre

Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1988), and Robert Putnam(1993). Each of these scholars saw social capital as inhering in the structure of human relationships. Beyond this point, however, consensus seems to break down. Definitions and operationalizations of the concept vary widely and several powerful criticisms have been leveled in recent years (see Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Edwards and Foley 1998; Wall, Ferrazzi, and Schryer 1998; and Woolcock 1998). Embedded in these analyses are three major concerns. First, the level at which social capital is said to operate varies from study to study. It is unclear whether social capital accrues to the individual, the community, the society or all three. Second, definitions of social capital are extremely inclusive and may encompass elements better viewed as sources or outcomes of social capital. Finally, social capital is commonly portrayed as an unequivocal “good” to be maximized in the pursuit of goals that are often limited to the economic sphere. In the following discussion I will review these criticisms, offer several extensions to them, and explore some possible solutions.

Levels of Analysis

In their descriptions of social capital both Bourdieu (1985) and Colman (1988) focus on the potential benefits individuals can access through participation in networks or broader social structures. In his earliest writings Bourdieu defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of durable networks of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu 1985: 248). Thus, for Bourdieu, social capital represents benefits accruing to individuals through their social ties. Similarly, Coleman sees it as an essential feature of the structure of relationships between and among actors that facilitate the actions of individuals and thereby allow “the achievement of certain ends that, in its absence, would not be possible” (Coleman 1988: S98). For example, he states that social capital can be seen as “a set of resources which inheres in family relations and in community social organizations and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person” (Coleman 1990: 300). Coleman diverges from Bourdieu rather significantly, however, when he suggests that “purposive organizations” or “corporate actors” can be the beneficiaries of social capital (Coleman 1988). This suggestion may have contributed to a significant transition that took place when the concept was taken up by disciplines other than sociology.

As interest in the concept spread, social capital was often redefined as an attribute of communities or nations. For political scientist Robert Putnam, the most prominent advocate of this view, social capital refers to “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1993: 35-36). Civic engagement and social connectedness, key aspects of this “coordination and cooperation”, are seen to produce “better schools, faster economic development, lower crime, and more effective government” (Putnam 1995: 66-67). “Everyone would be better off,” he argues, “if everyone could cooperate. In the absence of coordination and mutual commitment, however, everyone defects.... Working together is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital” (Putnam 1993: 35-36).

Applying the term “social capital” on so many levels has led to confusion over its meaning. Social capital has been described as a resource individuals can access through their social networks, a characteristic of families, an attribute of networks of “corporate actors”, and an

explanation of civic success or failure. As Portes and Landolt (2000) suggest, “The heuristic value of the concept suffers accordingly, as it risks becoming synonymous with each and all things that are positive or desirable in social life” (535). To avoid such pitfalls a clear definition of social capital and its level of operation is required. To achieve that goal, however, one must first examine the diverse components of existing definitions.

Sources, Resources, and Outcomes

Though Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam utilize social capital in different ways, there are some common elements in their descriptions. In each case social capital consists of social networks that can be activated and then used to enhance some feature, like education, social mobility, economic growth, political position, or community vitality, or to achieve some goal (Wall et al. 1998). In addition to social networks, other features of social organization are often included in the definition of social capital. For Putnam (1993) social capital also includes norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation. Coleman (1988) incorporates obligations and expectations, information channels, and sets of norms and effective sanctions that facilitates or constrain certain actions. Another element of complexity is added when an actors’ “investment” in social relationships is included. Paxton (1999) initially argues that social capital consists of trust and the objective associations between individuals. She goes on to say, however, that an individual “can create social capital through increased communication, information diffusion, and social support” (Paxton 1999:100). Lin (2001) goes even further by defining social capital as “investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns...” (17). It is thus unclear whether social capital is comprised of the content or the infrastructure of social relations, or possibly both (Woolcock 1998).

As this brief exploration suggests, definitions of social capital may include the contexts in which social ties are formed, the networks used by individuals to achieve certain goals, the nature or quality of the relationships that constitute those networks, the investments of actors in social networks, and the products or outcomes accessed through social ties. While there seems to be a growing consensus that social capital represents “the ability to secure resources by virtue of membership in social networks or larger social structures,” questions concerning the nature, origin, and function of those resources abound (Portes and Landholt 2000). As Lin (2001) argues that, when exploring social capital, it is important to separate the returns an actor is trying to achieve from the social networks and social relations that can be “accessed and/or mobilized” in pursuit of such returns/goals (12). Thus, to truly grasp the concept of social capital one must understand not only the components of its definition, but also what it is supposed to do.

Functions of Social Capital

For Coleman (1988) social capital, like physical and human capital, facilitates productive activity and is a resource individuals can use to achieve their interests. Putnam (1993) adds that it also “enhances the benefits of investment in physical and human capital” (35). These functions are attributed to social capital on both the individual and collective levels. Coleman (1993) asserts that social capital contributes to children’s development of human capital (education, skills) and affects their goals and life chances, while Putnam (1993) argues that it can be viewed as a vital ingredient in economic development. In both cases, these outcomes are achieved, at least in part, because social capital, as defined by the both authors, plays a key role in establishing norms and standards and pushing individuals to live up to them (Wall et al. 1998).

Social capital may also allow communities or individual actors to garner certain direct benefits via social networks. For Bourdieu, access to social capital means people have connections to individuals, cultural elites or political insiders for example, who can assist them in maintaining or changing their position in the social hierarchy (Wall et al. 1998, Lin 2001). Similarly, ties to civic, professional, kinship and friendship networks open a window to social support and economic and information resources which can then be used by the individual to meet his/her needs or to achieve some goal (Paxton, 1999; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1998; Woolcock, 1998). Child minding, loans, transportation, and tips about job openings are all examples of benefits that can come from utilizing social capital. Such networks can also be beneficial on the community level. By speeding the transmission of information and innovative ideas, for instance, social capital fortifies investments in physical and human capital, which in turn contributes to a stronger community (Putnam 1993).

Is Social Capital Always “Good”?

As the above discussion suggests, social capital is most often presented as a positive resource that should be maximized (Edwards and Foley 1998, Wall et al. 1998, Woolcock 1998). Though Coleman (1988) recognizes that aspects of social capital can reduce innovation and Putnam (1993) acknowledges that forms of social capital can subvert individual liberties, neither pursues this potential downside. Instead, Putnam (1993,1995) focuses on social capital as a producer of “civic engagement” and key contributor to economic development, while Coleman (1988) emphasizes social capital’s role in improving the economic position of individuals. French theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1986) takes a similar approach, arguing that social capital is a resource individuals can convert into both economic capital and social position.

This positive slant has been called into question on several fronts. First, communities with strong social capital frequently underperform economically. Wall et al. (1998) describe conditions in both Newfoundland, Canada and the Indian state of Karala where rich social capital exists along side significant political participation rates and in the case of Karala, the highest levels of education and community health in the country, while economic performance remains low. If social capital is the key to economic development, then situations such as these should not exist. Edwards and Foley (1998) offer a second perspective when they point out that “all forms of social, cultural or human

capital are not equally valuable as resources to facilitate individual or collective action”(129). Some job skills (human capital), for instance, may be of little or no value because they apply to occupations that are economically obsolete. Likewise, they argue, social capital in the form of a wide-ranging network connected to a dying industry would also be of little value. It is thus imperative that the context-dependent nature of social capital not be ignored. How social capital is realized varies greatly from one context to the next.

Finally, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) accept that social capital can support economic goal seeking behavior, but argue that it can also constrain or derail it. From their exploration of immigrant communities, they uncovered three negative effects that can emerge in situations where strong social capital exists. First, the same tight-knit relationships and normative structures that promote trust can also enforce demands on successful members and produce a “free-riding” problem. Second, strong networks and norms can place constraints on individual action, limit receptivity to outside culture, or restrict contact with outsiders. Individual economic advancement can be inhibited, for example, when heavy personal obligations are placed on members preventing them from participating in broader social networks (Portes and Landolt 1996). Lastly, pressure may be exerted by the group to keep members “on the same level”. This “leveling pressure” is most often found in communities who’s cohesiveness derives from common adversity. In such cases individuals may be discouraged from seeking or pursuing outside options (Wacquant and Wilson 1989).

Function or Dysfunction?

As a result of their critical analysis, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) redefine social capital as “those expectations for action within a collectivity that affect the economic goals and goal-seeking behavior of its members, even if these expectations are not oriented toward the economic sphere” (1323). Even though they acknowledge that a community or group can direct the interests of individuals toward the non-economic, there continues to be a focus on economic goals alone. I would argue that this limits our ability to explore the complexity of social capital in a given context. Richling (1985), for example, discusses social capital’s role in maintaining the rural lifestyle of Newfoundland that attracts many return migrants. These Newfoundlanders returned to an economically underperforming area for a variety of reasons including strong family ties, attachment to their homeland and a preference for rural life. Cooperative, reciprocal relations between households who share labor, equipment, and expertise make such return migration possible.

Social capital in forms such as these may also make it possible for rural communities and their members to sustain their current lifestyle. There seems to be an assumption on the part of many who work with social capital that individuals in all contexts are trying to move “up” in social position or socio-economic status. What if the goals emphasized in a given family or community are directed toward maintaining the status quo? Bourdieu (1986) allows for this possibility when he discusses social capital as a resource that people can use to either change *or* maintain their current position in the social hierarchy.

It is also important to question who is determining whether social capital is viewed as functional or dysfunctional. What may appear dysfunctional from outside a particular community (especially when economic goals are seen as more important than others) may in fact be quite sensible behavior when viewed in the context of the community in question. As Granovetter (1985) points out, individuals' goals can center on "sociability, approval, status, and power" as well as economic gain. How these goals are prioritized by individuals, their families, and their communities must inform any discussion of social capital and its effect on the economic decisions of individuals.

Similarly, what may be a "positive" effect of social capital within the context of a particular community may appear to have negative consequences for individuals when viewed through the lense of the larger society. For example, an individual fisher in a close-knit fishing community may have access, via friends and family, to equipment and knowledge needed to sustain his/her fishing operation, to loans in difficult times, or to work on other boats or in other areas of commercial fishing. At the same time that individual may have little interaction with non-fishers and the norms and values of the community may discourage, or at least not encourage, members to pursue alternative occupations. In such a circumstance, these forms of social capital may be viewed as functional by members of the community, but dysfunctional by those from outside who read the lack of economic progress as a negative.

Some Possible Solutions

Given all of these concerns, it may seem that social capital is too "messy" a concept to be useful. As Woolcock points out, however, we may simply be seeing "different types, levels, or dimensions of social capital, different performance outcomes associated with different combinations of these dimensions, and different sets of conditions that support or weaken favorable combinations" (1998:159). In the discussion to follow, I will consider four sources of social capital proposed by Portes (1998) and a set of dimensions delineated by Woolcock (1998), both of which attempt to clarify how social capital operates in particular contexts. Context also influences the returns individuals expect from social capital. Both Lin (2001) and Bourdieu, in his discussions of capital and social position, stress the importance of examining the goals and available resources of individuals.

Portes (1998) argues that any understanding of social capital must include an exploration of the motivations of the "donors" of that capital. "To possess social capital," he states, "a person must be related to others, and it is those others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage" (Portes 1998:4). Donors can have different motivations for making resources available to individuals. These motivations serve as distinct sources of social capital and can differentially impact the goal-seeking behavior of recipients. First, social capital can result from *internalized norms* that prompt individuals to act in ways other than naked greed or self-interest. For example members of a community may be able to extend loans without fear of nonpayment if repayment is a widely accepted norm. Another source of social capital, *reciprocity transactions*, represents the accumulation of "chits" based on previous good deeds to others, backed by the norm of reciprocity and centering, not on money and material goods, but on social intangibles. Here, donors provide access to resources with the expectation that they will

be repaid in the future. A third source, *bounded solidarity*, denotes internal solidarity born out of a collective awareness of shared adversities as in cases of industrial workers taking part in “sympathy strikes” to support other laborers. Finally, *enforceable trust* indicates situations in which individual members subordinate their present desires to collective expectations in anticipation of long-term advantages by virtue of group membership. These sources of social capital can, depending on how and where they are actualized, result in many of the “positive” and “negative” effects discussed above. Portes’ argument also suggests that different social contexts may provide different types of social capital.

Woolcock (1998) goes further when he describes complementary but distinct dimensions of social capital. Building on Mark Granovetter’s discussion of embedded relationships, he argues that all economic action is rooted in social relationships and that economic progress can be brought about by a change in the kind, as well as the degree, of embeddedness. From this beginning, he uses the location of relationships in both social and geographic space to describe, on the micro-level, two forms of social capital that may offer different possibilities for those who utilize them. The first, *integration*, consists of intra-community ties, which are an important source of social capital that allows members to provide one another with services and resources such as job referrals or child care. The second form, *linkage*, refers to the extent to which an individual has access to non-community members.

The presence or absence of these two aspects greatly impacts the role social capital plays for individuals within a given community. For example, ethnic loyalties or familial attachments can create an “excess of community” that could discourage members from “advancing economically, moving geographically, and engaging in dispute resolution with outsiders” (171). In this case, there is a high level of integration, but little linkage. The reverse exists as well. When there is linkage, but little integration, individuals may have the freedom and opportunity to participate in a wide range of activities but lack a stable community base to provide guidance, support, and identity. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) add strength to this argument when they describe the role of intra and extra-community ties in immigrant communities. They found that individuals who can draw on a variety of social resources, including social approval and business opportunities, from outside their ethnic community, were less constrained by the norms and expectations of that community. On the other hand, individuals might resist forming such ties, due to pressure from within the community.

Lin (2001) agrees that not all social ties lead to “better information, influence, social credentials or reinforcement”, but argues that “what types of network locations evoke resources in order to generate returns depend on the type of returns one expects.” In other words, different goals require different resources. Lin argues that two types of outcomes can result from social capital: instrumental and expressive. The former represents the addition of resources not previously held by the recipient of social capital, while the latter refers to maintaining resources already within one’s possession. If one’s goal is to move into a new line of work, for example, then cultivating ties to those who can provide one with information about job openings or requirements would be beneficial. If, on the other hand, one wished to maintain a current business then those same connections would be of little use. Lin (2001) also suggests that denser networks may offer relative advantages for those seeking to preserve resources, while accessing

ties or extending “bridges” beyond one’s immediate social network would be more useful if one were trying to obtain new resources.

The positions discussed so far suggest the need to separate the elements involved in the formation and actualization of social capital. Portes (1998) points out the importance of context and its role in shaping the kinds, amount, and quality of social capital available in a given setting. Woolcock (1998) emphasizes the identification of types and combinations of social ties, the environments shaping them, and their consequence. Lin (2002) argues one must also examine the accessibility of resources embedded in the social structure and how individuals mobilize or use those resources to achieve their goals. The elements of our discussion of social capital can then be summarized as goal formation, social ties, resources, and outcomes, all of which are influenced by social context. Pierre Bourdieu discussed the connection between these components in his theoretical treatment of capital.

Bourdieu introduced the concept of “habitus” or worldview as “a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices” (Bourdieu 1979: vii). This worldview, learned during the socialization process, guides the formulation of an individual's expectations and orients him or her toward certain goals (McClelland 1990). It arises from one's place in the social structure. “By internalizing the social structure and one's place in it” states Dumais, “one comes to determine what is possible and what is not possible for one’s life and develops aspirations and practices accordingly”(2002:46). As time progresses there is a constant modulation between the “subjectivity” or habitus and the external constraints of the “objective” social world (Jenkins 1992). Social capital, along with economic and cultural capital, represents a key feature of this social world. Thus, in order to fully understand the choices individuals make one must examine both the resources (capital) available to that person and his or her orientation toward using those resources (habitus) (Dumais 2002).

Summary

As this review of the literature reveals, social capital is a complex concept. Its definition can be both broad and inclusive, while its forms, functions, and outcomes are hardly agreed upon. Any effective exploration of how social capital operates in real world settings must, therefore, begin with a clear statement of the components to be investigated. First, however, a definition should be agreed upon.

Social capital itself can be defined as resources embedded in social structures that can be accessed or mobilized by individuals in pursuit of some goal. Resources can range from job tips or loans to child-care and emotional support. The availability and usefulness of those resources, however, varies according to context. It is essential that one ascertain the types of ties that exist for a given individual as well as their location within both social and geographic space. Family, friendship, and work ties have different potentials as social capital. Likewise, connections within and outside a given community may offer very different opportunities for those involved.

Social context also shapes the aspirations of individuals that, in turn, affect the kinds of social capital resources that will be of use. What is valued, discouraged, encouraged, or expected in a given setting can greatly influence both the goals toward

which an individual works and the specific decisions he or she makes. Moreover, the outcomes- the benefits or costs- of social capital vary according to context as well. Networks of relationships can provide access to information, economic resources, and needed services, but they can also place constraints on individual action, limit receptivity to outside culture, and enforce demands on members. Finally, individuals may not be able to mobilize social capital in all situations. For example, ties to industries that offer few job opportunities are of little use to the individual in need of work.

As this discussion indicates, there are several features of, and associated with, social capital that should be examined if one is to use it effectively in any exploration of the economic decision-making of individuals. First, one must describe the social contexts in which occupational goals were formed and which influence the current decision-making process. Next, one needs to ascertain the types of social ties and social capital resources available to the individuals in question. Finally, an examination of how those resources are accessed and put to use is necessary if one is to provide a well-rounded picture of social capital in action.

The emphasis placed on context also suggests the need to explore how social capital operates in different settings. Most research into the on-the-ground functions of social capital has focused on ethnic and minority enclaves in urban areas (Woolcock 1998). These communities are often endowed with rich social capital. At the same time, their members' skills are devalued in the larger American labor market leaving members to depend on the character of their own communities, and the social structures available there, for their economic success (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). These characteristics have made ethnic enclaves a focal point for economic sociology and the key site for the critical study of social capital. Yet other communities share many of these features as well.

Rural communities, particularly those who are dependent on natural resource industries, are also characterized closely-knit social networks whose members depend on one another for a wide array of services and support. Likewise, members may have skills that cannot be easily marketed outside of the area and/or occupation in which they are currently working. They may also have distinct occupational, ethnic, or cultural identities that separate them from other groups and limit members' access to outside opportunities. Studying how social capital operates in these situations offers an opportunity for fresh insights as well as for comparison. The research presented here undertakes an in-depth exploration of social capital in one such community.

FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

In this study I explore the nature and role of social capital in the occupational decision-making of Louisiana's oyster harvesters. This population is geographically concentrated, ethnically unique, and closely tied to its occupation; all characteristics that suggest the presence of rich social capital. Previous research has shown, however, that the future of their occupation, and thus their economic prospects, are in question (Deseran and Riden 2000). Faced with this reality, harvesters must decide whether to continue in their current line of work or pursue other options. By working backward from a known outcome- an individual's decision to continue or discontinue harvesting- I will examine three aspects of social capital: the types of ties each informant has, the nature of those ties, and how they, and the context within which they develop, influence her/his occupational decision-making. In so doing, I will illuminate not only the decision-making processes of individuals within this community, but also the ways in which social capital influences such decisions.

The initial question that must be asked in any study of social capital is what forms of social capital exist for each informant? The first step then is to determine with whom each individual is connected. Who do they turn to if they need help, for example? Who do they talk to about personal and work problems? With whom do they engage in social activities? Next, I explore the nature of those ties. Are they based in kinship or friendship? Are they intra- or extra-community ties? Are they work-related?

The work of Portes and Landholdt (1996), Portes and Zhou (1992), and Richling (1985) suggest that ethnic and rural communities of the type studied here are characterized by dense, relatively homogenous, networks. As such, there should be a rich pool of social capital available for those who wish to maintain their current resources and occupation. On the other hand, individuals may have limited access to ties outside the community. Such ties would be essential for any who intend to move into new lines of work. Thus, one would expect to find more extensive extra-community ties among those who have successfully left the oyster industry.

In addition to the social ties themselves, I also focus on how these relationships have affected the occupational goal-seeking and decision-making of individual harvesters. Of key importance here are the types of goals that were promoted when they were growing up and which are supported today. Were informants encouraged to pursue school or to develop other skills? Was work in the oyster industry promoted? Do they or did they feel discouraged from leaving the industry?

Beyond these influences on the goals of individuals, I explore how social ties facilitate or constrain their ability and/or willingness to continue harvesting oysters or pursue other work. For example, did they receive help when starting their oyster business? Do they have connections to others who could help them if they decided to do something else? Have they taken advantage of such ties when entering a new line of work?

As McClelland (1990) states, "socialization processes can orient individuals toward particular goals and...provide the means to achieve them" (103). For example, an individual's decision to invest in education or to aspire to certain occupations is strongly influenced by their class position and the expectations instilled in them during their formative years (Dumais 2002). As such, I would expect to find that greater emphasis

was placed on education and other work opportunities by the families of those who have left or wish to leave the oyster industry.

The influence of social context does not end with childhood, of course. The worldview developed in childhood is augmented with subsequent experiences and balanced by the constraints, demands, and opportunities of the objective world (Jenkins 1992). Together these factors determine the decisions and actions of individuals. The choice to stay in oyster harvesting or to leave the industry for new lines of work will be influenced, at least in part, by the changing conditions of the industry. Changing conditions may also serve to reshape the worldview of participants with regard to the occupation of oyster harvesting.

The ability to access and mobilize the resources available through social ties is of equal importance. In order to begin or continue oyster harvesting, an individual needs training and experience, financial support, equipment, or free labor. These resources, accessed through family and community ties, could prove vital to the success of an oyster operation. Their absence, on the other hand, might prove fatal. Those who wish to leave the oyster industry would have to mobilize different types of social capital, however. Family, friends, or acquaintances in other lines of work, for instance, could offer information about job requirements and openings or even provide job opportunities directly. Such patterns should be revealed in the course of this research.

Finally, I will inquire as to how harvesters' experiences affect what they encourage their children to do with respect to oystering. Are they grooming them for a future in the industry or are they guiding them in a different direction? Changing conditions within the industry and expected changes in attitude toward the occupation on the part of participants should result in a less favorable view of oyster harvesting as a career path for the children of this generation of oystermen. Given the community's long history in oystering, changes of this sort could be quite important to the future of this community and the oyster industry as a whole.

The above questions can be used to create a picture of how social capital works within a given context. They reveal the role that family and community, via the social capital they provide, play in the formulation, pursuit, and attainment of an individual's goals. They also illuminate the role social capital plays in the decisions individuals make with regard to their occupation. The following section will detail the methods I use to achieve these ends.

METHODS

LOGIC AND RATIONALE FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Most approaches to social capital focus on counting the number of persons in a household, determining who an individual knows, or measuring participation rates in a range of organizations (see Bourdieu 1986, Coleman 1988, and Putnam 1993). While such quantitative measures do indicate the presence or absence of certain types of social capital, understanding the nature and content of the relationships such ties represent is also necessary if we are to continue to develop social capital as a useful concept. Wall et al. argue that a qualitative approach, nearly absent in the literature, might provide a “more realistic, and thus valid, sense of the level of social capital and how it functions in a community”, as well as a portrait of the quality of the relationships that comprise social capital (1998: 319). Indeed, qualitative research, with its focus on description and analysis of both “the processes through which social realities are constructed, and the social relationships through which people are connected to one another”, does seem particularly suited to this task (Miller 1997:3).

Qualitative research attempts to understand social behavior by discovering the perceptions and interpretations of reality of individual actors and how these relate to behavior, in other words, to understand social realities from the perspective of the subject (Schwartz and Jacobs 1979). It also seeks to explore and describe while emphasizing context and setting (Marshall and Rossman 1989). To these ends, qualitative researchers have long assumed that competent observers can clearly and precisely report on their own observations of the social world as well as the meanings and life experiences of their subjects (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). In this tradition, social phenomena are seen to “exist not only in the mind, but also in the objective world” where reasonably stable relationships can be found among them (Miles and Huberman 1994:4). In order to reveal and examine these patterns, the qualitative researcher collects detailed or “rich” data which, when analyzed, yields a contextualized understanding of the subjects social world (Bryman 1984). Thus qualitative research seeks to “discern meaningful patterns within thick description” (Warren, 2002: 87). The understandings achieved through this process can also inform, flesh out, or “fill in the gaps” of quantitative studies of social phenomena (James 1977).

ORIGINS OF THE STUDY

In 1998, a project was conducted for Louisiana Population Data Center and the Louisiana Sea Grant Program that focused on labor displacement in the Louisiana oyster industry (Deseran and Riden, 2000). Results from this telephone survey revealed that, though the industry is threatened on many fronts and more than half of all respondents earn money from some other kind of work, few oyster harvesters planned to exit the industry (8.9%). In fact, most (82.3%) stated that they would go into it again if they had the choice. Given the high levels of occupational satisfaction revealed in the survey, it was surprising to then find that (60%) said they would not encourage their children to pursue oyster harvesting. How can one explain this complex and seemingly contradictory set of findings? What motivates people to continue in an occupation that they

acknowledge has an uncertain future? What allows others to exit that industry? These are the questions that eventually led me to explore the concept of social capital as presented here.

The research described in this dissertation is an in-depth exploration of the effects of non-pecuniary social circumstances on the economic decision-making of individuals. More specifically, I explore how social capital operates in a specific setting. Working back from a known outcome- the decision to continue oyster harvesting or pursue other work- I examine the types of ties each participant has, the nature of those ties, and how they, and the context within which they develop and function, influence his or her occupational choice. In the following section, I will describe the specific setting in which this study took place.

SETTING

Seafood is big business in Louisiana. The state consistently ranks among the top three seafood producers in the nation with important harvests of both finfish and shellfish (Keithly 1991). Oyster harvesting has been one of the most important components of this industry since the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, in the past decades, as the oyster fishery in the rest of the U.S. declined, Louisiana, with its extensive wetlands and longstanding bottomland leasing system, has become one of the nation's leading producer (Keithly and Roberts 1988; Keithly, Roberts, and Brannan 1992). This apparent success, however, masks a wide array of problems that threaten the future of oyster production in the state.

Louisiana's oyster harvesters, like fishers around the country, have been faced with a growing array of problems. Implementation of increasingly restrictive fisheries regulations and growing competition from imports have combined with unstable market prices, high operating costs, and declining stocks to make fishing an increasingly unreliable way to earn a living (Garrity-Blake 1996; Maril 1995; Townsend and Wilson 1987). In addition to these issues, all commercial fishers operating out of Louisiana are experiencing the negative effects of the state's rapid loss of wetlands and the ever increasing problem of industrial water pollution (Deseran et al. 1996, Hallowell 2001).

While environmental issues such as these affect all segments of the seafood industry, the unique structure of oyster production in Louisiana limits harvesters' ability to adapt to these conditions. Unlike shrimping or finfishing, oyster harvesting is a fixed-bottom fishery that, over the last century, has evolved into one dominated by mariculture (Dugas, Pausina, and Voisin 1982). In other words, oyster production became less like fishing and more like farming. The state grants fifteen-year leases of up to 1,000 acres for \$2.00 per acre per year (Keithly et al. 1992; Melancon 1991). These leases are renewable, heritable, and transferable and represent over 400,000 acres of productive bottomland (Louisiana DWLF 1999). More than 50% of the state's harvested oysters are raised on these grounds (Louisiana DWLF 1999). This system makes it more difficult for oyster harvesters to adapt to environmental changes that adversely affect oyster populations. For example, they cannot move their operation to less affected areas when problems arise.

The overall volume of oysters produced in Louisiana has remained relatively stable in recent decades despite the continuous increase in the number of acres of bottomland leased (Keithly 1991; Keithly and Roberts 1993; Van Sicle 1976). Over the

same period there has been a steady rise in the number of oyster harvesting licenses issued (Keithly and Roberts 1988). These findings suggest that per acre oyster production is waning while harvesting effort increases. This decline in production is rooted in a complex of natural and human-made phenomena.

The deterioration of Louisiana's oyster grounds has been a slow and continuous process (Van Sicle et al 1976, Chatry, Dugas, and Easley 1983). Saltwater intrusion along the coast has destroyed many oyster beds and left many others vulnerable to predation by saltwater species such as southern oyster drill, blue and stone crab, and black drum (Keithly and Roberts 1988). Recurrent natural disasters, including hurricanes and floods, also result in mass mortality of oysters. Human agency has contributed to the declining productivity of Louisiana's oyster grounds as well. River channelization, dam construction, and dredging have increased siltation rates, stimulated saltwater intrusion, and left some oyster beds void of essential nutrients that were once deposited by periodic flooding (Kilgen and Dugas 1989). Finally, increased pollution related to coastal population growth has been linked to contamination of oysters by viruses and bacteria. The dangerous conditions brought about by this pollution have resulted in permanent closure of many beds and conditional opening of others (Keithly and Roberts 1988; Kilgen and Dugas 1989).

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION AND SELECTION

Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries license data (2000) indicates that there are roughly two thousand commercial oyster harvesters operating in these conditions. For the purposes of this study, however, I have narrowed the focus to a particular category of full-time harvesters whom I feel offer me the best opportunity to explore social capital and its relationship to occupational decision-making.

The Louisiana Population Data Center/Sea Grant study mentioned above indicates that only 27% of harvesters surveyed worked at oystering for more than 40 weeks out of the 12 months prior to the survey (Deseran and Riden 2000). The vast majority of those who do are operators of vessels larger than 40 feet. These characteristics- large boat operation and concentration of work in oyster harvesting- indicate a group that can be considered full-time oyster harvesters. Such a categorization is supported by the fact that this group spent the least amount of time, and received the smallest percentage of their income, from other forms of work (Deseran and Riden 2000). They also have long family histories in oyster harvesting (61% have a grandfather who was a harvester, 65% have a father who is/was a commercial fisher). In addition, fewer members of this group have plans to leave the industry than any other category of harvesters. They are also the least likely to encourage their children to pursue oystering as an occupation. From this information we can assemble a portrait of a group of people deeply invested in an industry financially, temporally, and historically.

Ethnicity must also be taken into account, however. According to survey data 30.2% of harvesters self-identify as Cajun/French, while another 35.3% indicate they are of Croatian/ Yugoslavian decent (Deseran and Riden 2000). For several reasons, I will focus on the latter group in this study. First, harvesters of Croatian/Yugoslav decent, unlike the Cajun/French, are concentrated in particular geographic area, in or adjacent to Plaquemines Parish, making access easier and less costly. Such a concentrated ethnic

population also contributes to a high potential for social capital as indicated by the ethnic enclave literature (see Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). This group of harvesters has a long and unique history that is intertwined with that of Louisiana's oyster industry as well. The strong ties to occupation indicated by previous research suggest the presence of an occupational community, the extent of which will be verified during my research (Deseran and Riden 2000). The nature of occupational communities would again suggest the presence of rich social capital. In summary, concentrating on a particular ethnic and occupational group in a specific area will allow me to focus more clearly on the role of social capital. The Croatian oyster harvesters of Plaquemines Parish offer just such an opportunity.

SAMPLING METHOD

An empirical examination of my research questions does not demand a random sample. Since no complete list of Croatian oyster harvesters was available, respondents were selected from the population of interest using a snowball sampling technique that began with a list of names of potential research subjects who have characteristics relevant to this study (Chadwick, Bahr, and Albrecht, 1984). These individuals were participants in the Louisiana Population Data Center/Sea Grant project mentioned above. At the end of each interview conducted for that study respondents were asked if they were willing to participate in future research. Of those who said yes and provided a phone number, forty-eight identified themselves as Croatian.

Calls were placed to each person on that list. For fifteen of the numbers listed no answer was received, the party had moved with no forwarding number, or a disconnect notice was encountered. In four cases the person refused to participate citing health, language, or time concerns, while another four individuals had returned to Croatia or were there for prolonged visits. I was, however, able to contact 25 individuals who expressed interest in the project.

Scheduling interviews proved difficult for those willing to participate in the study. Since twenty four of these individuals were still harvesting at the time we spoke, the ability to sit for an interview hinged on the weather, the oyster crop, and how far they had to travel to harvest oysters at that time. I was routinely asked to call when I was in the area or call back throughout the week to see if the person was available. From these initial contacts, however, I was able to obtain both interviews and names of others who either continued to work as full-time oyster harvesters or who had left the industry. Research participants were sought until stable patterns began to arise from the information gathered and theoretical saturation had been reached (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Strauss 1987).

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

As the discussion of the research questions to be explored in this study illustrates, there are several features of social capital that must be examined if we are to truly understand how it operates. Any study of social capital must first establish the individual participant's personal network and then locate those relationships in social and geographic space. With whom do they interact? What is their relationship to the

participant? Where do they live? One must then explore the nature of those ties and their influence on the participant. How have these relationships affected the goal-seeking behavior of the individual in question? Were they encouraged to pursue education or training? Were they nudged in the direction of work in the oyster industry? Furthermore, how do these ties affect the individual's current occupational decision-making? Are they receiving help in their oyster business? Are they being encouraged to stay in the business? Do they have connections that might help them get out?

In order to explore these aspects of social capital I chose to use an in-depth interview in three parts: 1) a preliminary questionnaire covering basic descriptive characteristics of each participant; 2) an adaptation of the "Procedure for Surveying Personal Networks" put forth by McCallister and Fischer (1978) and designed to establish the social ties of each informant; and 3) a semi-structured interview focused on the interaction of those relationships with the participants decision to enter, continue, or exit oyster harvesting as an occupation.

Preliminary Information

The initial phase of each interview consisted of a standardized series of demographic questions. Questions included age, gender, education, marital status, and presence or absence of children. I also documented whether each informant was currently harvesting oysters or pursuing other work.

Establishing Social Ties of Informants

Lazega argues that analyzing social networks provides "a way of contextualizing actors' behavior, based on description...of... the relational pattern, or 'structure', of the social setting in which action is observed "(1997:118). Though not a network analysis per se, the research presented here utilizes an adaptation of the method described by McCallister and Fischer (1978) as a "Procedure for Surveying Personal Networks" in order to establish and locate the set of social ties that may serve as social capital for each informant and thus "contextualize" the information that will be provided in the third segment of the interview.

McCallister and Fischer (1978) state that their methodology is most useful for research concerned with the study of "the 'social worlds of individuals and their connection to social structure" (131-132). While this method was developed for use in mass surveys of social networks, at its core it is designed to elicit descriptions of informants' whole personal social network (not just kin, friends, or neighbors) and to identify "the part of respondents' networks that most influenced their attitudes, behavior, and well-being" (McCallister and Fischer 1978:135). It is thus possible to use this method to map such a personal network while not developing a closed-ended measure of network ties. In so doing, I was able to create an inventory that, in turn, stimulated discussion of the relative importance of network members' influence on the occupational choices of informants.

The procedure for surveying personal networks was designed to be efficient and quick to administer (20 minutes). It begins with a set of questions that ask the respondent to give the first names of people, in this case five individuals, with whom they are likely

to engage in series of highly valued interactions and that identify network members from a full variety of social contexts (work, neighborhood, family etc.):

1. Who would care for the informant's home if they went out of town?
2. If they work, with whom to they talk about work decisions?
3. Who, if anyone, had helped with household tasks in the last three months?
4. With whom they engage in social activities
5. Who would they talk with about hobbies?
6. If unmarried, who their fiancé or "best-friend" is?
7. With whom do they talk about personal worries?
8. Whose advice they consider in making important decisions?
9. From whom they would or could borrow a large sum of money?
10. List adult members of the informant's household?

This list was modified after initial interviews revealed participants' lack of response to a number of questions. It appears that the nature of their work, and possibly cultural factors, lead to limited social interaction and minimal discussion with others. This possibility will be addressed in greater detail in the discussion of findings to follow. These reasons aside, participants were not replying to some questions, gave a limited number of responses to others, and appeared to lose interest in the interview during this portion. In order to obtain some useful network data I pared down the list by removing questions that seemed redundant or unnecessary for the purposes of this study. Questions 5, 6, 8, and 10 were removed. Also, discussions in the open-ended portion of initial interviews revealed the important role played by friends with whom respondents maintain contact, but do not interact with regularly. To that end, an additional question, "Who are five people you consider to be friends?", was added.

After each of the above questions was asked, description of the respondent's network was furthered by asking a second series of questions:

- a. Are they male or female?
- b. What is their relation to you (cousin, coworker, friend)?
- c. Which do you feel especially close to?
- d. Which live with-in five-minute drive?
- e. Which live more than an hour away?
- f. Which are full time-homemakers?
- g. Which are in the same line of work as informant? (If not what do they do?)
- h. Which are Croatian?

Since respondents often gave the same names for many of the initial questions, this process went quickly. Responses to a through h for a given name, when provided on one question, were transferred to each subsequent question for which that name was given after the interview was completed. If two individuals had the same first name an initial or other identifier was requested.

A third series of questions requesting detailed information (age, marital status etc.) for each person named appears in the original method, but was left out of this study for several reasons. First, my interests lie in the personal network of the individual participant and not in creating a detailed picture of the overall social network. Second,

participants may feel uncomfortable revealing the personal details of those named. Finally, limiting the interview length in this way will help reduce interviewer fatigue and maintain the interest of participants.

Exploring the Nature of the Ties and How They Relate to Goal Seeking Behavior

To elicit detailed information about the nature of participants' relationships and how they relate to his goal-seeking behavior I chose to use a non-structured, standardized interview in which specific information is elicited from each informant, but the particular phrasing of questions and their order is left flexible so they can be adapted to each respondent (Richardson, Dohrenwend, and Klein, 1965). While some have criticized such flexible methods for their potential to reduce reliability by increasing variation between interviews and interviewers, others have expressed concern that attempts to improve reliability through standardization may actually lead to a reduction in validity (Michler, 1986; Suchman and Jordan, 1990; Schaeffer and Maynard, 2002).

In the non-scheduled type of interview used here the focus is on "standardizing" the meaning of a question, rather than the question's wording. As Briggs (1986) points out, attempts to standardize questions in order to promote reliability often lead interviewers to present questions in exactly the same manner to each respondent, but the meanings of questions are not always the same for each interviewee. Differences in social backgrounds (class, ethnicity, culture) of respondents may require the interviewer to change the wording of questions to maintain validity (Gorden 1969; Briggs 1986). To that end, Lazarsfeld (1972:193) advocates a "loose and liberal handling of a questionnaire by an interviewer." He justifies this position by arguing that:

The resulting margin of error would be much greater if a standardized question were interpreted in very different ways by different respondents who have their own different experiences in mind. If we get a respondent to report to us the determinants of his experience to the best knowledge and recollection, our results will be much more homogeneous than in a case where we have inflexible words but have not taken any care for ascertaining the meaning placed upon those words by our respondent (193).

In other words, in order to "standardize" the meaning of a question "it must be formulated in words familiar to the person being interviewed (Richardson, Dohrenwend, and Klein, 1965: 51). Likewise, questions are not asked in predetermined order since, "no fixed sequence of questions is satisfactory to all respondents; the most effective sequence for any respondent is determined by his readiness and willingness to take up a topic as it come up" (Richardson, Dohrenwend, and Klein, 1965: 51). Finally, the flexibility of this form of interview also leaves room for other relevant issues that may be raised by the respondent, but not in the schedule.

MANAGING AND RECORDING DATA

Tape recording, an important data collection tool, allows the researcher to preserve both the content and the form of what is said during the interview (Briggs 1986; Seidman 1991). Mishler (1986:138) states that: the interview schedule and interviewer's reports of responses are an inadequate and inaccurate record of the interview...an accurate description, the basic requirement for reliable and valid analysis and interpretation, depends on tape recordings and careful transcription of interviews. As such, I utilized audio tape to record each interview. Concern that error might result from poor tape quality, transcriber fatigue, lack of familiarity with the topic area, and use of multiple transcribers were addressed (Poland 2002). All interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed by the researcher using the same high quality tapes and recording device each time. Each interview was promptly and carefully transcribed into a computer file where it was reviewed for accuracy during and after transcription. Due to the irregular schedules kept by oyster harvesters and the travel distance to Plaquemines Parish, it was necessary to conduct seven of the interviews by telephone. Phone interviews were also taped, transcribed, and entered as a computer file. A consent form explaining the research project and the confidential nature of all information provided was read to each participant (appendix A). For interviews conducted in-person a signed copy of the form was obtained. Telephone participants were asked to give oral consent during the taped interview.

For the Survey of Personal Networks portion of the study, responses from each interviewee were recorded on a form designed to assist in the orderly listing of names and responses to each question (Appendix B). Descriptive information was also noted on a standardized form at the time of each interview (Appendix C). Questions and prompts used in the open-ended segment were organized on a check sheet that served as a guide for each interview (Appendix D).

Once transcribed into a word processing program each interview was transferred into a CDC EZ- Text database. CDC EZ-Text is a computer program designed to organize, manage, and analyze semi-structured interviews (Carey et al. 1998). Data analyses discussed in the following section are performed using this program in conjunction with notes and Survey of Personal Networks data stored in Corel Word Perfect and Quatro Pro files.

DATA ANALYSIS

While acknowledging the historic and social nature of knowledge, I would concur with Huberman and Miles (1998) when they argue that social phenomena do exist in the objective world. As such, there are some reasonably stable relationships to be found in the sequencing and regularities that link such phenomena and which, in turn, allow us to account for individual and social life (Miles and Huberman 1994; Huberman and Miles 1998). Qualitative data analysis is a search for these relationships.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) state that qualitative analysis seeks to reveal "general statements about relationships among categories of data". During this process information is "condensed, clustered, sorted and linked" with the goal of finding patterns, which are then classified or encoded (Huberman and Miles 1998:181). Themes that

result from this process would then consist of “a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis 1998:4). When such a theme is discerned the researcher must then try to qualify or confirm that finding through repeated examination of interviews and/or other data.

For the purposes of this research, I adopted the strategy for conducting such analyses presented by Miles and Huberman (1994). First, observations, notes, and transcribed responses to interview questions were reviewed and a summary file created for each informant. I then began reviewing the data, making initial sense of it, and noting any obvious patterns in a journal that I kept throughout the data collection and analysis process. Next, data were clustered into conceptual categories. This began the coding process and allowed me to see any connections more clearly. Comparing and contrasting responses in these categories then lead to a more refined grouping of the data. Codes were condensed or merged as patterns became apparent.

This process, the unbundling and reorganization of observations and groupings, took place throughout the research process as new interviews were incorporated. When all responses could be readily classified categories were considered “saturated” and sufficient numbers of “regularities” were thought to have emerged (Miles and Huberman 1994:62). The end goal of this process was to subsume specifics into more general categories and to build a logical chain of evidence leading to conceptual coherence. When a coherent picture emerged interviewing was halted. All data, including summaries, categories, and codes, were kept as close to the raw information as possible thereby increasing the “likelihood that various people examining the raw information will perceive and therefore encode the information similarly” (Boyatzis 1998:30). The following sections will place this research into historical context and present the findings revealed through this data analysis process.

BACKGROUND: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CROATIAN LOUISIANA AND THE OYSTER INDUSTRY

Croatian immigrants played an essential role in the transformation of Louisiana's oyster industry from a simple process of harvesting oysters from wild reefs to a highly skilled, profitable system of oyster cultivation (Vujnovic 1974). Today, that system, which led to great economic success for local Croatian oyster harvesters over the past several generations, is under threat. Faced with increasingly stringent regulations, environmental degradation, labor shortages, decline or stagnation in prices, negative media coverage, and an influx of harvesters from surrounding states, the Croatian community in Plaquemines Parish, so long held together by shared interest in oyster harvesting and associated businesses, is at a turning point. In this section I will describe its history, its connection to oystering in Louisiana, and the conditions that exist today, thus providing a backdrop for the discussion of occupational decision-making to come.

As early as the 1820's seamen from the Dalmatia, on the Adriatic Coast of Croatia, were making their way to the port of New Orleans (Kane 1944; Lovrich 1967). Many of these sailors, highly sought after for their skills at sea, had been fishermen before taking work on sailing vessels that transported goods world-wide at that time (Vujnovich 1974). Excessive taxation, government corruption, and depletion of natural resources contributed to these early and sporadic migrations from Dalmatia and served as disincentives to any who might wish to return (Lovrich 1967). As a result, a number of the sailors who went ashore in New Orleans decided not to return to their ships. They traveled south along the Mississippi where, to a few, "it seemed like home, this place and climate, to these men whose living was along the waters" (Kane 1944: 92).

At the turn of the 20th century emigration from Croatia continued to increase in response to a decline in available farmland and farmwork and the persistent deterioration of economic conditions (Kraljic 1978). As a result, the apex of immigration to the United States occurred between 1900 and 1914 (Shapiro 1989). New Orleans was a center of Croatian immigration during this time period. Many of those who were unable or unwilling to find work in the city settled in or near Plaquemines Parish, south of New Orleans, founding the communities of Olga, Empire, Buras, Ostrica, Venice, and Port Sulphur (Lovrich 1967; Ware 1996). This area continues to serve as a center of Croatian American life in Louisiana. As one resident of New Orleans stated, "They have their own little colony there, in Empire...and Buras. You're likely to hear Croatian there. You don't know where you're at." (Ware, 1996).

These early Croatian immigrants, called "Takos" by their French neighbors from a common Croatian response to the question "how are you?" "Tako, tako" or "so-so", held themselves apart from the larger French population (Kane 1944; Vujnovich 1974). Often related or hailing from the same village, many of the early immigrants chose to live together in *društvo*, or cooperative households, where living expenses were shared equally among the residents (Kraljic 1978). They later established benevolent fraternal unions and societies in order to provide insurance, assistance to unemployed or disabled workers, and recreation and entertainment opportunities (Lovrich 1967; Vujnovich 1974, Kraljic 1978). Men who had established themselves often sent home for brides or went home to marry and have children only to return to the United States to operate their oyster businesses (Lovrich 1967; Vujnovich 1974). Their families would be sent for at

some later date. The Croatian language, though modified by contact with English and French speakers, was also kept alive (Ware 1996). Through these practices Louisiana Croatians were able to remain a cohesive group.

Shared occupation also played a key role in holding together this distinctive ethnic community. As stated in Kane (1944), "They fished, they tried shrimping, they hunted. Then they turned to oysters- and some of the commercial history of lower Louisiana was changed. Man had met job" (93). Some early immigrants, most notably Anthony and Nikola Cibilich and Joseph and Luke Jurisich, came from an area of Dalmatia known as Peljesac Peninsula, where Adriatic oysters had been cultivated by suspension methods for centuries (Vujnovich 1974). Aware of this process, they decided to attempt oyster cultivation in Louisiana sometime in the mid-19th century (Wicker 1979).

Until that time oyster harvesting had always been a rough process of collecting from a wild-reef until its stock was depleted then moving on to another. The Dalmatian immigrants experimented with relocating juvenile oysters, constructing artificial oyster reefs, and tending oysters year round in a manner very similar to farming (Kane 1944; Vujnovich 1974). This method was highly successful, producing a meaty, flavorful, high quality oyster. The shift to mericulture was formalized in 1908 when laws were established to promote and support the leasing of state owned water bottoms for the purpose of oyster cultivation (Padgett 1960). By the mid-20th century seventy to ninety percent of the oysters produced in Louisiana were farmed or mericulture oysters (Keithly et al. 1992). At the forefront of that success were the Croatian oystermen. When Frank Lovrich published his description of Dalmatian Yugoslavs in Louisiana in 1967, 80% of Plaquemines Parish Yugoslavs worked in the oyster industry or related occupations.

Investment in the oyster industry also helped limit the geographic mobility of the Croatian population of Louisiana. While persons of Croatian descent live in Orleans, Jefferson, and surrounding Parishes as well, a significant portion of those who fish for a living continue to reside in Plaquemines Parish (Ware 1996). In the late 1990's 71.1% of all self-identified Yugoslav/Croatian oystermen surveyed lived in Plaquemines Parish (Deseran and Riden 2000). This Parish, situated along the Mississippi river south and west of New Orleans, is a narrow arm of dry land stretching some seventy miles into marshlands and the Gulf of Mexico. Its location and the quality of the oysterbeds to which it is adjacent, have made it a prime location for oyster harvesters since the earliest decades of the industry. This link between locality and occupation is under threat as the wetlands around Plaquemines and nearby parishes recede, the Gulf of Mexico encroaches, and local oysterbeds are destroyed (Hallowell 2001).

The Croatian harvesters interviewed for this study were well aware of the problems facing their communities and industry. Both current and former harvesters described negative impacts on the oyster industry as a result of wetlands degradation, wetlands recovery projects, increasingly restrictive regulations, low-market prices, lack of political voice, and a limited pool of labor. On five separate visits to Plaquemines Parish, participants described or pointed out land that had been lost entirely or had been rendered useless for oyster cultivation. One participant described the quite literal disappearance of the town of Empire: " Empire is gone. The marsh is gone. Everywhere you see, my dad, they have pictures. If I saw the way it used to be when he got there and now, or even from when I started until now- its disgusting"(C2). Another participant

described the demise of two additional communities that once served as centers of Croatian immigration and oyster production:

There used to be a little town over there what they called Ostrica. That's where my family was from. My father, my mother, my grandfather- that's where they settled...and now there's no one there. Its just a dead town. When I was a kid I worked in what they called Auger down the river where lots of Yugoslavian people lived..they may have seven, eight of 'em left out of a couple hundred. (F8)

Finally, others described the effective destruction of once productive oyster leases:

They got some areas on the western side of the river that used to produce oysters for a hundred years, ok, but these people are not even bedding [oysters] anymore because it's not economically feasible for them to do that. Throw a load of oysters and get ten sacks out of it. It don't cut it. That's scary. (C11)

These experiences represent challenges to the Croatian people in Louisiana. Faced with environmental transformation, regulatory constraints, and market pressures, the future of this occupational community remains uncertain. It is this setting to which I now turn in order to explore social capital and its role in occupational decision-making.

FINDINGS

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

By design the participants in this study were somewhat homogenous. All were of Croatian ancestry and identified themselves as such. All were current residents of Plaquemines Parish or had been at the time of their exit from the oyster industry. Other characteristics were also consistent across both groups. Table 1 provides a summary of these demographic characteristics for current and former harvesters. Table 2 presents the responses of each harvester individually.

Gender

Though not a part of the research design, all current and former harvesters interviewed are male. While conducting this study I was never made aware of any female full-time oyster harvester of Croatian descent, though one participant did indicate his willingness to help his daughter if she did decide to enter the business:

We each have a daughter too. I mean my grandmother was pretty much Matriarch around here. She was tough as nails. I'm not saying that the two girls we have will be anything like that, but they will have the opportunity too if they wish to pursue it. (C5)

Age

Findings for age shown in Table 1 reveal that current and former harvesters from all age categories were interviewed. Interviews were obtained from one current and two former harvesters under age 30. These participants had recently made the decision to enter or leave oystering. Among current harvesters eight (67%) were between the ages of 30 and 49 compared to three (25%) for former harvesters. In fact, over half (58%) of former harvesters were above the age of fifty. Three current harvesters fell into this age range.

Education

A wide range of educational experience was also reported by participants in both categories. Two current and four former harvesters reported less than a high school education. Years of school completed by these participants ranged from six to eight. Three current harvesters reported earning their high school diploma but continuing no further with their education. No former harvesters gave this response. Technical training beyond high school completion was reported by one current harvester and two who had left the oyster industry. Six participants, four current and two former harvesters, had completed some college work, while one current and two former oystermen had received their undergraduate degree. One participant in each category had begun, but not completed, graduate or professional training. Finally, one former harvester had received a graduate degree.

Age and Education

It is important to note that participants who reported having less than a high school education fell into or near the older age categories. Current harvesters who gave this response were 48 and 71 years of age. All four former harvesters reporting this level of education were over age fifty.

Marital Status and Children

As with the descriptive characteristics discussed above, the two categories of participants were also similar with regard to marital status. Four current and two former harvesters indicated they were single, while seven current oystermen and nine former stated that they were married at the time of their interviews. One individual in each category reported being divorced. When asked if they had children, ten current harvesters answered yes and two no. Among the former harvesters interviewed eight had children at the time they were interviewed, while four did not.

PERSONAL NETWORKS

The Survey of Personal Networks (SPN) conducted for this study was designed to elucidate that part of participants' social networks that most influences their attitudes, behavior, and well-being and which serves as social capital for each individual. I had envisioned an extensive list of social ties, located socially and geographically, that would connect smoothly with the more open-ended discussion of occupational decision-making to follow. During the course of this research project, however, it became apparent that the data were not revealing this expectation.

First, some participants (C1, F10, F11) expressed concerns about giving out names or discussing other people. Others (F1, F2, F7) stated that they were "loners" or "kept to themselves" and gave few, if any, responses. In addition, each participant was asked to give five responses, first names only, for each question. This proved difficult for most participants on most questions. Finally, while reviewing transcripts early in the research process I noticed repeated mention of friends who played key roles in occupational-decisions, but were not included in any of the lists provided in response to SPN questions. As a result, I added a question to the SPN that requested the names of five friends. The "friends" question and the question concerning social interaction received the most response.

Limited Networks

As the discussion above indicates, the networks revealed through this survey were small and relatively homogenous. Participants, whether current or former harvesters, typically discuss personal worries with a limited number of family members and close friends (Table 3). Conversations about work decisions are also confined to a select group of family members, friends, and work associates (Table 4). For example, only two individuals were able to name five people with whom they discuss personal worries, or work decisions. Likewise, when asked from whom they could or would borrow a large sum of money no one could give five responses.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic Characteristic	Current Harvesters	Former Harvesters
Gender		
Male	13	12
Female	0	0
Age		
Under 30	1	2
30-39	5	2
40-49	4	1
50-59	2	4
Over 60	1	3
Education		
Less than High School	2	4
High School Degree (HS)	3	0
HS and Technical School	1	2
Some College	5	2
College Degree	1	2
Some Grad/Professional	1	1
Grad. or Prof. Degree	0	1
Marital Status		
Single	5	2
Married	7	9
Divorced	1	1
Children		
Yes	10	8
No	3	4

Table 2. Description of Individual Participants

Interview #	Age	Education	Marital Status	Children
C1	33	high school degree	single	no
C2	23	high school degree	single	no
C3	71	sixth grade	single	yes
C4	39	some college	married	yes
C5	36	some college	married	yes
C6	38	high school degree	single	yes
C7	35	some college	single	no
C8	51	college degree	married	yes
C9	56	high school degree	married	yes
C10	48	some college	married	yes
C11	45	some grad. school	married	yes
C12	41	some college	divorced	yes
C13	48	sixth grade	married	yes
F1	55	eighth grade	single	no
F2	73	seventh grade	married	yes
F3	56	high school degree	married	yes
F4	26	graduate degree	married	no
F5	44	college degree	married	yes
F6	34	some college	married	yes
F7	73	eighth grade	married	yes
F8	57	eighth grade	married	yes
F9	24	college degree	single	no
F10	70	some high school	married	yes
F11	57	some grad. school	divorced	yes
F12	33	some college	married	no

In fact, eight participants said they would not or could not borrow money from any individual (Table 5).

Among this group, a typical response was “I wouldn’t talk to anyone about important decisions” and “I wouldn’t borrow money and wouldn’t advise my kids to either” (C3). When asked to name person’s with whom they regularly socialize several participants stated that they rarely interact with anyone due to health concerns (F1), death of friends (F2), work demands (C13) or choice (C3, F6). For many others the number of replies was still less than five (Table 6). Responses to the request “Name five people you consider to be friends” and the question “Who could watch your home if you went out of town” followed this pattern as well (Tables 7 and 8).

Strong Oyster Ties

Tables 3 through 8 reveal the strong ties between current harvesters and others in the oyster industry. When asked whom they consider to be friends, harvesters listed the names of other oystermen for the majority of their responses (Table 8). In the case of participants C1, C8, C9, and C13, all of their friends are also oyster harvesters. More than half of those with whom participants engage in social activities are in the oyster business as well. These individuals are both family and friends as indicated in Table 7.

The responses of former harvester in the SPN section of each interview represent their current social networks. Though for a number of participants this information may not represent the type of social network present at the time the decision to leave the oyster industry was made, it does shed some light on their ongoing connection to the community of oystermen. Tables 3 through 8 show that the former harvesters interviewed for this study maintain friendships with individuals who work in the oyster industry. They also continue to rely on family and friends in the oyster industry for emotional support, work advice, and loans.

Croatian Ties

Given the history of the occupational community to which they belong, I anticipated that the current oyster harvesters interviewed for this project would maintain social ties with others in the oyster industry, many of whom would also be Croatian. This expectation was supported by the personal network data provided by participants as illustrated in Tables 9 through 14. Of particular importance is the fact that current harvesters do largely participate in social activities with family and friends who are also Croatian-American (Table 9). Similarly, four current harvesters described all their friends as Croatian, while another four indicated only one non-Croatian friend (Table 10). Participant C5 was unique among the group of current harvesters in reporting no friends of Croatian descent.

Though their networks of Croatian-American friends are somewhat less extensive than those reported by current harvesters, seven of the ten former harvesters who responded during the Survey of Personal Networks reported friendships with others of Croatian ancestry (Table 10). Six of these former harvesters also typically engage in social activities with family and friends who are Croatian-American (Table 9). Responses to the other questions on the SPN also suggest that former harvesters continue to maintain strong ties to other Croatian-Americans, both family and friends, after leaving the industry (Tables 11 through 14).

Table 3. **With Whom Do You Talk About Personal Worries?**¹

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	cousin				
C2	oys father	sister	cousin	school friend	school friend
C3	oys son	oys son	attorney	dom. partner	
C4	wife	oys friend	oys friend	oys freind	
C5	no one				
C6	girl friend				
C7	no one				
C8	wife	mother	oys cousin		
C9	son	son	daughter		
C10	friend	mother-in-law	Father-in-law		
C11	freind	oys brother	Sister	sister	wife
C12	sister	oys brother			
C13	wife				
F1	no one				
F2	no one				
F3	wife				
F4	brother	oys father	Father-in-law		
F5	wife	oys friend			
F6	wife				
F7	no answer				
F8	son				
F9	father				
F10	no answer				
F11	mother	father			
F12	wife				

¹ "Oys" indicates the individual works in the oyster industry or did at the time the participant met them.

Table 4. **With Whom Do You Talk About Work Decisions?**

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	no one				
C2	mother	father	school friend	school friend	oys friend
C3	oys son	oys son			
C4	oys friend	oys cousin			
C5	oys father	oys brother			
C6	no one				
C7	oys brother	oys cousin			
C8	oys brother	mother			
C9	son	accountant	wife		
C10	friend	oys friend	oys friend		
C11	oys brother	friend	oys friend		
C12	oys father	oys brother	friend	LSU expert	
C13	oys in-law				
F1	oys friend	oys friend			
F2	no response				
F3	wife				
F4	wife	brother	oys father	father in-law	
F5	oys friend	oys brother	oys brother	oys in-law	
F6	oys father				
F7	no one				
F8	son	son	friend		
F9	father	brother			
F10	no response				
F11	no one				
F12	oys father	brother	wife		

Table 5. **From Whom Would You Or Could You Borrow A Large Sum Of Money?**

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response5
C1	oys friend	oys friend	father		
C2	oys friend	grandmother			
C3	no one				
C4	no one				
C5	oys father				
C6	no one				
C7	no one				
C8	mother	oys uncle			
C9	oys brother	oys brother			
C10	mother-in-law	father-in-law			
C11	wife's aunt	oys brother			
C12	oys father				
C13	no one				
F1	friend	oys friend	oys friend		
F2	no one				
F3	fish friend	oys friend			
F4	oys father	mother-in-laws	father-in-law	oys uncle	
F5	sister	oys brother	mother-in-laws	father-in-law	
F6	oys friend	oys friend			
F7	no answer				
F8	no one				
F9	father				
F10	no answer				
F11	oys father				
F12	oys father				

Table 6. With Whom Do You Typically Engage In Social Activities? ²

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	oys friend	oys friend	oys friend	oys friend	
C2	school friend	school friend	school friend	oys friend	school friend
C3	family				
C4	family	family	oys family	oys friend	oys family
C5	school friend	school friend	oys family	family	
C6	owk friend	oys friend	oys friend		
C7	oys family	oys family	oys friend		
C8	oys family	oys family	family	family	family
C9	oys friend	oys friend	oys friend	oys friend	oys friend
C10	oys friend	oys friend	owk friend	oys friend	friend
C11	owk friend	owk friend	owk friend	oys friend	
C12	oys family	oys family	family	family	family
C13	oys family	oys friend			
F1	no response				
F2	retired friend	retired friend			
F3	neighbor	oys friend	oys neighbor	family	family
F4	school friend	family	college friend	work friend	
F5	oys friend	oys friend	oys family	oys family	
F6	family				
F7	family	family			
F8	family	neighbor	family	family	family
F9	school friend	school friend	school friend		
F10	no response				
F11	school friend	oys friend			
F12	college friend	owk friend	work friend	owk friend	family

² "owk" refers to an individual who the participant met while employed in another line of work.

Table 7. Name Five People Whom You Consider To Be Friends.

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	oyster	oyster	oyster	oyster	
C2	oyster	school	school	school	school
C3	family				
C4	oyster	oyster	oyster	oyster	school
C5	school	school			
C6	oyster	oyster			
C7	oyster	oyster	school		
C8	oyster	oyster	oyster	oyster	oyster
C9	oyster	oyster	oyster	oyster	oyster
C10	oyster	oyster	oyster	school	school
C11	oyster	oyster	fishing	fishing	school
C12	oyster	oyster	college	family	family
C13	oyster	oyster	oyster	oyster	oyster
F1	oyster	oyster	oyster	oyster	
F2	other work	other work			
F3	oyster	oyster	fishing		
F4	school	college	college	college	
F5	oyster	oyster	oyster	oyster	oyster
F6	oyster	oyster			
F7	no answer				
F8	oyster	oyster	oyster	other work	
F9	other work	other work	school		
F10	no answer				
F11	school	other work	oyster	oyster	
F12	college	other work	school	work	other work

Table 8. **Who Could Care For Your Home If You Went Out Of Town?**

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	oys friend	oys friend			
C2	oys father	mother			
C3	dom. partner	oys son	oys son	daughter	
C4	mother	oys brother	oys friend	neighbor	
C5	oys father	mother	father-in-law	oys brother	
C6	oys brother				
C7	oys brother	oys friend			
C8	mother	oys brother			
C9	son	son	daughter	wife	step-son
C10	father-in-law	mother-in-law	neighbor		
C11	sister	neighbor	neighbor		
C12	neighbor	sister			
C13	sister-in-law				
F1	neighbor	nephew	sister	oys friend	oys friend
F2	wife	daughter	daughter		
F3	neighbor	oys friend			
F4	oys father	mother	brother		
F5	sister	oys br-in-law	mother-in-law	father-in-law	
F6	wife	mother	oys father	neighbor	neighbor
F7	oys son				
F8	wife	son	sister		
F9	father	mother			
F10	no answer				
F11	no answer				
F12	grandmother	uncle			

Table 9. Ethnicity of Those With Whom Participants Typically Engage In Social Activities³

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	Croat friend	Croat friend	Croat friend	Croat friend	
C2	non	non	non	Croat friend	Croat friend
C3	non				
C4	Croat family	non	Croat family	Croat friend	Croat family
C5	non	non	Croat family	non	
C6	Croat friend	Croat friend	Croat friend		
C7	Croat family	Croat family	Croat friend		
C8	Croat family	Croat family	non	non	non
C9	Croat friend	non	Croat friend	Croat friend	Croat friend
C10	Croat friend	Croat friend	non	non	non
C11	non	non	non	Croat friend	
C12	Croat family	Croat family	Croat family	Croat family	Croat family
C13	Croat family	Croat friend			
F1					
F2	non	non			
F3	non	non	Croat friend	non	non
F4	non	Croat family	non	non	
F5	Croat friend	Croat friend	Croat friend	Croat friend	
F6	non				
F7	Croat family	Croat family			
F8	Croat family	non	Croat family	Croat family	Croat family
F9	non	non	non		
F10	no response				
F11	non	Croat friend			
F12	non	non	non	non	non

³ "Croat" indicates the person is considered to be of Croatian ancestry.

Table 10. Friends Croatian Ethnicity

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	Croat	Croat	Croat	Croat	Croat
C2	non	non	non	Croat	Croat
C3	no response				
C4	Croat	non	Croat		
C5	non	non			
C6	Croat	Croat	Croat		
C7	Croat	Croat	non		
C8	Croat	Croat	Croat	Croat	Croat
C9	Croat	non	Croat	Croat	Croat
C10	Croat	Croat	non	non	non
C11	non	non	non	non	Croat
C12	non	Croat	Croat	Croat	Croat
C13	Croat	Croat	Croat	Croat	Croat
F1	Croat	Croat	Croat	non	
F2	Croat		Croat		
F3	non	non	Croat		
F4	non	non	non	non	non
F5	non	non	non	Croat	Croat
F6	non	Croat	Croat	non	non
F7	no response				
F8	Croat	Croat	Croat	non	non
F9	non	non	non		
F10	no response				
F11	non	non	Croat	Croat	
F12	non	non	non	non	non

Table 11. **Ethnicity Of Those With Whom Participants Talk About Personal Worries**

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	Croat				
C2	Croat	Croat	Croat	non	non
C3	Croat	Croat	non	non	
C4	non	Croat	Croat	Croat	
C5	no one				
C6	non				
C7	no one				
C8	non	Croat	Croat		
C9	Croat	Croat	Croat		
C10	non	non	non		
C11	non	Croat	Croat	Croat	non
C12	Croat	Croat			
C13	non				
F1	no one				
F2	no one				
F3	non				
F4	Croat	Croat	non		
F5	Croat	non			
F6	Croat				
F7	no answer				
F8	Croat				
F9	Croat				
F10	no answer				
F11	Croat	Croat			
F12	non				

Table 12. **Ethnicity of Those With Whom Participants Talk About Work Decisions**

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	no one				
C2	Croat	non	non	non	Croat
C3	Croat	Croat			
C4	Croat	Croat			
C5	Croat	Croat			
C6	no one				
C7	Croat	Croat			
C8	Croat	Croat			
C9	Croat	non	Croat		
C10	non	Croat	Croat		
C11	Croat	Croat	Croat		
C12	Croat	Croat	non	non	
C13	Croat				
F1	Croat	non			
F2	no answer				
F3	non				
F4	non	Croat	Croat	non	
F5	non	Croat	Croat	Croat	
F6	Croat				
F7	no one				
F8	Croat	Croat	non		
F9	Croat	Croat			
F10	no answer				
F11	no one				
F12	Croat	Croat	non		

Table 13. **Ethnicity Of Those From Whom Participants Could Borrow Money**

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	Croat	Croat	Croat		
C2	Croat	Croat			
C3	no one				
C4	no one				
C5	Croat				
C6	no one				
C7	no one				
C8	Croat	Croat			
C9	Croat	Croat			
C10	non	non			
C11	non	Croat			
C12	Croat				
C13	no one				
F1	non	Croat	Croat		
F2	no one				
F3	non	Croat			
F4	Croat	non	Croat		
F5	Croat	Croat	Croat		
F6	Croat	non			
F7	no answer				
F8	no one				
F9	Croat				
F10	no answer				
F11	Croat				
F12	Croat				

Table 14. Ethnicity of Those Who Could Care For Participants' Homes

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	Croat	Croat			
C2	Croat	Croat			
C3	non	Croat	Croat	Croat	
C4	Croat	Croat	Croat	non	
C5	Croat	Croat	non	Croat	
C6	Croat				
C7	Croat	Croat			
C8	Croat	Croat			
C9	Croat	Croat	Croat	non	non
C10	non	non	non		
C11	Croat	non	non		
C12	non	Croat			
C13	non				
F1	Croat	Croat	Croat	Croat	Croat
F2	Croat	Croat	Croat		
F3	non	non			
F4	Croat	Croat	Croat		
F5	Croat	Croat	non	non	
F6	non	Croat	Croat	non	non
F7	Croat				
F8	Croat	Croat	Croat		
F9	Croat	Croat			
F10	no answer				
F11	no answer				
F12	Croat	Croat			

Ties To Those Who Live Nearby

The Survey of Personal Networks also asked participants to reveal which individuals listed for each question lived within five minutes or more than one hour away. The goal was to identify ties to individuals within the immediate geographic community of the participant and those that might lie outside that community. Given the history of the area in question, I expected to find that ties outside of the geographic community would also represent ties outside of the oyster industry and to individuals who are not of Croatian descent. The geography of Plaquemines Parish, however, made the original measures problematic. The Parish is a long narrow strip dotted with small towns and unincorporated areas, most of which do not provide the range of services needed by residents. As a result it is not unusual for people to travel half an hour or more and still consider their destination “just up the road”. Belle Chasse, the largest town, rests at the northern edge of the parish just below New Orleans and is roughly forty-five minutes by car from Buras and Empire, the two most populous towns in the southern part of the parish. As a result, many residents consider people living within that driving distance as “nearby”. I therefore recorded how far away individuals listed lived from the participant if their residence was not “less than five minutes ” or “more than an hour ”. These distances ranged from fifteen minutes to forty-five minutes and were merged into the category “one hour or less”.

Three current harvesters interviewed for this study reported friends who lived more than one hour away. Participant C11 and C12 reported one friend each who lived more than sixty minutes from them, while C13 listed three friends who lived at that distance (Table 15). Two current harvesters stated that all their friends lived within five minutes of their residence (C2, C5). The remaining participants in this category listed friends who lived within five minutes or between five minutes and one hour (Table 15). When looking at the residential location of those with whom current harvesters interact socially, only one participant (C13) reported someone more than one hour away (Table 16). The same pattern held true on each questions included in the SPN (Tables 17 through 20).

Former harvesters described geographically, a wider network of friends. Seven of the ten former harvesters who responded to the Survey of Personal Networks listed friends who lived more than one hour away (Table 15). Only two former harvesters reported interacting socially with people who lived at that distance, however (Table 16). Thus, responses to other questions on the SPN, indicate that former harvesters, like their counterparts who continue to work in the industry, talk with, depend on, and interact with individuals who live nearby.

ENTERING THE OYSTER BUSINESS

Family History in the Oyster Industry

“It’s what my grandpa did. It’s what my daddy did. It’s what my uncles did and my cousins did. It’s what I did.” (C10)

As discussed in the background section of this dissertation, most of the Croatian people who immigrated to Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries came to work in the oyster industry. The harvesting operations of these early

Table 15. Location of Friends

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.
C2	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.
C3	no response				
C4	≤ 1 hr.	<5 min.	<5 min.		
C5	<5 min.	<5 min.			
C6	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.		
C8	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.
C9	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.
C10	≤ 1 hr.	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.
C11	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	> 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.
C12	> 1 hr.	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	< 5 min.
C13	≤ 1 hr.	> 1 hr.	> 1 hr.	> 1 hr.	< 5 min.
F1	> 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	
F2	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			
F3	< 5 min.	> 1 hr.	< 5 min.		
F4	> 1 hr.	> 1 hr.	> 1 hr.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.
F5	> 1 hr.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	< 5 min.
F6	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.			
F7	no response				
F8	≤ 1 hr.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	< 5 min.
F9	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	> 1 hr.		
F10	no response				
F11	≤ 1 hr.	> 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	< 5 min.	
F12	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	> 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.

Table 16. Location Of Those With Whom Participants Engage In Social Activities

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	
C2	<5 min.	<5 min.	<5 min.	<5 min.	< 5 min.
C3	<5 min.				
C4	<5 min.	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	
C5	<5 min.	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	
C6	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.		
C8	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.			
C9	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.
C10	≤ 1 hr.	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	<5 min.
C11	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	
C12	≤ 1 hr.	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.
C13	≤ 1 hr.	> 1 hr.			
F1	no response				
F2	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.			
F3	<5 min.	<5 min.	<5 min.	<5 min.	<5 min.
F4	> 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	
F5	<5 min.	<5 min.	<5 min.	<5 min.	
F6	<5 min.				
F7	no response				
F8	≤ 1 hr.	<5 min.	<5 min.	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.
F9	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	> 1 hr.		
F10	no response				
F11	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.			
F12	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.

Table 17. Location of Friends With Whom Participants Talk About Personal Worries

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	>1 hr.				
C2	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	<5 min.	<5 min.
C3	<5 min.	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	<5 min.	
C4	<5 min.	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	
C5	no one				
C6	≤ 1 hr.				
C7	no one				
C8	<5 min.	<5 min.	≤ 1 hr.		
C9	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.		
C10	≤ 1 hr.	<5 min.	<5 min.		
C11	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	<5 min.
C12	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.			
C13	<5 min.				
F1	no one				
F2	no one				
F3	<5 min.				
F4	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.		
F5	<5 min.	>1 hr.			
F6	<5 min.				
F7	no answer				
F8	≤ 1 hr.				
F9	≤ 1 hr.				
F10	no answer				
F11	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.			
F12	<5 min.				

Table 18. Location Of Those With Whom Participants Talk About Work Decisions

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	no one				
C2	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.
C3	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			
C4	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.			
C5	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			
C6	no one				
C7	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.			
C8	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			
C7	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	< 5 min.		
C10	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.		
C11	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.		
C12	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	> 1 hr.	> 1 hr.	
C13	< 5 min				
F1	> 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.			
F2	no response				
F3	< 5 min.				
F4	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	
F5	> 1 hr.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	
F6	< 5 min.				
F7	no one				
F8	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	< 5 min.		
F9	< 5 min	≤ 1 hr.			
F10	no response				
F11	no one				
F12	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	< 5 min		

Table 19. Location of Those From Whom Participants Would Or Could Borrow Money

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	> 1 hr.		
C2	≤ 1 hr.	> 1 hr.			
C3	no one				
C4	no one				
C5	< 5 min.				
C6	no one				
C7	no one				
C8	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.			
C9	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			
C10	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.			
C11	> 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.			
C12	≤ 1 hr.				
C13	no one				
F1	> 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.		
F2	no one				
F3	> 1 hr.	< 5 min.			
F4	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	
F5	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	
F6	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.			
F7	no answer				
F8	no one				
F9	< 5 min.				
F10	no answer				
F11	≤ 1 hr.				
F12	≤ 1 hr.				

Table 20. Location of Those Who Could Care For Participant's Homes

Interview #	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5
C1	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			
C2	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			
C3	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	
C4	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	
C5	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	
C6	< 5 min.				
C7	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.			
C8	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			
C9	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.
C10	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.		
C11	≤ 1 hr.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.		
C12	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			
C13	≤ 1 hr.				
F1	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.
F2	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.		
F3	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			
F4	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.		
F5	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	≤ 1 hr.	≤ 1 hr.	
F6	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.
F7	≤ 1 hr.				
F8	< 5 min.	< 5 min.	< 5 min.		
F9	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			
F10	no answer				
F11	no answer				
F12	< 5 min.	< 5 min.			

immigrants then functioned as springboards for family members and other Croatians who came to work in them until they could set out on their own. Boats and oyster leases were also passed down from father to son. In this way a tradition of oyster harvesting was established within families and in the community as a whole. All participants in this study entered the oyster business through this system of community and family ties.

Table 21 describes the deeply rooted family ties to the oyster industry among the current harvesters interviewed for this study. Two participants, C7 and C8, are fourth generation harvester, while five other current harvesters stated that their grandfathers and fathers were/had been oystermen. Five participants in this category also had brothers and/or other family members who work in the industry. Only two current harvesters, C1 and C9, reported that they were the first members of their family to enter the oyster business. Both of these men immigrated to the United States to work in the oyster operations of Croatian-Americans in Louisiana.

Table 21. Family Ties To The Oyster Industry: Current Harvesters

Interview #	Great Grandfather	Grandfather	Father	Brothers	Other Family
C1					
C2			X		X
C3			X		
C4		X	X	X	
C5			X	X	X
C6			X		
C7	X	X	X	X	X
C8	X	X	X	X	X
C9				X	
C10		X	X		
C11		X	X	X	X
C12			X		
C13		X	X		

As Table 22 indicates, the former harvesters also reported long family histories in the oyster industry. The fathers of all participants in this category are or were oyster harvesters, as were six of their grandfathers. Three former harvesters were fourth generation oystermen when they left the industry. The only noticeable difference between current and former harvesters lies in the number of brothers and other relatives who work in oystering. Only one former harvester stated that his brother operates an oyster business, while three mentioned other family members who do.

Motivations for Entering the Oyster Industry

Dense connections to the oyster industry and long family traditions associated with the occupation helped to shape the occupational goals of the men interviewed for this study. For example, nineteen of the twenty-five participants in this study described working, to varying

Table 22. Family Ties To The Oyster Industry: Former Harvester

Interview #	Great Grandfather	Grandfather	Father	Brothers	Other Family
F1		X	X		
F2			X		
F3			X		
F4			X		X
F5	X	X	X		X
F6			X		
F7			X		
F8		X	X		
F9	X	X	X	X	
F10		X	X		X
F11		X	X		
F12	X	X	X		

degrees, in their families' oyster operations as children. A seventy one year old harvester, still working his oyster leases, told this story of his earliest days in the business:

[M]other and father came from Yugoslavia, from Croatia. We lived in the bayou, we didn't have a house then, we lived out of the camps. I grew up out at the camps. My mother and father worked oysters together. You know at the age of six, well, I had to go to school. So they built a house. Momma and Daddy saved a little money, enough to build a little house across the street over there [from his current home]. We started going to school. But meanwhile even at the age of five or six I was already , you know, with my Daddy on the boat, not working oysters but always picking them up, always doing something with them. So I knew the business even at a younger age, even at six years old I knew what they were doing out there. It was hard work.(C3)

Childhood experiences such as these, combined with family traditions and expectations, contributed to the decision of all but two of the nineteen to adopt oyster harvesting as an occupation. The exceptions, F4 and F9, are young men, 26 and 24 respectively, who worked alongside their fathers during high school and college, but decided to leave the industry and begin careers in other areas. The following sections will explore the connections between family, tradition, and occupational decision-making.

Tradition and Expectation

The rich history connecting Croatian families in Plaquemines Parish to the oyster industry had important consequences for their children. For example, among those interviewed for this study, four current and two former harvesters stated that they chose to enter the oyster

business either because it was just “what you did” or because it was a family tradition. One forty-eight year old oysterman offered this typical account of his decision to enter the family business:

Back then times were a little different. When there was a boy born into the family he was the next fisherman. It was almost taken for granted. I was born and we were raised, we had a camp. We'd go to school....when school was out we'd go to the camp. You couldn't even get there by car. You had to get there by boat. We'd spend the whole summer out there. Till school started then we'd go back home. I was raised on the water. On the boat, on the water. As soon as I could see over the steering wheel I used to drive the boat. I was basically, I went to high school because I had to. I knew I was going on a boat. So when I went to college I didn't even try because I wanted to go on the boat. My father, whenever I had a holiday, he'd kind of like take me on the boat. Say come on you know, let's go out. Even if I had a date or something he'd say come on you got to go to work. I was always on the boat. And, like I say, when I got to college I said I'm just going to goof off and play around because I'm going on the boat anyway. I don't need no career because I already have one. So, I did terrible that first semester. Then it was time to go on the boat. So I went to work.(C10)

For others there was a sense of being thrust into the oyster business as this current harvester, also in his forties, described:

In a sense you somewhat pushed into it. Your kind of pushed and encouraged to. We was also encouraged to get an education, but I guess as it is with any family farm⁴ you know that I guess extra hands help no matter what the situation. Part of you kind of feels responsible. There's kind of tugs and pushes, but you just kind of decide you just got to do it. Eventually, you see you know what needs to be done and you do it. As your growing up you're comparing what your doing for a living with what other people are doing. Its interesting yeah, but with fishing and farming there's a lot more individual freedom. And then you start learning the trade secrets. Each family has their own trade secrets. You kind of know the neighborhood- and I'm calling it the neighborhood but its really a part of the estuary- and you start to understand this estuary and how it works....and I guess the accumulation of what's around and having an interest in it. And partially feeling obligated to keep the family tradition things kind of going. I kind of just ended up there. (C12)

A third group of participants stated that they gave little thought to other career options during their formative years. Oyster harvesting was simply what one did as this forty-four year old former harvester recalled:

⁴Participant C12 described his family's oyster mariculture operation as a “farm”

Yeah, we grew up working oysters with our Dad. We worked in the summertime from the time we could do physical work. I would say 15 on I started operating boats and my brother, who is a year younger than me, he and I would work together on a boat. So we were working weekends, holidays. That was just the culture we grew up with. It was something we accepted. What we did.(F5)

A Good Way to Make A Living

Historically, Croatian-American oyster operations have been large and successful. Boys grew up working on family boats and seeing their fathers earn substantial incomes, build comfortable houses, and generally flourish in the industry. At the same time, many participants were themselves earning steady pay working on their families' boats:

No, a lot of my friends they worked in the oil fields, in grocery stores and in restaurants. I never did any of that because we had a full time job on these things [boats] and keeping up the camp. You see my friends were always saying "stay up for the football games", I went to Southeastern [Louisiana University] in Hammond you know and I never stayed up for a weekend. I always came down Friday afternoon, work Saturday and Sunday, then drive back up Sunday evening. Back and forth all the time (C4 aged 39)

Similar experiences prompted two participants to take up the occupation because, in their view, it was a good way to make a living. One, a thirty-six year old oysterman, put it like this:

Well, uh, I guess I always knew [I would go into the business], but I took a little college. It was my second semester. During spring break it was. Everybody went to Florida and everything and I stayed and worked and I made enough money to pay for my next semester of college and room and have money to play with. When I realized that and I missed out on my fun, but at the same time I made quite a bit of money to make it through. Like I said that semester of college and, when that was over, my GPA, well mainly my math was suffering and I just couldn't get past that and decided that I needed to be on the boat and that was it. (C5)

While for a thirty-four year old former harvester, the decision to work oysters was only about potential earnings:

Just money, nothing but money. There's no joy in harvesting oysters. Its strictly work....strictly a money issue. It was sit here and pay my tuition and go to school and live poor. My friends when we was at LSU, I remember them selling plasma.... I didn't have to sell plasma because I worked on the weekends.(F6)

It Get's in Your Blood

For others participants of this study, however, oyster harvesting is a way of life they learned to love while working alongside their fathers, brothers, and cousins. A fifty-one year old current harvester stated simply, "As a kid I was raised in this business. Its kind of like a kid being raised on a farm and becoming a farmer. It was just the natural progression of things. It was something that I fell in love with from a young age" (C8). This quiet sentiment blossomed into a genuine passion for a thirty-nine year old participant and his contemporaries:

I grew up around it. I loved it right away. I love the water the boats. I grew up around boats. It's just the way to go for me. If you put me in an office I would be a basket case. I'm just not an indoor person...He [indicates another oysterman on a nearby boat] is the same way, a bunch of people around here. They wouldn't want to do anything else. _____, it killed him when he couldn't work anymore. He'd come to my house and talk about it. Have a glass of wine. He told me from time to time he came over to see how my day went. He said he was living through me. I was telling him what's goin' on out in the bay, he was feelin' that and imaging being there. So, it's a way of life you know. You have to like what you doing. (C4)

A more detailed explanation of such feelings was provided by participants who recounted why they love or loved this work. A fifty-seven year old former harvester shared the following memories:

The first time I worked oysters I guess I was twelve years old with my father. Not to say working oysters but driving the boat. You used to have to stick poles. I been driving the boat since I was five actually, so by the time I'm twelve years old I was a seasoned driver. At that point we used to have to go stick oyster poles and my job was to steer the boat and go down the line and puttin' the poles in the water. Then I used to clean the boats and paint the boats every summer....I always liked it. It was a business that you were your own boss. You were independent. Nobody told you what to do. It had a lot of, you could call it the self-assured individual. You could be like a cowboy so to speak. Do his own thing. And you could do it. That was the major reason and also when you worked, you worked. There was no time off so to speak. No weekends or whatever. You worked day in and day out. But, then when you were off, you were off. That's what I liked about it. (F11)

These positive aspects of oyster harvesting also seem to outweigh the many negative ones faced by practitioners. One current harvester, aged thirty-six, gave the following statement to that effect:

...[I]t gets in your blood. When your doin' well, when your catching good oysters, it can't get any better and sometimes when your not it can't get any worse. We deal with mother nature a lot and that's pretty tough.....Other than that being your

own boss, freedom of being on the water and just doin' your own thing is probably the best part of it. You know we deal with the elements everyday...you get wind, you get rain, you get cold fronts...it's hot, but when you finish up there's still satisfaction, you know? Knowing that my father did it, my grandfather and grandmother did it and I hope that my kids will have the opportunity to do it.(C5)

For some the appeal of this way of life was enough to draw them back from other occupations. One retired harvester admitted that he had moved back and forth from oystering to other lines of work throughout his working years:

No, I worked with my daddy until I was seventeen or eighteen, you know summers and weekends...Actually when I got out of school I went to work for a gas company and I worked there for nine years. I was a measurement technician and then when I quit them I bought the boat. Well I got the boat and got it ready then I quit....I missed it. You got a lot of freedom with it. You're basically working for yourself and if you want to take a few days off you can any time you want. You're no punching a clock.(F3)

Family Encouragement

The influence of early childhood experiences and strong emotions associated with oyster harvesting were often more powerful than a families insistence that their son receive an education. As Table 23 illustrates the families of most participants interviewed for this study emphasized education. They wanted their sons to have options. As one current harvester put it, "every fisherman encourages education for their son or daughter because nobody [of their generation] had it." (C2). Those participants who stated that their families stressed high school completion or college attendance also reported a wide array of attitudes toward oyster harvesting on the part of their parents (Table 23). Parents were variously described as encouraging or supporting oyster harvesting as a career path (2), leaving the decision up to the participant (7), and discouraging or refusing to support their sons' interest in harvesting (5).

Despite the ambivalence or outright opposition of their families, most of these men did indeed enter the oyster industry for some period of their working lives. Parental reaction to the decision to enter oyster harvesting ranged from acceptance to anger. Participant C4, aged thirty-nine, described his parents reaction as follows:

They were fine. It wasn't a big problem at all. My brother had already basically made the same move....They always pushed education, but at the same time the business was good. We know it's a hard life, we lived it, at that time eighteen or nineteen years. That was what we knew. And seeing a little bit about what else was out there this was as good or better that anything else. I mean we liked being outside, that was pretty much it all the rest as they say is history. (C5)

On the other hand a fifty-seven year old former harvester recalled his parents very different reaction to his decision to enter the oyster business as follows, "They didn't like it. They felt it was too hard work. That there was a better life outside of that" (F11). For another former

harvester, twenty-six years of age, his father when he decided to work oysters full-time after college was even more negative:

He didn't encourage me....He didn't want me to get involved with it...I did it while I was at college. I went during summers to make money...There was one point when I finished LSU when I thought about doing it [on my own], but no way. He wouldn't even have let me if I had wanted to. It was verbal. I can remember we had an argument over it one time. He wouldn't have supported me one bit. Wouldn't have given some funds even to start. He was pretty adamant against it. (F4)

Faced with these less than glowing parental attitudes, why did the men interviewed for this study decide to enter the oyster business at all? For one current harvester, aged fifty-one, the choice was an easy one made early on, as this statement illustrates:

Well I think my Dad, he always gave me the opportunity to choose something else, but I think my Dad always knew from the time I was a young kid that I had a particular interest in this business. And I think ultimately he was very pleased that I came into business with him....He sent me to school. I got a good quality education and I could have done other things to be sure. But, I chose not to. I chose to come into business with him. (C8)

While a forty-four year old former harvester, who has left oyster harvesting twice in his work-life, recounted his desire for alternatives:

We went to school. We did well in school all of us....and after I completed high school I had a choice whether I wanted to go to college or not and I decided to go to college....Our parents left it open. It was up to us. If I had wanted to go work oysters my Dad would have been content to let me run a boat and work oysters. I knew the oyster business already. When I was seventeen I already had enough experience harvesting oysters. So I could make my living with oysters, but I didn't want to get stuck without trying something else. I listened to the old-timers and they said, "boy stay in school, don't do like I did."....got my degree in engineering ...[but] it was my intention to come back and work in the oyster business. It was something I knew I was going to do sooner or later. (F5).

Finally, a current harvester, aged forty-five, described the pull of both his family and the oyster industry:

Actually, I was the first in a long line to go to college. I paid for it myself. And then to go to law school. So they weren't too happy about it [his decision to leave school and return to the oyster business]. He [his father] grew up in a time when you had nothing. All you did was work to take care of yourself and he raised us four and made a good life, good living for all of us. No education. He went to

fourth grade...and he was proud of the fact that I had done so well in school, you know, and I was proud of the fact that he and my brother had done so well fishing. So I went to school- luckily I had a dual education. I had training...I could fish for a living plus I also had an education I could fall back on...Then I watched my Daddy's health go bad real quick. So I had a choice to make. And I wasn't really happy in law-school. I said "so let me go back on the boat where my heart was." My mind was in the school, but my heart was on the boat. (C11)

Help Getting Started

For all of the participants of this study, however, the desire to enter the oyster business as a full-time career was only realized with the help of others. Whether stepping into the family business, forming a partnership with family members, or establishing a new operation, each utilized family relationships or family connections to achieve their goal. In addition, four participants used family and community ties to immigrate to the United States. Oyster harvesting was, for these men, either a career in which to succeed long-term or a stepping stone as they established themselves in a new country. The following sections will explore each of these scenarios.

The Family Business

For many participants the transition from part-time helper to full-time harvester took place within the family business. This seventy-one year old current harvester recalled his family building-up their operation as a unit:

When I got to be fourteen I was already a captain on a boat, I was running a boat for my daddy. Then business started picking up. Little by little we inched our way up...We all worked and lived out in the bayou and everything we made we saved. When we built a boat in them days and I mean 1945-1950 you know you could build a boat for 15,000 dollars them days you pay for it it would be like paying 200,000 dollars today. So when I'm talking about expanding I mean your thinking about the debt today you'd have to go finance it and in them days they didn't even have a bank that would lend you any money. You just saved what you could save. (C3)

Others moved into the family business full-time after they reached adulthood. One thirty-nine year old oysterman related this story of how his relatives maintained the family oyster business after his father's death and until he chose to assume control:

Well, that's just it. The business was there. We had three wooden, smaller wooden oyster boats at the time. Everything was in place. I had an uncle who took it over, ran it for my mom, my cousin took it over a few years after that. He ran it for a while until he bought his own boat. Then I came of age... I think it was '82. In '82 I decided to get out of college and start working. In '83 we started building this boat. (C4)

Table 23. Parents' Attitudes Toward Harvesting and Education

Interview #	Family Encouraged/ Supported Oystering	Family Left it Up to Me	Family Discouraged Oystering	Family Encouraged High School Graduation	Family Encouraged College Education
C1			X		
C2			X	X	
C3		X			
C4		X			X
C5		X			X
C6	X				
C7		X			X
C8			X		X
C9		X			
C10	X				
C11		X			X
C12	X			X	
C13	X				
F1			X	X	
F2	X				
F3	X				
F4			X		X
F5		X			X
F6			X		X
F7					
F8	X				
F9			X		X
F10					
F11			X		X
F12		X			

A former harvester, aged forty-four, returned to his family business after his father retired:

My Dad had retired...so the family business was in [my brother's] hands. He had to more or less fend for it on his own and we had two boats and a lot of oyster beds.... It was something interesting to see what I could do with it....so I came back home and [my brother] and I started in business together. We were working as a partnership, taking my Dad's boats. It was still a family business. (F5)

Though a family business was waiting for each of these men, they invested a great deal of time and energy in improving, revitalizing, or expanding their respective operations. One harvester assured me that, "... there's nothing easy about stepping into some position in life, not at all. It's a lot of backbreaking long hours, sleepless nights, a lot of pressure. It's a hard industry to make a living at, but when you're raised up in it you learn to take that (C12). Family members helped smooth the transition from youthful worker to full-time harvester for many as this former harvester remembers:

Sure, my Dad helped me. Oh, yeah. He's still there for me if I need help. I'm pretty well off now to where I don't need his help but if I ever do he's right there. Equipment and mainly knowledge, and financial help also, but the knowledge was the most important way he could help.(F6)

Family Partnerships

Another group of participants established partnerships with family members rather than joining an already existing operation. One fifty-one year old harvester described how he and his father formed a partnership and established a new, expanded operation:

Actually, we have a corporate structure that we do business in at present and that corporate structure was started by me and my Dad back in 1974 with the purchase of a number of oyster leases from a retiring oyster man. A cousin of my Dad's. So we purchased those leases and we formed a corporation and is the entity we do business in today. (C8)

While another oysterman, aged forty-five, began his career when he bought his father's portion of the family business:

I guess it was when I bought the other half of the boat. My dad's sickness got so bad he sold me the other half and my brother and I worked together. That's when we started full-time. Oystering and shrimping. We built another boat for oysters and shrimp, but then the shrimp business got so bad that my brother does strictly oysters with that one....Well the one that I run is the one my Daddy had built forty-five years ago. We just maintained it....kept it up. It's a wooden boat. It don't look like its forty-five years old. But, we were raised that way. You take care of your equipment. And we built another one.... Had it built and paid for it. And added on and paid for it and made it bigger and paid for it. (C11)

Family Connections Help

In several cases, family or community connection provided access to the financial capital necessary in order to establish a new oyster operation. A fifty-seven year old former harvester recalled the importance of Croatian-owned financial institutions, “ Back in them days we did financing with the Delta Bank and also with a company that used to belong to...a Croatian man...The only thing my father had [for collateral] was some oyster beds and some of ‘em are estates from the time of his father” (F8).

The youngest active harvester in this study, C2 aged twenty-three, painted a detailed picture of how family connections allowed him to go into business for himself against his fathers wishes:

Finally, boat came for sale fifty thousand. So I talked to my mom, kept talking to my mom and she's the one who went to the bank and was like, she got a personal loan for herself for fifty thousand.... Then that fell through, the guy wouldn't sell the boat... so I bought some leases. Paid five thousand dollars for them. I bought fifty percent of these leases. The people that owned them weren't fishermen, they just inherited it right. It was my mom's aunt.... I didn't have enough money to build a boat so this is what I did [applied for a loan]....My dad and them dealt with that guy a long time ago, they borrowed money, even they borrowed money just to live on when they didn't make no money... So I had the few leases, had the application, had the boat and the money was running out...

During this period, his father was not willing to give him anything directly, so he approached another lending agency:

...I went to Farm Services Agency, went to him and talked to him and said I'm building a boat and I need the money to finish it. “Well all I can give you is two hundred thousand. That's the maximum. Your father has a good name with us.” The fifty is on the side, I got a hundred and thirty from the bank. I went to the bank, I told the bank guy the whole time, I'm gonna get his loan from the Farm Service, he's gonna come pay you off, you know, but I need this money right now.

At this point, he turned to another family connection:

So I went to the guy we sell oysters to against my Dad's will. He's got plenty of money. I looked at him and I said look, I need to get my boat finished. The banks waiting for me to get approved and this guys on the board at Regions (Bank) anyway, that's how much money he has, and he said well how much do you need. I said about fifteen thousand dollars. He said let me talk to my wife and I'll get back to you..... So he gave me the money to live on and get the boat out while the bank is dragging their feet. So and I told him I will pay you as soon as they give me the loan. So when the loan passed the bank I went back to him and paid him back and gave him a bottle of Dom Perrignon and said thank you and he told me most people never pay me back and you brought a present and that's good. And

he would have never gave me that money, he gave me that money cuz my dad worked for him for thirty years and he could see it in my eyes when I went to him, I needed it. (C2)

Another current harvester, C 13, related this account of assistance from a distant family connection:

In 1979 I went back home [to Croatia] to visit with my parents, with my mother and my father. Then I met one gentleman who was there from New Orleans. He happened to be one of the top businessmen here in New Orleans. When we got into conversation I found out that we share same roots... He gave me his business card and offered that when I came back to the United States if I should need any help I could always call on him. I said thank you very much and was the end. I thought he was just one of those guys once you meet him and he is all excited about meeting you know distant relative, but once he goes back he's gonna more or less forget about me and who I was and that sort of thing. Well to my surprise that didn't happen. When I came back to United States in my Post Office box down in Empire I find letter from he. He wanted to meet with me again. So I got a little time and went to his office in New Orleans in St. Charles Street and there he introduced me to his father and his brother....then later on he offered me a job...

Though he initially turned down the job offer, conditions in the oyster industry took a turn for the worse and he was no longer able to make enough money operating the oyster boats of others. As a result:

I was out of a job. So I called back this gentlemen and he said sure you can come work for us. So I worked at his plant over in St. Rose for about six months then I went back to work as an oyster harvester again. Then I met.... my wife, I think it was... '79, no it was ...1980, when we bought our first boat. It was a wreck and I was working on it to fix it and bring it into working condition down in Empire. There was a boat yard owned by a gentlemen...and he came to me and said this gentlemen was calling for you....so I... called him back. And it was this same gentleman and his father and they wanted to know what I was up to, what I was doing. Then I told them what happened in the last five, six months and that I met [future wife]. They said, "Why don't you come to our house for Christmas Eve. We have a big Christmas Eve party. We'd like you to come and bring your then fiance, with you." I said, "Ok, let me see if I can swing that." So when I told them what was happened that I bought a boat, they wanted to know who financed me, what were interest rates and all that. I told them, not thinking about what was about to happen....

He later received another call from this same man:

...when I first financed my boat the lender offered lower interest rates should I bring him ten thousand dollars, I believe it was within 90 days. This man said,

"Well, we'll lend you ten thousand dollars interest free. Pay us back when you can. And pay this man so he can bring that interest rate down." I said, " I don't know if I can accept that. If I can take it. I have to talk it over with my mother and father and fiancé," ...[My wife] and I went to their house on Christmas Eve and indeed there was a check already made out in my name for ten thousand dollars and that's how we the first payment on the boat that we have. Then I brought this money to this finance company and they say that interest will stay the same. When this gentleman gave me this check of ten thousand dollars he said, "If your lender don't bring down your interest rate come talk to us we'll take care of your loan where it wouldn't cost you so much." Since this lender wouldn't bring the interest routes down I called on them again and they paid the balance on that loan and I had the boat interest free. That was the beginning. Then I decided I needed bigger boat and they offered they would finance it again. That's how I got bigger boat... And I'm not sure there are many people who do things like this and that there aren't many people that something like this actually happens to. So that's how I got started. (C13)

Coming to America

Four participants, three current and one former harvester, immigrated to the United States as adults. In three of these cases family members of these participants had been working oysters in Louisiana for generations while continuing to raise their children in Croatia. This connection to the U.S. paved the way for those children make their way to Louisiana and into the oyster industry. The forty-eight year old harvester who described his entrance into the oyster industry above was a recent immigrant to Louisiana despite the fact that his father and grandfather had been osytermen in the U.S.:

How I got into it? It's a family tradition. My grandfather was an oysterman. My father was. I had no education and where I was born and raised if you have no education and we didn't have much land to work with so I had to do something. This was the way out. You can in a way getting away from poverty. Living in Communist Yugoslavia at that time it wasn't much of fun and I had to look for something. This was the only way. Well, I won't say the only way out, but one of the two ways out. I had a choice either to come to the United States or join my two sisters in Sydney, Australia and I chose United States. (C13)

A former harvester, also forty-eight, was able to work in a relatives oyster business when he first arrived in the country:

When I first came to the country my sister [and brother-in-law] now in Plaquemines and I'm working for them for a couple of months and after that I went on boat working oysters [for other Croatian boat owners] because my... Daddy, my Grandpa used to work in oysters. My Daddy had oyster lugger and worked oyster pretty much. Most of the time he was in the United States, all the time really he was in the United States spent he was in oyster business .(F10)

The other participants in this category used ties to the Croatian community in Louisiana to come to the United States. One, a fifty-six year old current harvester, reported his experience as follows:

Well you know when I was in Yugoslavia this guy you know...saw me in Yugoslavia. He was in the oyster business at that time then I ask him if he want to sponsor for me to come to the United States. He said yeah and he was the one who put the bond down and all that you need to do and he brought me over there and paid for all my things that need to be taken care and I started working for him. That was 1968. (C9)

Another current harvester, aged thirty-three, recently immigrated to work in the oyster industry. As he put it he, "came over to work with a friend of a friend. My good friend, who is a U.S. citizen, sold his boat and moved back to Croatia. He contacted the buyer who invited me to come over and run the boat for him...I was born in a fishing area, I came because I loved fishing..." (C1). Finally, one oysterman described his father's immigration and entry into the industry during the 1960's as follows:

My dad came to American when he was 26. Couldn't speak English, didn't know anything. His brother was here before him. His brothers ten years older than him, but his brother was here a couple of years, five years before him. He sent for him to come here, picked him up from the airport. He didn't even have any clothes in his suitcase, just what he was wearing and the empty suitcase which I don't know why he brought it, just to fit in I guess. But he picked him up from the airport and they went straight to work and he hasn't stopped since. That's pretty much what happened.(C2)

DECIDING TO STAY IN OR GET OUT

After the decision to enter the oyster industry was made, family, friendship, and community ties were accessed in order to implement that choice. Most participants in this study believed, at this crucial moment in their lives, that they would be oystermen for the rest of their working lives. As the industry changed, however, that certainty began to waiver. The following sections will address the relationship between this change in context, attitudes toward oyster harvesting, and decisions about the future.

Work Satisfaction and Future Plans

One group of current harvesters held such strong feelings for their work that they found the thought of quitting difficult to contemplate, as this fifty-one year old current harvester makes clear:

I enjoy doing what I do. From the lifestyle. I love being outdoors. I love boats. I love being outdoors on the water. The life out there. The fresh air. No telephones

bothering you. Of course now we have cell phones so telephones have caught up with us. But it's a lifestyle that is really unique and like I say I've been engaged in that lifestyle so many years, since I was a small child, that I would find it very difficult to give up. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't give it up. Even if I couldn't make any more money being an oyster man I would always have a boat and just go out for the ride. (C8)

When asked if he had ever considered leaving the oyster business, another current harvester, aged forty-five, described adjusting his lifestyle so as to make the question unnecessary:

Not really. Not really. I'm to the point, almost to the point, in my life where a lot of my stuff is paid for.... I'm good at oyster fishing. I manage my money better than most people. My bookkeeper asks me how I do it and I say, "I don't drive- I just got that truck, it's seven years old, but I had a ninety eight no a seventy-nine Ford pickup truck until last year. And everyone says, "Why you drive that old truck?" Why should, it has air condition. It goes a hundred miles an hour if I need it to. I can leave it anywhere. I don't have to impress anybody....I got a nice house. Nothing exuberant, but its nice. So I'm to the point where in another two years it'll be paid off. (C11)

Finally, a thirty-six year old oysterman expressed some optimism about the future:

It's doing good. Its cyclic, it always has been. We're coming off a four or five year stretch that's been really good and we know that the hard times are coming now for the next couple of years. You try to plan and save for those times and make the best of em. I mean were not fortune tellers either, we can't predict the future, we don't know exactly what's going to happen. We're just gonna do to the best of our ability. Planting strategies and what not and do a little bit of praying and hope for the best. (C5)

Uncertainty

For one participant in this study, aged forty-one, there is a sense of uncertainty surrounding his career in the oyster industry. When asked if he had thought about quitting he responded:

Sure 365 days a year. No often, quite often. I guess because I really haven't done anything else- not because I haven't had a lot of experiences in life and stuff like that because being an oyster farmer if you want to take time to go do something you prepare yourself and go do it. I've been able to travel around the world, not around the whole world, but different parts of the world, see different things and experience different cultures and stuff like that in life. But, there's always I guess something, I've never really done anything else and you always have a part of you that wonders, wonders if there was really something else you was meant, called to do or something. Then there's, when things are going good there's really no place

else in the world. Then when the business is bad and things are real demanding and the pressures build that's when you really kind of question. I guess those kind of questions kind of pop into your mind.(C12)

Dissatisfaction

While addressing the many problems facing the oyster industry, another group of harvesters expressed their concerns about the future, their desire to leave oystering, and their perceived limited options. One participant voiced the following:

Well, when I get frustrated I think "I'm gonna give up this. There must be better ways to make a living" . Then when I kind of cool off and start thinking a little better I don't see nothing better that I can go into. I mean immediately then I get back into what I'm doing. I can do a lot of things, but I don't have no degree or nothing. Maybe one day in the future I might think of doing something else. I don't think this is gonna last me to my old age. The way its been going, every year is worse and worse. (C6)

For another harvester, limited work experience and industry pressures have left him feeling trapped:

I'd love to [quit]. Everyday. Everyday. But, I've never had a job doing anything else for one minute of my life and I just don't think with the bills I have that I could survive doing anything else....Its such a different job. I feel like I'm trapped. I really. It was great back then. It was almost like it was my heritage. But, everything has changed. I feel like the government, the federal government, is trying to push everybody out. They are making so difficult. They have all of these rules that are unnecessary and too much of a burden on us. They are trying to make it hard for us. Is's like they wanted us to get out. If I could oblige them I would. (C10)

Financial concerns are at the heart of this oysterman's inability to leave the industry:

At this point, really I can't afford to. You know. I've got this boat. The boat next to us on the left. That one run's part-time. I have somebody running that for me. If I were to try to sell out, I don't know if I'd get the money out of it that I should get. In that case its kind of like the stock market. You sell high and buy low. It would be impractical to try and get out, then what would I do when I got out. I'm too young to retire. If I was twenty years older I might think about it. (C4)

An older harvester echoed this man's sentiments:

Right now I am so disgusted. Well, you know, reason is the most of my life, part of my life, I invested all my money in the oyster business because I saw the future in those days. Sense the whole thing changed, you know, now I can't get out. You

know my age. I got no time to switch to another type of business. Because all my money, my boat itself, I invested \$200,000 in my boat and you know who I'm going to sell that to for the money I put into that, plus my leases, plus this and that you know. I got to stay in and fight it. (C9)

Finding A New Occupation

The reasons given by former harvesters for leaving the industry also offer insights into the changing attitudes toward and experiences of oyster harvesting in this community. When former harvesters were asked why they decided to leave the oyster business the most common response was financial difficulties. The wide array of problems facing the industry, combined with existing market pressures, contributed to the decision to seek more stable and secure sources of income. Two of these men stated that they would return to the oyster industry if the conditions changed. Other participants described frustration and a loss of satisfaction in their oyster work, while two former harvesters simply found their new line of work more appealing. One participant left the oyster industry for health reasons. Table 24 summarizes these responses.

Having made the decision to leave the oyster industry these men took a variety of career paths. Along the way they were helped by a variety of friends, family, and work associates. The following sections examine the role played by these social ties in the transition from oyster harvesting to new occupations.

Mixed Strategies

Several former harvesters described blending aspects of their oyster harvesting operations with new types of work in order to deal with problems facing the industry. One participant, who now works in the processing side of the oyster industry, stated that his brother runs the family's harvesting operation though he "assist[s] with that from time to time. But my heart is still in there with the boats and the leases." (F5).

Though no longer harvesting themselves, others continue to earn money from their families' oyster leases by subleasing or contracting out the harvesting of oyster grown on their reefs as this former harvester explains:

I had other people working the leases and I still had oyster boats up until about 1990 myself... That's when I decided to let people like my nephews and, we use a lot of Vietnamese to fish our oysters. Yeah the Vietnamese... they're really not in the oyster business, but they do work a lot of leases for us and all. We'll put 'em out there to fish the oysters until they fish it out, come back the next couple of years they may start back up again. (F8)

Participant F6 also pursued this strategy in his transition from full-time harvester:

I own oyster leases. I had my own oyster boat where I would go out and bring a crew with me and fish and everything, but trying to be in two places at one time, you know, trying to be on the oyster boat and the shrimp boat at the same time

really didn't work out real well. And putting other people on my oyster boat and having them run it for me, that didn't work out either with the liability. You know you always gotta worry about someone getting hurt and I'm responsible for the break downs, something breaks and I gotta pay for it you know and people don't take care of your equipment. So I just sold that oyster boat and now I'm just concentrating mainly on shrimp, but I still have oyster leases where other people go on my leases and other people fish for me. I bedded those leases throughout the years and I put reefs on 'em and now they just fish 'em for me. At times it goes pretty good, you know, but this year was kind of slow, last year was good, but this year was slow. (F6)

Table 24. Reasons For Leaving The Oyster Industry

Interview #	Didn't Enjoy the Work Anymore	Prefer Other Work	Left for Financial Reasons	Left for Health Reasons	Wish to go Back
F1			X		
F2	X				
F3				X	
F4		X			
F5			X		X
F6			X		
F7	X				
F8			X		
F9		X			
F10	X				
F11			X		X
F12			X		

He is also attempting to blend shrimping, and work in insurance sales:

I still have my licence to sell insurance and I'm going to continue to do that because I don't want to grow old as a fishermen so I plan on pursuing my insurance career. I do it on the side now. I'm not doing it this month, because the shrimp is pretty good you know, but like in the winter time when it gets cold and it gets really hard to go out on the water from say December till April. So I think I'll try to get my license for property and casualty. Right now I only have my "life and health" license. I just got into the insurance business like last winter. That was the first time I did it and I liked it, just the money wasn't real good you know. (F6)

Former Job/Croatian Tie

Participant F10 gave a detailed account of the help he received from former job ties and members of the Croatian community. After coming to the United States to work in his extended family's oyster operation he decided the work was not for him. He began looking for a new job and, as he stated:

I know some people and they told to me to go ask guy if you can have job. ...[H]e was vice president of the from old Yugoslavia, so really he give me job. He put me on. So I worked for him for a couple of years. Like a helper and after that they put me on a press. Like an apprenticeship. I went to Delgado [Community and Technical College] at night and work daytime. When I finish boiler-maker not machinist. Training at Delgado. Apprenticeship to the State. I don't know which years it was, somewhere '69, I think '69, I changed jobs and went to work for another company where I became foreman, superintendent, salesman, whatever they need. (F10)

After some time without promotion he decided to go into business for himself. To improve his chances for success he sought out a partner:

I knew him from before. I knew him a little bit from old country..[W]e rent the building. We bought a couple of machines, but really he didn't want to quit his job. I quit my job and he didn't want to quit his job. I didn't have any choice we just go separate way. So I called another guy I know he's worked good machines. So he came over there, but I don't know, he was young. He didn't care I had a family. I had family to support. So he didn't last long...Then I was on my own. With big trouble ahead of me. At that time I had two children and my wife didn't work. So I had pretty big, big trouble.

With difficulty he was able to continue building this business on is own:

Little by little, you know. We had to work so hard. When really I started to make a few dollar, more money, I started to make more money when economy in the 80's went down, economy 80's a bunch of people went out of business. At that time people where looking for cheaper and good work, cheaper and that's when I gained some customers. At that time I build up my business. I buy machine. I bought building across the street and this building. And my son came right in. He worked with me all the time. He works for himself now. He's got a shipyard. Through school he worked with me. Then he finished mechanical engineering, he worked two job as engineer, he came back work with me for a few years and after that he start shipyard. (F10)

Oyster Ties

Two former oystermen interviewed for this study shifted from the harvesting side of the industry to handling and processing. For participant F3 the move was prompted by declining health. Not wishing to leave the area or the industry entirely he looked for opportunities close to home. Close and trusting relationships within that community allowed him to start his current business as he relates in the following excerpt:

We was working for a dealer, been working for him for a long time, he died and his son took over, but he quit- just decided he didn't want to do it anymore he just quit, which left us, we had to make a decision find somebody else to sell the oysters to. The other dealers down here we knew of certain situations and we just didn't want to go with them and uh so uh I knew everyone who was working we had worked together for years. So I told them I would considered doing it if they would stick with me and sell me the oysters and they all said yeah they would try it and that's how I did it. (F3)

Another former harvester left the harvesting side of his family's business to fill a perceived need in the industry. He was able to use connections made through his harvesting operation to begin a now successful processing business. His account began with a rash of negative publicity concerning the health risks associated with eating raw oysters and the subsequent drop in prices:

And I saw that I did not have much control over where my oyster goes so I started looking at other alternatives to help the oyster industry out of its dilemma. And going to a lot of the oyster meetings and seeing that oysters were really having a hard time in the public opinion and got slammed for getting people sick, I always thought the industry should do more to make oysters safer..... But, I did everything I could. I put refrigeration on my boat. I put coolers on my boat to refrigerate it as soon as possible to try to make the oysters fresh. We're packing the oysters on the boat. Something other oystermen just weren't doing. We washed, grade, packed it and refrigerated on our boats. From our boats it would go straight onto a refrigerated truck. And we were selling; we had a market out on the West Coast in California. We'd send the oysters in two days....So we were doing the extra step trying to get top quality and that was our niche....Even though I did everything I could somebody could eat it and get sick and die. That bothered me. That really bothered me....What I stumbled on is some research that you can kill the bacteria by heating the oyster at mild temperatures. You can kill this bacteria and I thought wouldn't that be great if we could develop a method to kill this bacteria.... I shared it with the people I was selling to, the processors and dealers that I was selling to, and they didn't think it was that great an idea.

Then pressure, in the form of impending regulations, was placed on the industry:

The idea started with the buyer that we had in California. He was an entrepreneur that was involved in different projects. He had his oyster distributorship in Southern California, but he had other projects going on in casino boats, gambling and what not. He was a promoter and able to put people together. I just felt like I needed somebody that could move this thing. So I got involved with him and he brought another one of his friends and former partners that used to work with him in _____ Steamboat Company..., [my business partner] used to be the president of _____ Steamboat. So we had a business plan laid out that there would be rosy projections for this new business because it seemed like such a great idea. And everybody that hears about it says it's a great idea; its gonna take off like wildfire. It just didn't happen that way. We had the partners and the three of us were the main partners. They were already connected to a network, a loose network, of investors in New Orleans area.... There were also some investors in California. But, there were some well to do investors, mainly people that [my partners] had known. Its mainly on their side that the private monies came in. We didn't involve the smaller people in the industry. One of the requirements of the investment was, I forget what they call it, but you have to be in a position to, you can't solicit money from someone who can't afford to risk it all. (F5)

School Ties/ Friends

Another type of social tie that proved useful for the former harvesters in this study were friendships made during their college years. One participant was introduced to a new line of work, insurance sales, through friendships he had maintained for years despite his return to oyster harvesting after college:

A friend of mine did it for years. A couple of friends actually and I seen them doing pretty good for themselves and I just kind of wanted to get into it. So I asked them about it and they told me there was an opening so I got in with 'em. He lives in New Orleans, the guy who got me into it. About an hours drive away....No, actually it was a friend of mine I met at Nichol's (Nichol's State Univeristy). I went to LSU for a year and a half then I went to Nichol's for a year and a half and I met this guy at Nichol's. We just stayed friends and you know I just, when I seen him doing good you know, but you always think the grass is greener on the other side. It was like he didn't do real well when he first started off, but he is now. He's been doing it probably for ten or fifteen years. I jump into his shoes and try to accomplish what he doing over night and that's impossible. (F6)

Former oysterman F2 described his move in and out of full-time oyster harvesting over the years. After arriving in the United States at sixteen and setting up a lucrative oyster operation with his brother in Plaquemines Parish he decided to try his hand at other maritime activities. As he stated, "I worked out on the water all my life. I was a boat operator. I worked out in the Gulf

running tugboats, running crew boats, hauling passengers. I'd go out in the oil field." He later returned to the family business for some years only to meet his wife and decide: "I need a pay check every two weeks so I went back to the oil fields running crew boats." His former employment in that industry proved useful for obtaining a new position. At a later date, however, he once again needed a change. As he recalled:

I wanted to do something else, but it had to be on the water. So started commercial fishing with a good friend of mine years ago. Oh red snapper, black snappers, pompano...I went fishing with my buddy until last year when I had to give it up. I had a bad leg. I had to wear a brace. I couldn't handle it anymore. (F2)

Family Ties

Family members who work at other occupations are important connections for harvesters who wish to leave the industry. One young harvester, C1, who plans to leave the industry in the near future will return to Croatia where, as he put it, " My family is happy and supportive. I will go into the family business, restaurant, shop." For a seventy-three year old former harvester family members in agriculture allowed him to leave oystering when he decided it was not his career of choice:

My uncle. Yes. They were in the citrus business too. Oranges, they used to make wine. Orange wine. And then she had a bar-room downstairs and a dance floor upstairs. He died in '49, in 1949. And then his wife, my aunt, she was still living. I don't even remember when she died. Its been so long ago. Not too long because a freeze came twice after...I helped my aunt on the farm. (F7)

Another participant shifted from the family oyster business he had worked in from the age of fifteen to his uncles tugboat operation:

Well, it was sort of a- my grandfather was in it. When I first started actually I worked on a tugboat a year or so when I was a kid and it was family members I was working for and it became an interesting way of also something I new and something to get involved in to make a living. It was that type of situation. It was basically like a hand-me-down situation also, getting involved in the oil fields, because my uncle had boats. My both uncles had boats working in the oil fields and it was a type of situation same thing as the oyster business....I hire people to run the passengers and supplies back and forth...And I have a couple of tug boats too. Shipyard yes. We work on shrimpboats and yachts. As a matter of fact we, (youngest son) and I, have plans to open up a pretty good size shipyard down the river. There aren't any shipyards in the Venice area and there a hundreds and hundreds of boats. There are small ones like I have. So we are getting ready to start a bigger one. (F8)

This man's son was also a participant in this study. He had worked oysters with his father and brother during high school and college, but decided it was not a career he wanted to pursue. He also described his decision to leave college and join the crewboat operation his father had established during his college years:

I don't know, I guess basically 'cause I saw maybe it had an opportunity for me. Originally I was going for pharmacy, but plans kind of changed and I wound up getting a marketing and management degree which is helping me out now. Working with my father you know. Just different aspects of the business. There's certain things that I've learned that are helpful. You know, especially when you know we get a lot of lawsuits in this business. I help my father understand exactly what they say because nowadays they really try to confuse you...I applied [to pharmacy school] the first time and I didn't get in and I never even looked back. He went into this business and I went for a business degree right away and got out with it. It was always something to fall back on if pharmacy didn't work out....I don't know. It just worked out that way. I couldn't explain why. Maybe I didn't see it as a good way for me to make a living or the best opportunity for me to pursue.(F9)

Participant F12 also left oystering for a tugboat operation owned by his father:

It had really gotten taken over by people I really didn't like dealing with. An opportunity opened to go back with my father full-time with the tugs and I was having difficulty collecting money from people who owed it to me. And on the other end of my wholesale, because I used to credit- I'd sell the oysters on credit to them- and they got too far behind and it ended up in litigation which was a big hassle. It just wasn't worth it anymore. And part of the reason or it was that our family grounds were pretty much deemed closed for probably forever. I don't know if they will ever reopen...I basically just went to work for him (father). He needed weekend dispatchers to stay in the office twenty four hours a day on the weekends. And I started by doing that and working some days during the week to as whatever. Basically doing whatever he needed me to do.(F12)

Academic Credentials

A final group of participants moved into their new lines of work after accumulating academic credentials and professional achievements. They reported applying for job openings they found in classified advertisements or professional publications.

I did it [worked oysters] when I was at LSU. I went during the summers and go out there to make some extra money when I could. I graduated in 1997 and...I worked with them for that full year. Make some money...then from there I just completely stopped. I went away to PT school for two and a half years.... Well, I sent out resume's this past summer while I was in Florida (at PT school) all around the New Orleans area. Actually, I had a job with another company coming

home and I was getting ready to start the following week and this guy called from downtown and wanted to meet me. It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. He was getting ready to open up two clinics and he wants me to run one of them. It's great opportunity right out of school. (F4)

Another former harvester, now a Certified Public Accountant, also found his current job in this manner. He was able to use the social ties he had established during his years in the in the oyster industry in order to establish a client base as he related in this quote:

Well what happened was I went to accounting (his undergrad) and I went to Law School to have a legal background basically. I didn't want to be a lawyer; I just wanted to have a legal background. And so all of what I did by the way was in connection with the oyster business. And I got a year and a half of law school. It was really with the intent of going back into the oyster business. But in the end what happened was I went and got a job with a CPA firm... This while, with the intent I was going to leave.... It was with a National CPA firm... Then I went to work for a big local firm and then...when that local firm went national several partners in the firm broke away, ___ and myself formed [our current firm] and from then on we got business actually from the other company. A lot of the clients that I had were in the marine business. They were in tugboats or oyster fishermen or whatever. But, I had some fairly large clients too. (F11)

THE NEXT GENERATION

Participants in the study were also asked whether they had or would encourage their children to enter the oyster industry. Their answers ranged from “that’s up to them” to “absolutely, positively, not.” The majority of current and former harvesters also mentioned the importance they have or will place on higher education for their children. No participant in this survey stated that they would encourage their child to enter the oyster business at this time. Table 25 provides an overview of their responses on these topics. The following sections will explore in greater detail the attitudes of the current and former oyster harvesters toward their children’s participation in the industry.

Uncertainty and Options

Most participants who responded to this question expressed uncertainty about the future of the industry and a desire for their children to have options. Only one current harvester expressed mild optimism about the future of the oyster industry and his children’s potential role in it:

I'm really just gonna leave it up to them. I know the benefits and I know the hardships. I'm not gonna discourage 'em because I'm a pretty optimistic fella. I see a bright future in it. A sustainable future at least for my lifetime. Because of environmental changes and things that could happen I'm not gonna encourage them, but I'm gonna make it available. (C12)

A former harvester, who still maintains close family ties within the industry, was more hesitant, "I could [encourage him] but the business has changed in the last seven, eight, ten years so drastically that it would be hard to say to do that. If I had somebody right now that was ready to do it I'd have to make a decision right now. Next week might be different story (F3)." For some there is still a desire to pass on the tradition of oyster harvesting as this current harvesters implies:

No, I wouldn't encourage it, but I wouldn't discourage it either. In other words I'd give them the same options I had. I took 'em on the boat. I showed 'em all the good stuff. The freedom. You out there. And its in their blood. My oldest one, when we get out there catching shrimp or we catching a full drudge of oysters you can see it. When we're moving fast. It's an idea. It's something you live with..... He's been around long enough to know what's going on. So, I told him "whatever you choose I'll support you. But, your not gonna stay home and lay on my leg your either gonna go to work or your gonna go to school. One of the two." (C11)

This oysterman's concern for his son's work ethic was even more apparent in the following statement:

One of my kids is getting ready to go to college. He should get scholarships. He got a four point something and he scored 31 on his SAT (ACT). So he should get just about whatever he needs. ...and he works in the summertime. He makes enough money to take care of himself, but he works. Its not a play game out there. He's been in the boat with me since he was eleven and every summer and he knows the game.. (C11)

Another harvester related his fear that young men may be negatively affected by the shift away from oyster harvesting in the Croatian-American community:

I take him out quite a bit. He's only seven, but at that time we were doing quite a bit more and my brother was a year older than me so I probably got my feet wet a little earlier than he did and I'm not gonna push him, but I know that there are a lot of other Croatians right now that don't want they kids on the boat. And I thinks that's wrong too because I know of at least a couple whose kids are eighteen, nineteen years old and the kids have no direction. I mean its nuts...because they could at least know work and I know some of 'em too that you've probably talked to that instilled the work factor. Even if they don't want to do it [for a living], but if they know how to work they will succeed in whatever they do. If they don't learn work, well their not gonna learn how to make it in life. (C5)

Table 25. Attitudes Toward Childrens' Participation In The Oyster Industry

Interview #	Encourage Oystering	Leave it Up to Them	Encourage Part-time	Discourage Oystering	Emphasize School
C1		X			
C2		X			X
C3				X	X
C4				X	X
C5		X			
C6				X	X
C7		X			
C8				X	X
C9				X	X
C10				X	X
C11		X			X
C12		X			X
C13				X	X
F1					
F2		X			
F3		X			
F4		X			X
F5		X			X
F6			X		X
F7			X		X
F8			X		X
F9					
F10		X			X
F11		X			X
F12		X			

Harvesting is also seen as a fall back for children who are not academically inclined as this oysterman explains:

My oldest son, works with me now....I think I'm a shoe in as far as college and that situation so to say for my daughter and my youngest son. But, a little bit of educational problem with my oldest boy. A bit of a rebel there. He quit school and I'm fighting with him to get his GED. Trying to make sure he gets some kind of education. But, he might just have it set in his mind that he's gonna make a living doing oysters or just physical [work]. He's a very hands-on individual... And that doesn't scare me. The fact that he's not really gonna get much more than highschool education, because most of my ancestors, uncles, and relatives very seldom made it past the eighth grade. I don't think my father made it past the third grade. My uncle didn't finish the third grade and they've done very well for themselves and they're very intelligent. My father, I think with a third grade education runs his business. My uncles the same way. Does all they own books, they own paper work, all kind of thing. So its not so much, I put my faith on him and his ability as an individual instead of his academic achievements.(C12)

Educational opportunities and a dose of work reality were child rearing strategies for this current harvester:

Well you know the time when they were growing up I thought I would leave my business to one of my sons. But when things started going down I changed my mind. I put a lot of pressure on my kids to finish school and I put a lot of my money to put them through private school and make them get a good education. Make them be something. So later on when they finish school that's up them what they wanted to be. If they wanted to come to the oyster business later on. But I wanted them to finish school. And one of my sons asked me " you know Daddy, after I finish college I'd like to you know come on the boat." And I said, "is there anything else you could do for yourself besides come on the boat" because there's no money. I say when you get married your not going to be able to be with your wife every night. You know couple of different things to make him realize its not an easy life. He give me an answer about three days later. He said Daddy I want to go into physical therapy. I said I am happy for you I'll help you in any I can to go through. My oldest son he hated it from beginning he never wanted to be oyster fisherman. So he is a lawyer. And my daughter she is going to be a nurse. So I gave all the attention to my kids at that time to make them finish school. (C9)

In the end, most current and former harvesters in this study felt that their children should be well informed of the difficulties they would face if they chose to enter the oyster business. As one man stated, " They've seen the challenges that have been posed while I

was involved. I don't hide anything back from them. I think they see that. I think that that's up to them. If they want to get involved the business will be there. " (F5)

Part-time or Short-term

Others viewed oyster harvesting as a short-term or part-time work opportunity for their children. In one case an active oysterman saw working on the family boats as a way to bolster interest in education among his children:

Well, I told 'em when they were thinking of not going to school that I would put 'em on the boats and let 'em work over there and that would instill in them to go back to school. But, as far as me having them go back into the oyster business, I think it's probably better with an education. As long as they have a decent college education. If not then maybe the oyster business would be a good business for them. (C11)

A former harvester supported working during the high school years:

I wouldn't discourage it. If they showed an interest in it in the slightest, you know, I probably, I hope to do as my father did and let them- 'cause we still have family in it, if they are still in it at that time- I'd like to encourage them to at least work some. To work summers like I did. If they showed an interest in it I'd help them if I could. Help them do that if it is what they want to do.(F12)

While another former harvester saw oystering as good a source of income for his son while he prepares for a future career:

My little boy I would encourage him to do it as a part-time job as he worked on his professional career. He does it with me now, he's five years old. He doesn't work, but he comes out on the boat with me sometimes. Later on, if he wanted to do it I would help out as much as I could. I'd give him a boat and all, but in no way tell him that would be the thing for him to do with for the rest of his life. (F6)

Discouragement

Most emphatic was the group of participants who stated that they would discourage their children from entering the oyster business. As one former harvester put it:

I been around the business my whole life, my whole family and my brother. We know the same people, all the friends of the family, all my dads friends are oyster fishermen or in some way involved in the industry. We grew up with it and kind of see what its coming to down the line. If I

wouldn't do it, I'm certainly not going to let my kids do it. I think its only going to get worse. (F4)

The physical nature of the work and its attendant health risks prompted this current harvester to push his son toward college attendance:

Absolutely, positively, definitely not. No. I don't think there is a future in it as it was when I started out. And it's hard work. It's backbreaking. My back is all messed up. And I wouldn't want him to go through what I went through. I think there is much better future in something different. First and foremost I would encourage him to get an education. Education would be on the top of the priority list.(C7)

Another working osyterman came to the same conclusion given the many problems confronting the oyster industry today. He stated, "I don't think by the time they get able in the business it's gonna be even less opportunity or be even harder to make a living you know. Every year more rules and regulations, department of environment, I don't know the names of all those...I would tell him try to get to college, get a college degree" (C6). When asked if he had encouraged his son to take up the family business, this current harvester also espoused a negative view of the industry's future:

I would not. And I'm trying to provide for him the same opportunities my dad provided for me in that I'm sending him to school. He's at LSU and doing well. I have to advise him that it's not a good time to become an oysterman. It's one thing being an oysterman and continuing an operation, but to start something new. To start a new life I don't think this is the industry that's gonna get it. I think I can get another 20 years out of this business. If I'm healthy I can work until I'm sixty or sixty-five, seventy and that will be it for me. There will be no need for any continuance. But, I don't see much of a future for... things that we do in the long term scheme. (C8)

Finally, one current harvester recalled taking active steps to prevent his son from developing an attachment to the oystering way of life:

When he grew up I didn't want him nowhere near the boats. See how it changes the whole time I've been in the business. When I first started I loved it, but now its just different...Oh, I kept him away on purpose. During the summer, I'd make him get a job in the city if he wanted to work. I didn't take him on the boat. I took him maybe two or three days out of the year just to show him how hard the work is and I kind of made sure he didn't stay out there too much. I didn't want him to start liking it. I wanted to make sure he stays in school and gets a different job. I'll tell you in my whole family, between my brother and all my cousins that are in the

business, none of the children I don't think will ever be in the business. They'll all be doing something else. Things just ain't what they used to be.
(C10)

SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

This findings of this study indicate the presence of an occupational community of oyster harvesters in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana. This community is delimited by long family histories in the oyster industry and dense networks of family, friends, and acquaintances connected with oystering today. Current and former harvesters have very similar personal networks. They talk about problems, work or personal, with a limited set of close family and friends and rely on a similarly concentrated network for needs such as watching their home or borrowing money. A majority of those with whom current harvesters participate in social activities are in the oyster business as are those they describe as friends. These individuals are largely Croatian-American and limited to a geographic area participants considered to be “nearby” as well. Former harvesters also continue to spend recreational time with others of Croatian descent. Likewise, they maintain friendships with local oyster harvesters even after they have left the industry.

The resources embedded in these intra-community ties were readily available for all but the youngest participants in this study when they decided to enter oyster harvesting as a profession. Family, friends, and other members of the Croatian-American community provided leases, boats, equipment, financial capital, and knowledge essential for the establishment, maintenance, or expansion of oyster operations. Closely-knit families, heavily invested in the oyster industry, furnished the resources, financial and otherwise, necessary for most participants to establish themselves as full-time oystermen. When families could not or would not provide support for a would-be harvester, resources were often made available through the larger Croatian-American community. Trust and expectations of repayment, rooted in family name or reputation and ethnic affiliation, led to family-friends, Croatian-owned financial institutions, and prominent Croatian-American citizens offering loans to participants at low or no interest. Likewise, non-family members served as sponsor for several participants when they decided to immigrate to the United States. A sense of commitment to other Croatians and a belief in the work ethic of persons of that ethnicity contributed to the willingness of these established oystermen to provide jobs and sponsorship for new immigrants according to participants.

Longstanding, trusting relationships within the larger oyster industry were also accessed by two participants who chose to move away from oyster harvesting and into other sectors of the industry. In one case, the belief that a long-time harvester would offer fair prices to his former colleagues lead to a commitment on the part of a network of harvesters to use the participant’s oyster distribution service before the business was purchased. In the other case, the scope and success of the participants harvesting business and his families reputation opened doors to the financial investors necessary for the implementation of his new processing technology.

Former harvesters reported that they interact with a more diverse network of family, friends, and acquaintances than those described by current harvesters, however. While the information gathered in the Survey of Personal Networks portion of this study

may not represent the networks available to all participants at the time they left the industry, it does suggest that the families of former harvesters, at least in this generation, are less active in the oyster industry. The presence of relatives in other lines of work was revealed to be an important source of social capital for former harvesters in the open-ended section of several interviews. Of particular relevance were family ties to other maritime industries. Family members who shrimped, farmed finfish, operated tugboats and crewboats, or ran shipyards provided training and jobs for participants. According to those interviewed, family affiliation and a belief that the participant would be a hard worker were the reasons that these individuals made such opportunities available. Other extra-community ties also proved useful for former harvesters when they decided to leave the oyster industry completely. Both strong and weak ties established while working at other jobs were exploited by participants in their search for employment. Friendships formed while attending college and maintained through the years opened doors to new lines of work as well.

The history and close ties characteristic of this community played a key role in shaping the occupational goals of both current and former harvesters. Individuals in both categories described long family histories in, and extensive family connections to, the oyster business. Participants reported that family history or tradition, childhood experiences on oyster boats, and working in their family's operation during high school motivated them to pursue oyster harvesting as an occupation, even though education was emphasized by most families. Twelve participants in this study had attended a university or completed a college degree only to return to oyster harvesting as a full-time occupation.

Participants' orientation toward oyster harvesting was also influenced by their parents' stance with regard to the oyster business. Parental attitudes toward harvesting as a potential occupation for their children varied and was related to the age of participants. Three current and six former harvesters reported that their parents encouraged them to enter the oyster industry. This pattern is the reverse of that which I expected to find. Former harvesters interviewed for this study were, on average, older than those currently harvesting, however. This could explain the more supportive attitudes attributed to the parents of those who have left the industry. Only two of the participants who stated that their parents had encouraged their entry into the oyster business were under the age of forty. On the other hand, of the five participants who recalled their parents discouraging their interest in oyster harvesting, four were under age thirty-five. The remainder of the participants who spoke to this issue reported that their families had left the decision up to them. Parents' motivations and behaviors ranged from wanting their child to have a real choice- providing them with a good education and experience on the boat- to verbal discouragement and refusal to aid in the establishment of a new operation. The latter was reported by the youngest participants in this study.

The findings presented here thus suggest a transition in attitudes toward oyster harvesting across the generations represented by participants. The oldest harvesters interviewed stated that they entered the oyster business because it was a family tradition or because it was expected. Education was rarely emphasized and, if their parents expressed any concern about oyster harvesting as an occupation it was that the work, in and of itself, was hard. In turn, these men provided their children with the same hands-on experience they had received on their parents' oyster boats. Unlike their parents, however,

harvesters of this generation sent their children to school as well. While all harvesters under the age of fifty graduated from high school and eleven attended college, each chose to return to oystering for at least part of their working life. Participants stated that family tradition, love of the work, and the income earning potential of oyster operations were behind their decisions. Over time, however, these harvesters were forced to contend with environmental degradation, increased government regulations, and low prices. The realities of the industry had changed and this, in turn, transformed the attitudes of harvesters toward their occupation. Most current harvesters reported being discouraged and concerned about the future of their industry, while former harvesters stated that their decision to leave the industry was, at least in part, a response to existing industry conditions.

Finally, no participant in this study indicated that they had or would encourage their children to pursue oyster harvesting as a full-time career. Those who would leave it up to the child did or will do so with caution. Many wanted their sons to learn the value of work on their oyster boats, while, at the same time, acquiring a quality education that would prepare them for college. Others stated that they had or would verbally discourage their children's participation in oyster harvesting in light of the many problems facing the industry. In the most extreme case, participants' reported keeping children away from the oyster business in order to prevent the formation of attachments to the work of oyster harvesting or the lifestyle with which it is associated. These statements were supported by two of the youngest participants in this study, aged twenty-three and twenty-six, who described their parents' verbal discouragement and refusal to offer assistance, financial or otherwise.

This inter-generational transition in orientation toward the oyster industry in particular, and work and education in general, can best be illuminated through the accounts of participants. To that end, I will present the experiences of four men whose lives exemplify these changes.

Generation One: The Family Business

Ivo (C3), aged seventy-one, began his work in the family oyster business at a very young age:

We were, mother and father came from Yugoslavia, from Croatia. We lived in the bayou, we didn't have a house then, we lived out of the camps. I grew up out at the camps. My mother and father worked oysters together...But meanwhile even at the age of five or six I was already , you know, with my Daddy on the boat.

After six years in school he left to help his family run the business:

Well, they built a house and me and my sister started school. Me and my sister couldn't speak English...They made fun of me when I went to school, called me all kinds of names. So went to school. We were poor. I had to help my momma and daddy. But my heart was really in the bayou and in trying to help my momma and daddy. So I dropped out of school

and started working with them on the boat...They accepted it because we needed it and you know a way of life I guess...When I got to be fourteen I was already a captain on a boat, I was running a boat for my daddy. Then business started picking up. Little by little we inched our way up.

His family ran a prosperous oyster operation for many years only to watch the industry transform before their eyes:

When I was coming up you know we would make a little money but diesel was three or four cents a gallon and labor was ten dollars a day. Now diesel is ninety cents to a dollar and labor, you have to pay 'em on a percentage basis. If they're sacking they make 150 to 200 dollars a day. It's not good. A guys got to really- to make a good living now you got to manage it well. You can't not mind your business. You got to know how much you are making and how much your spending.

Even so, he did not consider quitting, "No, things got pretty tough a lot of times, but we just stuck it out. We sucked it up and lived cheap. Live at the camp you know." When asked if he had encouraged his children to take up the oyster business he replied:

No, not really. They, I worked hard and sent 'em to school. They got a little college and while they was in college they would work in the summers with me and I cut 'em in on a pretty good deal and they saw the money they could make and they thought that fishing would be just as good as getting an education. But at least they got one or two years of college which is more than I got. So maybe their kids will finish college.
(C3)

Generation Two: To College and Back Again

Nikola, thirty-nine, also began harvesting with his family as a child. As he put it, "I was knee high to a grasshopper I guess you could say...we have a camp out in Lake Washington and I kind of grew up there and we lived there on weekends summers. I kept the boats up out there, all kinds of maintenance work until I was big enough to actually do the work on the boat" (C4).

At this point his story diverges from Ivo's. His entrance into the oyster business was by no means a forgone conclusion as his mother wanted him to attend college and move into a different line of work. He quickly realized, however, "I'm going to college for my Mom and not for me. I'm better off going on the boat and putting all my efforts into that...The business was there. We had three smaller wooden oyster boats at the time. Everything was in place...We did pretty good." Secure, trusting relationships within the industry allowed his operation to thrive:

Well, the business, well its tough. You really need to be established. As far as a dealer, I'm lucky to have one who won't mess me up. I feel I can trust him. A lot of people get burned selling oysters to this one and that

one. When the market gets tight they'll get desperate and start selling to just any body and they end up not getting paid. Take a step forward and end up falling two steps back. That's a big thing. To have somebody to work with. To be established with leases. The leasing system is good. And you have to have the willingness to work.

As time passed, however, new obstacles appeared:

I can see the government trying to make a safer product for the consumer. I read a lot of literature. FDA, I've been to Chicago before to the Shellfish Sanitation thing, you know. They talk about different things, a lot of it is a lot of hot air. Pencil pushers talking about something they know nothing about. That's why fishermen, dealers, shucking house owners go up there to have some input, to fine tune all these ideas they have.... There's just things they don't understand and you have to have professionals come in and tell 'em what can and can't be done. I can see the safety part of it..., but the business as a whole it's gonna get tougher and tougher.

As a result, his hopes for his son's future mirror those his mother had for him:

My wife asked me about my son, who is nine right now if I would encourage him to be in the business and I would say no right away. I don't know how many times she asked me and she finds that funny you know. I want him to stay in school, study and get a stable job. I've done well, but that doesn't mean that he would do well. Because of the business. I'm not saying he's gonna be lazy, but you can be persistent and try your best, but if the business isn't worth a darn your better off with something easier. It's hard work.

Even so, he expressed no desire to leave himself. In his own words, "I like it. I wouldn't be doing it if I didn't like it. I always told my kids that- if you don't like what your doin', don't do it. Go find something you like to do. I mean, I started so young. I grew up around it. I loved it right away. I love the water the boats. I grew up around boats. Its just the way to go for me..."(C4).

Generation Three: Options

Back-up Plans

Some harvesters, active during these transitional decades and fully aware of the problems facing the industry, chose to discourage their sons more actively. A few even kept their sons away from the oyster operation because, as this harvester stated, "I didn't want him to start liking it. I wanted to make sure he stays in school and gets a different job" (C10). Such negative sentiments had a profound impact on the youngest harvester interviewed for this study. At the age of twenty-three Mitch had to struggle, against his father's wishes, to establish his own operation:

I graduated high school I watched all my friends leave and things and my dad wouldn't let me go on the boat cuz he didn't want that for me. That was clear since day one and I eventually... I graduated in May, I worked the summer doing something else, and finally September came around and I always knew I wanted to do that since I was little and he fought me and fought me and fought me so finally in October one day I quit my job and packed my clothes and met em down there.. On the boat and put my clothes on the boat and went with em in other words I forced myself. There wasn't no, I mean once I was down there, there wasn't much he could do but take me.

Even after he began to work full-time on his fathers boat the pressure continued:

I worked for my Dad for four years as a deckhand....Eventually I was way over ready before he would let me take it. There's a lot of precautions that need to be taken, it kinda dangerous, a lot of things can happen. So maybe it was three years or the summer of my second year when I took the boat for myself. And that's when I started working and then finally I got tired of him being on the boat and me being on the boat. I know how to run the boat and he did too so it was time for me to do something. So I wanted a boat, wanted a boat, wanted a boat.... I worked a couple more years then I got to the point where.. I was gettin paid the same deckhands get paid. He didn't pay me one penny more than the next guy. I was doin everything. There's no special treatment. Their not like that. I had to do everything that the other people did. I slept on the floor. There was no bed for me. I slept on the floor and the guy that was older than me, the other deckhand, he slept in the bed. Until finally after the first couple of years they built me a bed.

With significant help from family members and family connections within the Croatian-American community he was finally able to build a new vessel and set out on his own:

So right now I'm about a quarter of a million dollars in debt. As of right now, being 23... If I had what I have right now in 1970 when my Dad go over here or whatever...I'd be probably a millionaire by the time I was thirty. Having what I have now, the boats the leases, there's no way that's gonna happen now....Back then there was more oysters, more market, and less boats....There's always going to be an oyster business, but the Golden Age is gone.

Aware of the problems facing the industry, and spurred on by his mother's concern for his future, he made sure he had something to fall back on:

I have back up. I have a hundred ton master license. I can drive any tug boat under a hundred tons, anything like that. And I have the credit to

build one, tug boat, if I have to. Because I got that relationship with the bank already. I could step...I could cross over within two years. I could drive tugboats in a second. I would probably work as a deckhand [on tugboats] sooner or later because they have Croatian people that have companies that would give me....their begging me for the work. They beg me to work for them, because they can see my work ethic father instilled in me. That's all day, every day. They want me to work right now, no. But, if something happened with the oysters and I had to quit- I'd have to be on my knees- but that is what I would do; work for them for a little while and eventually build my own boat and have that company. But, before I got my boat, my mother made me get that license. So I had something to fall back on... (C2)

New Directions

John is twenty-six. He began working oysters as a teenager on his fathers boat: "...[O]bviously I had to go to school during the week so my brother and I would work with him (father) a little on the weekends, then summer breaks to make some money. He didn't need us to we were just going out to help him out. He didn't need us to get by or anything" (F4). His father, who came to the United States with his two brothers in the 1960's to enter the oyster business, did not encourage him or his brother to follow in his footsteps:

He didn't encourage me. In fact. My brother he never did like it, but I liked it and my Dad strongly opposed it. He didn't want me to get involved with it. He'd been in it since he first came to this country and he's seen the business in its heyday and now its slowly going down with all the regulations and all the bad publicity oysters have gotten through the course of the years. While its not completely down yet, he sees into the future and he doesn't see that there's a good future in it.

Still, he continued to work with his father through college. When he had completed his undergraduate degree he gave serious thought to entering the oyster business permanently. His father's response was intense: "...[T]here was one point when I finished LSU when I thought about doing it, but no way. He wouldn't even have let me if I had wanted to. It was verbal. I can remember we had an argument over it one time. He wouldn't have supported me one bit. Wouldn't have given some funds even to start. He was pretty adamant against it" (F4). John decided to attend graduate school and is a successful physical therapist today.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

DISCUSSION

In this study I set out to examine the relationship between social capital and occupational decision-making. To that end I have defined social capital as resources embedded in social structures that can be accessed or mobilized by individuals in pursuit of some goal. This definition reveals several elements that must be considered in any exploration of social capital. As Portes (1998) suggests, these components, an individual's social ties and goals and the resources available through those social ties, vary from one social setting to the next, however. In the following sections I will present my conclusions with respect to each for the community studied here. Finally, I will bring the discussion full-circle by addressing the impact of participants' experiences in the oyster industry on their expectations for their children with regard to education and occupation. This final point is of particular importance since the goals fostered in these children will shape not only the future of the Croatian-American oyster harvesting community in Plaquemines Parish, but also the future of the entire oyster industry in Louisiana. Croats have played such a significant role in developing, maintaining, and improving oyster production in the state that their absence may be hard felt. If their numbers do indeed decline, then other groups will have to learn from their successes and mistakes if the industry is to survive.

What forms of social capital exist for individuals in this setting?

Through the research presented here, I was able to demonstrate the availability of different forms of social capital in a community characterized by shared history, occupation, and ethnic identity. Most participants, whether current or former harvesters, described extensive family history in and connections to the oyster business. In this context social networks, though small and relatively homogenous, provide solid ties to successful members of the community. Participants talk to and interact socially with a limited number of family members and close friends who live "nearby". Members of participants' social networks are also likely to be involved in the oyster industry and to be of Croatian ancestry. This is particularly true for those individuals who continue to work in the oyster business. For both current and former harvesters, attending college and working at other occupations earlier in their work lives served to broaden personal networks through the creation of social ties outside their community of origin. Likewise, participants' described close ties to family members in other lines of work, particularly marine-related industries such as shrimping, fin-fishing, processing and distribution of seafood, shipyards, and tugboat or crewboat operation. These relationships represent bridges extending out from the community of oyster harvesters.

Influence of Social Ties on Occupational Goal Formation

As Lin (2002) suggests, the usefulness of the social capital resources potentially available through such social ties does depend on the occupational goals the individual is trying to achieve. The formation of these goals thus became a focal point of this study. The distinctive social setting of the community of Croatian-American oyster harvesters provided the understandings

and experiences necessary for individuals to perceive oyster harvesting as a desirable career. As Dumais (2002) states, a person's aspirations grow out of a worldview through which she or he comes to understand what is possible or not possible for her or his life. One initially develops this worldview during childhood through observation, experience, and the direct input of parents. In the case of the current and former oyster harvesters interviewed for this study, their desire to enter the oyster business resulted from family history, hands-on experience, learned love of the work, and familial attitudes, combined with the reality that one could, at that time, make a good living at oyster harvesting. These factors were enough to attract individuals who had other options as illustrated by the eleven participants who attended college only to return to the oyster business. Their community of origin, with its rich family history in oyster harvesting, provided both powerful incentives to enter oyster harvesting and the resources to turn that goal into reality.

Access to and Mobilization of Social Capital Resources

One's goals or expected returns-what he or she is trying to gain from accessing social capital-determine the kinds of social capital that will be of use. For the participants of this study, once the decision to enter the oyster industry was made boats, leases, and equipment had to be obtained and put to use in an effective manner. Social ties to individuals who could provide these resources or assist in their acquisition were readily available within this community. These intra-community ties proved vital as family members, family-friends, and/or other members of the Croatian-American community furnished the necessary materials, information, and financial capital for participants to enter the industry full-time, establish new operations, or up-grade existing ones owned by their families. Consistent with the argument of Portes (1998), the willingness of these individuals to provide resources was rooted in trust arising from shared ethnic identity and family reputation within the community.

The relationship between participants and their occupation, so positive in these early years, was transformed by changes within the industry, however. As Jenkins (1992) points out, the worldview of individuals, though developed in childhood, interacts over time with the constraints of the objective social world and is modified or reshaped. For both current and former harvesters, the attitudes and feelings toward the work of oyster harvesting which had guided the decision to enter the oyster business came up against the growing array of problems facing the industry. This led to dissatisfaction on the part of most current harvesters and the decision to leave the business for many former oystermen.

Individuals who left oyster harvesting took several paths. For those who chose to combine the subleasing of their oysterbeds with other work and those who decided to move into the processing and distribution side of the industry, ties within the oystering community proved essential. Other types of social capital were required by those who decided to leave the industry entirely, however. Ties to individuals outside their immediate community, formed at college or on previous jobs, provided access to new lines of work for a number of former harvesters. These friends, acquaintances, and former workmates, offered information, recommendations, and employment opportunities. Family members working in other maritime industries were particularly important in this capacity. Participants were able to move into shrimping, finfishing, tug and crewboat operation, and shipyard work via family connections. Access to these industries was viewed as a backup plan by several current harvesters as well. These participants

had or could turn to work in these industries during periods when the oyster business was faced with severe difficulty.

Influence of Harvester's Experiences On What They Encourage Their Children To Do With Respect to Oyster Harvesting and Education

The changing nature of the oyster industry, combined with an increasing uncertainty about its future, has altered the attitudes of parents toward their children's participation in the harvesting business as well. In contrast to many of their own experiences, no participant in this study had or would encourage a child to enter oyster harvesting as a full-time occupation. Whereas most of their parents had stressed options, with education as a balance to the hands-on work experience gained on the family's oyster boats, these men placed particular emphasis on college attendance for their children. A majority of current harvesters also reported verbally discouraging their children's participation in the oyster business. Some even recalled keeping children away from the family's oyster operation in order to prevent the formation of attachments to the work.

These findings suggest that the social setting in which the next generation of potential oyster harvesters are forming their attitudes about the occupation is quite different from that of their parents or grandparents. Verbal discouragement and physical distancing of children from oyster operations will likely reduce the number of children who decide to enter the business. In this new climate, parents may even refuse to offer assistance to those who do decide to take up harvesting, in effect cutting the next generation off from resources that were readily available to past generations.

On the other hand broader range of social ties should also be accessible to these young people. Current and former harvesters interviewed for this study described friendships made during college or while working at non-oyster related jobs during their school years. Similar types of relationships proved useful for former harvesters when they decided to leave the oyster business. Thus, a broader range of social capital should be made available to the next generation as they spend more time away from the harvesting community.

CONCLUSIONS

The types of social capital available to the participants of this study were much more varied than I anticipated as well. Participants' descriptions of ties to college friends, former workmates, and family members in other lines of work during the open-ended sections of the interview suggest a wider range of ties outside the oystering community than that revealed by the personal network data obtained for this study. These extra-community ties represent resources that can be tapped by individuals who wish to pursue occupational goals outside the oyster industry.

Similarly, the ethnic loyalties and familial attachments depicted by members of this close-knit community do not appear to have directly limited the economic or occupational opportunities of participants. In fact, most participants under age sixty stated that they were encouraged to pursue school and to consider other work options. On the other hand, the experiences and observations that shaped their identities and their occupational goals steered them toward a career in oyster harvesting. As the problems facing the industry began to

accumulate and escalate, some harvesters described feeling “trapped.” These men, who had a wide array of options when they attended college, are now too invested in the oyster industry to get out.

Ultimately, the findings of this study demonstrate that, for members of the community of Croatian-American oyster harvesters, occupational decisions are not based solely on changing economic conditions, culture, attachments, or available social capital. The choice to enter, remain in, or exit the oyster industry is grounded in a complicated mixture of all of these elements. In clarifying the debate surrounding social capital I have been able to shed light on the interaction of these contributing factors, while at the same time defining the key features of social capital, its sources, availability, and outcomes.

In the end, this complex picture brought me back to my original interest in situations where individuals appear to make occupational decisions that are not rational in the classical economic sense. While many have suggested that cultural and affective factors form an irrational basis for occupational decisions, especially if they are allowed to outweigh financial concerns, I am not so sure the issue is so clear-cut. The participants in this study report balancing many key elements—history, culture, community, family, lifestyle, and income—within a vibrant and changing social context. Their descriptions indicate that they weigh their economic needs against other occupational benefits and that, up to a point, happiness or some other non-pecuniary factor might outweigh economic advancement. This does not seem irrational. Unfortunately, the changing attitudes of participants over time and across generations also suggest that what is at first a seemingly rational decision to enter the industry (when times are good and useful social capital is readily available) may become, with increasing investment and commitment, a lifestyle that is hard to leave when the going gets rough. Finally, faced with the difficult conditions of today's oyster industry and little hope for the future, it is clear that many Croatian-American oyster harvesters are looking back on their own occupational decisions and making a very rational and conscious choice to discourage their children from entering the oyster business. Sadness and frustration were palpable in the voices of many of the oystermen who spoke of this decision. They seem well aware that their choice may represent the end of a way of life that has sustained their community for over one hundred years. Only time will tell.

LIMITATIONS

At this point it is necessary to point out several limitations to this study. First, the research presented here has as its focus a unique population of fishers. Given their unique ethnic identity, high levels of education, and position at the top of their industry, findings may not be generalizable to members of other fishing communities. For example, while many of these harvesters have made the rational choice to discourage their children from entering oystering, without the options provided by their rich array of financial, human, and social capital, the choice would not matter. Less prosperous oystermen may not be able to provide alternatives for their own children.

Also of concern is the narrow nature of the sample drawn for this study. When I began to do background research for this project it became clear that very little was known about the Croatian-American community in Louisiana and even less about its oystermen. This fact, combined with my limited field experience in the community and the presence of a readily available sample of harvesters upon which I could base a snowball sample, led me to confine my

research to individual harvesters rather than families. It is possible that the study would have been strengthened by the addition of data collected from multiple generations within families, from siblings, and from mothers. The responses of several participants suggest that mother's play a significant role in the formation of educational and occupational goals for children. This possibility is also supported in the literature. As such, interviews with mothers may have proved useful. In addition, I did not design the study to interview siblings. If families have as great an impact on goal formation as suggested in my research then siblings should have had similar experiences. I cannot address this with the existing data. Finally, I asked participants to recall events from their past, including their parents attitudes. If data had been collected within families I would have been able to compare the responses of parents and children thus producing a richer pool of data.

A third limitation to this study is rooted in the method I chose for assessing social ties. As the findings illustrate, participants appear to have more extensive ties outside the oyster harvesting community than revealed by the Survey of Personal Networks. This finding suggests that the method I used to assess personal networks may not have been the best choice given my research questions. Lin argues that name-generator methodology such as that used here tends to elicit stronger rather than weaker ties. As a result, when the returns an individual hopes to obtain "concern instrumental outcomes, such as searching for better job or earnings, where theories have argued for the strength of weaker ties or bridges then the measures might miss the more critical social ties" (2002:16-17). The findings of this study support Lin's position. I would not have picked up on the value of friends not mentioned in the questions of the original Survey of Personal Networks if not for the open-ended portion.

The Survey of Personal Networks was also limited in its ability to measure the networks of former harvesters at the time they left the oyster industry. When this project began, I believed that I would be able to locate a large number of men who had recently left oyster harvesting. In fact this proved to be difficult. Former harvesters interviewed for this study left the oyster industry between two and thirty years prior to the date on which they were interviewed. This made the personal network data gathered from former harvesters much less valuable for the purposes of my research.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As indicated above, having multiple ways of accessing social ties built into the research method proved useful and I would suggest this technique in any similar research. However, an adequate system for assessing personal networks that could elicit these responses up-front would have been preferable. The culture, occupation, and lifestyle of participants may also be of importance here. Responses to the questions on the Survey of Personal Networks suggest that men in this community rarely talk about personal issues or work problems, travel outside the immediate area, or have others do work around their homes. In addition, oyster harvesters spend most of their time on their boats where they interact with few individuals. The nature of their work limits their social time. As a result, oystermen often participate in social activities with family and friends who share their schedule. They do, however, appear to maintain friendships with those outside the oyster industry through telephone conversations and occasional interaction. A series of questions more tailored to this culture and lifestyle may have extracted

more useful information. Pre-testing or field observation could aid in the construction of these questions.

The findings of this study also indicate an inter-generational change in attitude toward oyster harvesting. Though supported by the responses of participants of various ages, this finding would have been strengthened by a more detailed exploration within families. Similarly, participants were asked to recall their parents attitudes toward oyster harvesting and education and to describe or predict the advice they had or would give to their own children. A research design that included interviews with multiple generations of the same families would offer a more balanced picture of change over time. Likewise, the inclusion of interviews with siblings, mothers, and spouses could strengthen other similar studies.

Finally, further research into the relationship between social capital and occupational decision-making needs to be conducted among workers in other industries, communities, and ethnic groups, as well as at different positions in the class structure. Such studies would only add to our understanding of the forms and functions of social capital and their relationship to both the formation and fulfillment of occupational goals.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

My name is Carl Riden. I am a graduate student at Louisiana State University in the Department of Sociology and Rural Sociology. I am conducting research for my Ph.D. dissertation concerning occupational decision-making among current and former oyster harvesters in Plaquemines Parish. I am the principle investigator on this project and can be contacted at (XXX) XXX-XXX should you have any questions. I can also be reached at:

Department of Sociology
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Just before we start the interview, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this project you have several rights.

First, your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. This interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report.

I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that I have read its contents.

_____ **Signature**
_____ **Printed Name**
_____ **Date**

APPENDIX B

SURVEY OF PERSONAL NETWORKS

In the next section of the interview I will ask a series of questions designed to identify and describe individuals you interact with on a regular basis and who play important roles in your life. After each question you will be asked to respond with first names only in order to identify these individuals. A further set of questions will then be asked to describe each person and his/her relationship to you, your work, and your community. These names, like all information given in this interview will be kept confidential.

Interview Number: _____
 Date: _____

Who are five people you consider to be your friends?

	response 1	response 2	response 3	response 4	response 5
male/female					
know them from?					
who do you feel especially close to?					
which live within a five minute drive?					
which live more than an hour away?					
full time home-maker?					
in the oyster business?					
what other line of work?					
are they also of Croatian decent?					

Interview Number: _____
 Date: _____

Who would care for your home if you went out of town?

	response 1	response 2	response 3	response 4	response 5
male/female					
relation friend, cousin, brother etc.					
who do you feel especially close to?					
which live within a five minute drive?					
which live more than an hour away?					
full time home-maker?					
in the oyster business?					
what other line of work?					
are they also of Croatian or Slavic decent?					

Interview Number: _____

Date: _____

With whom do you typically engage in social activities (like inviting to your home for dinner or going out to the movies)?

	response 1	response 2	response 3	response 4	response 5
male/female					
relation friend, cousin, brother etc.					
who do you feel especially close to?					
which live within a five minute drive?					
which live more than an hour away?					
full time home-maker?					
in the oyster business?					
what other line of work?					
are they also of Croatian or Slavic decent?					

Interview Number: _____
Date: _____

With whom do you talk about work decisions?

	response 1	response 2	response 3	response 4	response 5
male/female					
relation friend, cousin, brother etc.					
who do you feel especially close to?					
which live within a five minute drive?					
which live more than an hour away?					
full time home-maker?					
in the oyster business?					
what other line of work?					
are they also of Croatian or Slavic decent?					

Interview Number: _____
 Date: _____

With whom do you talk about personal worries?

	response 1	response 2	response 3	response 4	response 5
male/female					
relation friend, cousin, brother etc.					
who do you feel especially close to?					
which live within a five minute drive?					
which live more than an hour away?					
full time home-maker?					
in the oyster business?					
what other line of work?					
are they also of Croatian or Slavic descent?					

Interview Number: _____

Date: _____

From whom would you or could you borrow a large sum of money?

	response 1	response 2	response 3	response 4	response 5
male/female					
relation friend, cousin, brother etc.					
who do you feel especially close to?					
which live within a five minute drive?					
which live more than an hour away?					
full time home-maker?					
in the oyster business?					
what other line of work?					
are they also of Croatian or Slavic descent?					

APPENDIX D

CHECK-SHEETS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Interview Number: _____
Date: _____

Interview Question Guide and Checklist Current Harvesters

___ When did you begin oyster harvesting?

___ What got you started in the industry? Tell me about that decision

If not included:

___ How did your family feel about your decision?

___ Family history in the industry?

___ Did you have any help getting started? (given equipment, loans, first job etc.)

___ Did anyone encourage or discourage you?

___ Have you always harvested oysters? (If no, prompt) Tell me about that work,

___ How did you get into it?

___ Why didn't you continue?

___ Why did you return to oystering?

___ How is your operation going these days?

___ If you are/were having difficulties could you tell me about them?

How are you getting by in the business?

___ Do you have all the help you need? ___ Who? ___ What kind of help?

___ Have you thought about quitting? Tell me about why or why not.

If not included:

___ What do family and friends have to say about that?

___ Would family and friends support your decision to find other work?

___ What other work would you consider?

___ How would you find other work?

___ Are there individuals who would help you? ___ Who? ___ How?

___ Have you, will you, or would you encourage your children to go into oyster harvesting?

(Are any children currently working in the industry?)

___ Why or why not?

___ If not what did/do/will you encourage them to do?

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Interview Number: _____
Date: _____

Interview Question Guide and Checklist Former Harvesters

___ When did you begin oyster harvesting?

___ What got you started in the industry? Tell me about that decision

If not included:

___ How did your family feel about your decision?

___ Family history in the industry?

___ Did you have any help getting started? (given equipment, loans, first job etc.)

___ Did anyone encourage or discourage you?

___ Have you always harvested oysters? (If no, prompt) Tell me about that work,

___ How did you get into it?

___ Why didn't you continue?

___ Why did you return to oystering?

___ Tell me about your decision to stop harvesting oysters.

If not included:

___ What did family and friends have to say about that?

___ Did family and friends support your decision to find other work?

___ Tell me about the work you do now. ___ Where?

___ How did you get into that line of work?

If not included:

___ Did anyone help you find that job? ___ Who? ___ How?

___ Is that the same line of work you entered when you left harvesting?

___ Have you, will you, or would you encourage your children to go into oyster harvesting?

___ Why or why not?

___ If not what did/do/will you encourage them to do?

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

VITA

Carl Marie Riden was born on February 15, 1969. She graduated from Mobile County High School, Grand Bay, Alabama, in 1987. She then attended The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa where she received the Bachelor of Arts in geology in 1992. She was awarded the Master of Science in forestry from Virginia Polytechnic and State University in 1995. She has read a number of professional papers at regional and national meetings, and has been a member of the Rural Sociological Society since 1996. She has also published reports and book chapters based on her research on Louisiana coastal communities. Her dissertation research on the subject of social capital and occupational decision-making represents the culmination of several years of study on these topics. She is currently a Lecturer of Sociology at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia.