OCS Study
MMS 2002-023

Social and Economic Impacts of Outer Continental Shelf Activities on Individuals and Families

Volume II: Case Studies of Morgan City and New Iberia, Louisiana

U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region

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Volume II: Case Studies of Morgan City and New Iberia, Louisiana

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Prepared under MMS Contract
1435-01-98-CT-30897
by
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Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology
Tucson, Arizona 85721-0030

Published by

U.S. Department of the Interior
Minerals Management Service
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region

New Orleans
July 2002

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CITATION

Suggested citation:

Austin, D. and T. McGuire, principal investigators. 2002. Social and economic impacts of Outer Continental Shelf Activities on Individuals and Families. Volume 2: Case studies of Morgan City and New Iberia, Louisiana. Prepared by the University of Arizona, Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, Tucson. U.S. Department of the Interior, Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico Region, New Orleans, LA. OCS Study MMS 2002-023. 197 pp.

ABOUT THE COVER

The cover photos were taken by Rylan Higgins and Diane Austin.

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PREFACE

In 1998, the Minerals Management Service (MMS), a bureau of the U.S. Department of the Interior, sponsored a two-year study entitled, "Social and Economic Impacts of OCS Activities on Individuals and Families" (contract number 1435-01-98-CT-30897). The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) activities affect the people of Morgan City and New Iberia, Louisiana. The study examined the nature of OCS-related work and its impacts on the lifestyles of individuals and families, and its results are reported in two volumes. Volume 1 describes the range of social and economic impacts and is intended to address the agency's information requirements in preparing social impact assessments. Volume 2, this volume, "Case Studies," was initially prepared in 2000 as a "first cut" through a large body of research material. These case studies served as an interim report to the agency and to the study participants in Morgan City and New Iberia – those who live with oil and gas.

The State of Louisiana has the oldest offshore oil and gas leasing program in the world, and the tremendous economic value of the oil and gas resources that lay in the submerged lands under waters adjacent to the Louisiana coastline led to a decades-long battle between the federal and coastal state governments over the control of those lands. That battle took the form of presidential proclamations, Supreme Court decisions, and federal law. The Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act of 1953 authorized the Secretary of the Interior to lease federal submerged lands for mineral extraction activities. The first federal offshore lease sale, held in 1954, covered 419,000 acres of submerged lands off the Louisiana coast and started a pattern of activity that, by 1991, had netted the U.S. government more than $25 trillion in lease payments, royalties, and bonuses. By 1980, two more Supreme Court cases involving Louisiana had finally been resolved, entitling Louisiana to the submerged lands extending three nautical miles seaward of the coastline. Everything beyond three miles belonged to the federal government. In 1983, the MMS was created to manage and regulate oil and gas exploration and development there. This development has indelibly shaped Louisiana's social landscape.

This study was conducted within two parishes of Acadiana, a 22-parish area in southern Louisiana named for the immigrants from Acadia in Nova Scotia who settled there in the mid-1700's. The traditional lifestyle of southern Louisiana can be characterized as one of hard work, tempered by the dictum, "laissez les bons temps rouler" (let the good times roll). During the economic hard times following the Civil War, the celebrated "Cajun" lifestyle was born. Though southern Louisiana residents trace their origins to numerous groups besides the Acadians, Cajun often becomes a gloss for local white residents. In contemporary Louisiana, many other ethnic groups, including Vietnamese, Laotians, African Americans, Cubans, Mexicans, and Houma and Chitimacha Indians, are represented in both the oil and gas industry and in the communities of the region.

Prior to the industrialization that followed World War II, many Gulf Coast communities relied on maritime activities, supplemented by trapping and agriculture. Local trade and barter were the foundation of the regional economy. The communities tended to have stable residential populations with maritime workers who would be absent for extended periods of time. Families augmented their incomes with trapping, farming, lumberjacking, and ranching. Some individuals devoted themselves to agriculture full time, but the lack of arable land along coastal marshes restricted large-scale agriculture. Further inland, agriculture predominated, and much land was devoted to sugarcane. Both fishermen and farmers generally rejected formal schooling and the influence of outsiders, relying on the transmission of knowledge from parent to child and mentor to apprentice. With the discovery of oil and development of the offshore industry, major changes occurred in the occupations and livelihood strategies of southern Louisiana residents. Though some local leaders tried to restrict the influence of the oil and gas industry on their communities, it proved impossible for either individuals or groups to insulate themselves from the changes taking place.

Morgan City and New Iberia have experienced the cycles characteristic of the oil and gas industry (see fig. P.1). With the Arab oil embargo of 1973, long lines formed at filling stations across the country, and, with subsequent calls for energy independence, the Gulf Coast boomed. When New Iberia's drainage ditch was dredged into a navigable channel in the early 1970's, the Port of Iberia rapidly became a host for the industry's diverse activities. Fabrication yards were geared up to shape, fit, and weld the platforms, chains, and anchors needed for working offshore. Tank companies built storage tanks; fuel and drilling mud companies used them. Pipe coaters prepared pipe for retrieving the products from offshore. Oilfield service companies came to the port and the town. Up the road on Highway 90, Lafayette grew almost overnight into a major administrative center for the offshore industry. Trucking companies were organized to transport the material; helicopter outfits transported men to the rigs and platforms out in the Gulf.

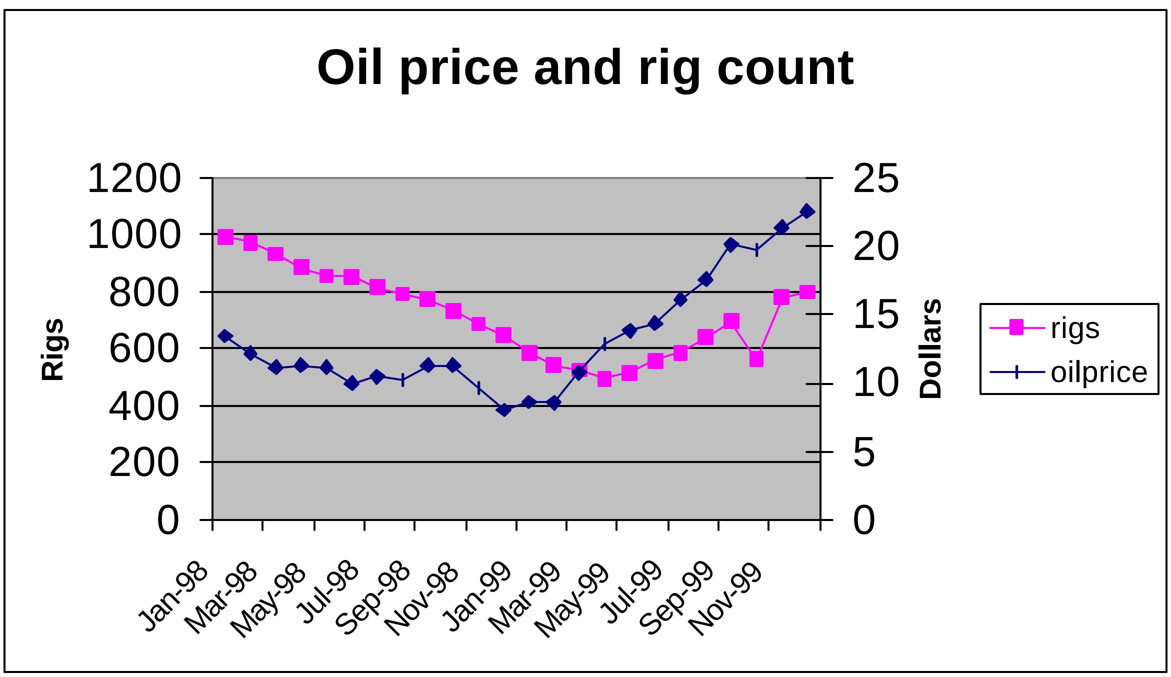

Figure P.1. Oil price and national rig count, 1998 and 1999

Morgan City, from which the first successful offshore well was drilled in 1946, is more historically embedded in the offshore industry than New Iberia. When prices and activity rose in the 1970's, it captured a healthy share of the decade's booming activity. Connected to the Gulf via the Atchafalaya River, Morgan City and Berwick across the river were well suited to meet the industry's service, supply, and building needs. Bulkheaded land along the natural Bayou Beouf and the artificial Intracoastal Waterway were prime real estate. Many of the major oil companies ran their offshore operations from those locations. Shipyards built and maintained the supply vessels, crew boats, and anchor handlers that berthed along the river and up the bayou at Amelia. Fabrication yards built jackets; ubiquitous pipe yards stored and shipped miles of drilling pipe. And thousands of roustabouts and roughnecks came through town on the way to and from the rigs. Some of them even came to call Morgan City home.

Oil prices soared through the 1970's and into the early 1980's, in no small part due to OPEC's ability to regulate its vast supply of crude and manipulate world prices. In the United States, consumers began to react to the high prices. Alternative fuels were sought and vehicles were made more fuel-efficient. In short, demand for petroleum and its derivatives dropped. By 1982, the boom along the Gulf was over. For oil producers and their suppliers, it became an out-and-out bust in 1986 when Saudi Arabia raised output and allowed the world price to react accordingly. That price fell from the $40 a barrel it had been in the early 1980's to $10 a barrel. For much of the next decade, more industry activity took place in corporate boardrooms and bankruptcy courts than off the continental shelf. The Gulf of Mexico came to be labeled the Dead Sea, a "mature" oil province whose remaining reserve could not be extracted at the prevailing prices. Through much of the 1990's, except for the brief spike in oil prices stemming from the Persian Gulf War, crude prices remained low. But technological developments in the industry began to alter the image of the Dead Sea. Finding, drilling, and producing oil and gas from huge "elephant" fields in the deep waters off the shelf and in the submarine canyons closer to shore became economically and technologically feasible, at least for the major energy companies. Every segment of the industry benefited to some degree from this new deepwater activity, and many smaller independent producers took renewed interest in shallower properties acquired from the majors as these companies turned their attention to deeper locations. Drilling rigs were in demand, and day-rates soared accordingly. Charter rates for all kinds of support vessels rose as well. There was, then, by mid-decade and shortly thereafter, a new boom along the Gulf, although many residents and company people preferred to use the term "upturn" – from previous experience, a boom usually implied a future bust.

A "downturn" came quickly, nonetheless. Asia's booming economy fell in 1997, and, with it, that subcontinent's rapidly growing demand for oil went flat. By 1998, world inventories outstripped world consumption and, predictably, prices plummeted. It was at this juncture that our team dispatched researchers to study the social and economic impacts of OCS activities on individuals and families in Morgan City and New Iberia. During our fieldwork, and as we continued to monitor events in the oilpatch, supply, demand, and price acted in curious ways. To correct the oversupply, OPEC began cutting production in March of 1998, and continued to do so. The price did respond appropriately; indeed it skyrocketed to over $30 a barrel by the end of 1999. But, the Gulf of Mexico did not kick back into life. Oil producers are producing oil and gas, but the exploration and drilling budgets upon which much of the rest of the industry and its workers depend remain generally flat. Some analysts attribute this to caution – a fear of investing in new exploration and development when a resurgence in OPEC production could lower prices. Others see more energy and money going into corporate mergers and megamergers than into holes in the shelf. For their part, workers and families either wait for the belated "upturn" or look elsewhere for work, sometimes in new towns and states. Their communities try to anticipate how the businesses and residents will act and then respond accordingly.

This study was conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Arizona's Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology in partnership with fourteen teacher-researchers from Morgan City and New Iberia. The teacher-researchers, Teresa Bagwell, Charlene Broussard, Jennifer Brown, Leslie Chambers, Sonya Cloutier, Norma Cormier, Barbara Davis, Leesa Falterman, Andrea Guerin, Jamie Guidry, Margaret Kleinpeter, Susan Lissard, Wendy Ochoa, and Laura Robison, are local schoolteachers who were recruited and trained, conducted household discussions in the homes of their students and other residents, attended study group meetings, and helped analyze their data and present findings of the study. Along with the teachers, numerous individuals helped with the project. Of these, several deserve special attention. Jerry Cunningham assisted researchers in the field and arranged and led discussions with workers, Cheryl Etienne provided transcription services, and Pam Daigle organized members of the Berwick Junior High School computer club to help create a web page for the project (www.aisp.net/oilweb).

Two university researchers, Jennifer Schrag-James and Rylan Higgins, lived in the study communities for 10 months during 1998-99. They attended meetings, read the local papers, and visited homes, offices, and work sites. They talked with workers, employers, and families involved in the offshore oil and gas industry and with civic leaders who were knowledgeable about how their communities were impacted by this large and complex industry. Eight additional researchers, Diane Austin, Marcia Brenden, Karen Coelho, Andrew Gardner, Tom McGuire, Helena Rincon, Shannon Sparks, and Leah Stauber, spent from two weeks to several months each in southern Louisiana talking with families and gathering information about the communities and how they function. Due to the changes that were occurring in the region and the industry at the time of the study, researchers maintained contacts and returned to visit the communities on several occasions through June 2000. Discussions often were taped and always were summarized in written notes. Information was shared throughout the team. One or two team members took responsibility for each section of this report, and they are the lead authors. Others helped write particular sections and are named as well. Still, in a collaborative project it is impossible to separate the contributions of the participants. Consequently, this report represents the work of more than twenty researchers and hundreds of community members.

We also relied on a dedicated team of students from the University of Arizona and on consultants who helped gather and review documents and manage the data we collected. Several of these individuals also helped write this report, and they are named as authors. Others include Kaylene Day, Jennifer Ebner, Nicole Kukowski, and Nadia Olson. Fernando Londono was essential in creating and maintaining the project database. Karen Morrison reviewed literature on families. Sherri Gerlak organized and managed the electronic bibliography, maintained the office and files, and was crucial in getting the reports put together. Finally, any effort of this magnitude requires countless hours of administrative assistance, and for this we thank Maria Rodriguez, Armando Vargas, and Nancy Young of the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology.

The four parts of this report reflect the research team's endeavors to capture the dynamics of oil and gas activity at the level of the community, the individual and family, and the industry. Thus, the first two parts, prepared by Jennifer Schrag-James and Rylan Higgins, respectively, look at social dynamics within our two field sites. Part 1, "Offshore Employment as Lifestyle and Culture: Work and Family in New Iberia," highlights some of the adaptive mechanisms that working families develop, such as extensive social networks throughout the town, to cope with the vagaries of offshore work. Part 2, "Morgan City Chronicles: Living Through a Downturn," is a month-by-month diary of an oil town, its companies, and its workers under stress. Upturns and downturns in the industry occur in rapid succession, and our resident ethnographers in New Iberia and Morgan City witnessed a cycle. In Part 3, "Parents and Children: Changing Roles, Changing Expectations," Leah Stauber, Jennifer Schrag-James, and Shannon Sparks and look at cross-generational change in American notions of fathers and families, in industry work-scheduling practices, and in occupational desires. Finally, in "Captains of the Road and Sea: Providing Transportation for the Gulf of Mexico Oilpatch," Andrew Gardner and Diane Austin examine two critical segments of the oil service industry that are undergoing fundamental restructuring: trucking and the operation of offshore supply vessels. Volume 1 of this report compares the experiences of workers and families in these transportation activities to those involved in fabrication, diving, drilling, and production.

The information in this report is based upon observations and discussions with workers and their families. Our promise of confidentiality precludes naming individuals, so statements taken from discussions are identified only by a code number (e.g., [I-431]). Information drawn from informal discussions and observations was recorded in researchers' field notebooks and is identified as such in the report (e.g., (DA fieldnotes, 4/3/99) indicates that the information came from Diane Austin's fieldnotes of April 3, 1999).

The team owes tremendous thanks to residents and leaders of New Iberia and Morgan City, who welcomed and participated in this project and ensured its success. The people who invited us into their homes and lives were truly extraordinary - their patience and kindness provided us with an intimate look at what it is to be an oilfield family. We also have benefited from the guidance of MMS project managers and personnel. These reports could not have been completed without the dedication and commitment of all those involved. To all of you we extend our thanks and appreciation. We have removed participants' references to specific companies and used pseudonyms where necessary to preserve anonymity. We also have changed the names and identities of the workers and families who participated in this study. It is to them that this document is dedicated.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September, 1998, researchers from the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, University of Arizona, commenced fieldwork for this study, "Social and Economic Impacts of Outer Continental Shelf Activities on Individuals and Families," under MMS Contract 1435-01-98-CT-30897. The research focused on two communities in southern Louisiana that have been heavily involved in oil and gas exploration, production, and support services on the Outer Continental Shelf – New Iberia in Iberia Parish and Morgan City in St. Mary Parish. The results of this research are reported in two companion volumes. Volume 1 surveys the impact of OCS activities on individuals, families, and communities, and on workers in diverse sectors of the industry. This volume, "Case Studies," is comprised of four parts. Two of these focus on the communities of New Iberia and Morgan City, another examines multigenerational attitudes towards work in the oil and gas industry, and the final part addresses recent changes in two service sectors, trucking and offshore supply vessels.

Methods

To carry out this research, the University of Arizona team partnered with 14 teacher-researchers recruited from St. Mary and Iberia parish school boards. These local schoolteachers were trained to guide discussions in the homes of their students and other residents. They attended study group meetings, analyzed their data, and presented findings of the study. These teacher-researchers also facilitated local contacts for the university team. Two university researchers resided in the communities for 10 months during 1998-1999, attending civic meetings, reading local newspapers and archives, and visiting homes, offices, and worksites. Information was gathered from workers, employers, and families involved in the offshore oil and gas industry, and from civic leaders with knowledge of the impact of the industry on their communities. Eight additional researchers spent from two weeks to several months each in southern Louisiana talking with families and gathering information on community and industry organization. Preliminary study findings were shared with participants in a series of 21 focus group meetings held in the communities between March 8 and 19, 2000. Due to the changes occurring in the industry and the region at the time of the study, researchers maintained communication with local contacts and returned to the communities through June, 2001. Discussions were often tape-recorded and always summarized in written notes.

Significant Findings

In "Offshore Employment as Lifestyle and Culture: Work and Family in New Iberia," Jennifer Schrag-James draws on her 10-month residence in that community to examine a variety of implications of oil work on family life. She provides a brief history of the community's involvement in the oil and gas industry and in sugar production, then examines common perceptions about oilfield employment. She suggests that the major problems facing oilfield families center around two issues that, in combination, characterize offshore oil and gas employment for many: the concentrated work schedules and the job insecurity characteristic of the industry. Evidence is presented that wives of offshore workers, who must bear the brunt of household management, develop adaptive mechanisms, particularly strong social networks, to cope with absent husbands. She found that some wives experienced anxiety, depression, and other difficulties, but these tended to occur most commonly in families newly exposed to oilfield work patterns, and were most acute in periods directly before or after the worker left for offshore.

In "Morgan City Chronicles: Living Through a Downturn," Rylan Higgins follows the lives of oil workers and an oil community through a volatile period in recent industry history, from October, 1998 to the fall of 1999. During the course of this downturn and halting recovery, workers were laid off, local businesses suffered, and community leaders renewed calls for economic diversification. Higgins found substantial variability across companies in their employment practices during the slowdown: some fired senior personnel with little warning, others endeavored to retain their workforce with reduced hours and wages, and some closed down their operations altogether. Individuals and families responded by moving out of town, tightening household budgets, and searching for new employment. During Higgins' residence, local efforts at economic diversification included a controversial new hazardous waste facility and ecotourism efforts. Higgins acknowledges the difficulties communities such as Morgan City face, including a lack of sound information upon which to base local planning efforts, and a lack of control over industry and investment decisions made outside the community.

In "Parents and Children: Changing Roles, Changing Expectations," Leah Stauber, Jennifer Schrag-James, and Shannon Sparks take a multigenerational look at job expectations, parenting, and work schedules. They distinguish between "Old School" workers, in their mid-40s and older, and "New Outlook" workers. For Old School workers, identities were closely tied to their jobs and often their companies; New Outlook workers, many of whom experienced layoffs during the downturn of the 1980's, are more likely to base their identities on responsibilities outside the workplace, such as in the family, and are likely to switch companies readily in search of higher pay, more preferable work schedules, or other benefits that make family and community roles easier to fulfill. Across generations, the 7-and-7 and 14-and-14 work schedules are most preferred, and the increasing use of on-call scheduling is universally disliked. Parents of today's teenagers expressed a strong desire for their children not to pursue careers in the oil and gas industry. Those teenagers themselves, when participating in focus groups in Morgan City, expressed preferences for attending college; only a few would consider oilfield work even in a computer-related area. The authors conclude that the industry is likely to continue to experience difficulty finding workers within the generation now entering the workforce.

Finally, in "Captains of the Road and Sea: Providing Transportation for the Gulf of Mexico Oilpatch," Andrew Gardner and Diane Austin provide case studies of two service sectors, trucking and offshore supply vessels, that have been developed along the Gulf of Mexico by local innovators and entrepreneurs. Both sectors have undergone significant changes in recent years. In trucking, the deregulation of the price for line hauls within Louisiana in 1995 and the establishment of alliances between the trucking companies and the major oil production and service companies has resulted in decreased earnings for the independent owner-operators who drive for the trucking companies, has reduced the premium placed on the entrepreneurial skills needed by independent drivers to solicit customers and build social networks, and has induced some truckers to seek union representation. In the offshore supply sectors, mariners who historically would “make captain” through apprenticeship on the water are facing increasingly stringent licensing and certification requirements, and many fear that some of the most experienced mariners may be unable to meet these requirements. At the time of the study, mariners were also faced with cuts in pay, reduced hours, and layoffs. Like truckers, during the period of the study mariners began exploring the possibility of forming unions to increase their collective bargaining power.

PART 1
OFFSHORE EMPLOYMENT AS LIFESTYLE AND CULTURE: WORK AND FAMILY IN NEW IBERIA

Jennifer Schrag-James

INTRODUCTION

Figure 1.1. Welcome sign in New Iberia

New Iberia, Louisiana claims to be "the sweetest, oiliest, saltiest, hottest place on earth," deriving from its four main industries, sugar, oil, salt, and hot peppers. Although all four industries are still active, oil is by far the largest employer, and is the only one about which locals say, almost in chorus, "it affects everything." This report seeks to provide readers with a sense of what it is like to live and work in the oilpatch.

The city of New Iberia (see fig. 1.1) is one of several towns and cities along the Gulf of Mexico coast that are linked, albeit in different directions and to different degrees, to the oil and gas activity on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). While no two communities are alike, all share several common features as home to individuals who work in the oil and gas industry and to their families. This report tells of the experiences of some of those families living in New Iberia between August 1998 and June 1999. These stories could have been heard in dozens of other south Louisiana communities. Many experiences of New Iberian workers, as well as of their spouses and children, are shared by tens of thousands of people who work in this industry, not only along the Gulf of Mexico, but across the United States and around the world in places where offshore oil and gas development is occurring. Some of the experiences, however, are specific to the communities of this region and derive from their history, culture, and political-economic contexts.

The focus of this report is on the onshore repercussions of offshore oil work, particularly on the families of workers and on the communities they comprise. While offshore employment offers a unique set of opportunities and constraints for workers, it also generates a special set of conditions for their families. These are stresses caused not only by the non-traditional work scheduling that routinely requires the absence of fathers and husbands from their homes for weeks at a time, but also by the uncertainty of a job that is closely tied into global oil prices, and by concerns about the physical and mental safety and health of men working miles out in the ocean. This study, then, gives voice to the often-silent participants in the offshore oil industry, the women who support and depend upon its workers. It attempts to render the perspectives of the participants of this study as directly as possible, using quotes from taped and transcribed discussions or field notes, and emphasizes the theme, issues, and concerns raised most insistently by our respondents.

The report is structured as follows: it begins with a brief introduction to the history of New Iberia and a discussion of the dual economic legacies of sugar and oil; and it then describes commonly held perceptions of the oil industry and oilfield employment, particularly beliefs about marital and familial problems. The remainder of the report focuses directly on the perspectives and experiences of oilfield workers and their families. It reviews workers' motives for staying in offshore work, the problems and advantages that families face due to the concentrated scheduling frequently associated with offshore work, and the various strategies that workers and families adopt to cope with the problems. Wives of offshore workers, routinely forced to bear the entire burden of household management in the absence of their spouses, develop a set of adaptive mechanisms including a strong reliance on social networks. Many of them establish patterns that make the best of both world—that of single person and of spouse. However, these systems and mechanisms are also regularly disrupted by the return of the worker: we found evidence that families' repeated shifts between single and dual parenthood could prove as difficult as the periods of workers' absence. Finally, the report tracks the ongoing tensions that workers and families face as dips in the industry's performance threaten their livelihood. These tensions came to a head in the early months of 1999, and brought to the surface memories of the 1980's bust and its consequences.

WORKERS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

A Brief History of New Iberia and Oil

New Iberia was founded by Spaniards in 1779 as an agricultural colony, and prospered as such for the first century-and-a-half of its existence. The town's location, nestled along the banks of Bayou Teche, provided rich soil for raising the mother crop of sugarcane that nursed the area to prominence. Today, the Spanish influence on its population is still evident in the pages of Seguras and Romeros that fill the phone book. In addition, a number of French families settled the area, many of whom secured large agricultural land grants in Native American territory before the French ceded Louisiana to Spain. These two sets of European settlers, along with their Senegambian slaves and a handful of Acadians (the French-Canadian ancestors of the present day Cajuns), formed the basis for the contemporary heterogeneous population of New Iberia. These early populations also account for the complexity of race, class, and ethnicity in south Louisiana today[1].

New Iberia was incorporated as a city on March 13, 1839. Despite the region's contemporary association with Cajuns, Acadians were not a significant population in New Iberia until after World War II, when many Cajun families relinquished their subsistence farms and moved to New Iberia for opportunities in the oil patch. This fact has led some local scholars and folklorists to characterize New Iberia's population as relatively non-Cajun, and to describe its cultural tendencies as remnants of the historic plantation folkways [I-173, I-321]. Indeed, a drive down New Iberia's Main Street, lined with ornate antebellum and postbellum homes, provides a tangible historical record of the wealth and power that had once been concentrated among the town's enterprising European and Creole[2] families.

The area continued to develop as an agricultural center, and, later, a center of commerce when steamboats began using the bayous to transport products bound for the Port of New Orleans. Oil was discovered in 1916 in Iberia Parish, but this early production was short-lived because the oilfields surrounding New Iberia were relatively low producers. Yet the families who owned the lands where the wells were dug amassed small fortunes. The town's oil involvement did not begin in earnest until the 1970's, when the dredging of a drainage ditch activated the Port of Iberia as a docking and fabrication area and connected it with Vermillion Bay, the Intracoastal Canal, and, consequently, to the rest of the offshore oil industry. It was during this time that oilfield service companies sprouted up on Jane Street alongside one of New Iberia's two sugar mills.

Despite this pervasive and rapidly growing dependence on oil, however, there are problems in characterizing New Iberia as a "boom town." This stereotype of oil patch communities conjures up images of small cow towns in rural areas turned virtually overnight into bustling centers of activity because of a nearby oil find. New Iberia did indeed experience, especially in the 1970's, some of the classic boomtown phenomena: dramatic price rises, critical housing shortages, massive changes in population size and diversity, and a strain on civic infrastructure such as water and sewage systems, roads, medical, educational and recreational facilities. However, the changes occurred within the context of the town's established and fairly diverse culture and economy, of which oil and gas was already a part. Typically a boom is followed, sooner or later, by a bust in which, as in the case of Spindletop, Texas or Smackover, Arkansas, the town is dismantled as quickly as it was constructed. New Iberia was rocked by a downturn in the mid-1980's that gutted much of its demographic and economic edifice. Yet, the town persisted through it and beyond, into several subsequent (if smaller) ebbs and peaks of the oil industry. The fact that New Iberia's economy and population have deep historical roots in sectors other than oil, then, differentiate it from the classic boom town.

Today, New Iberia is searching for greater economic diversity to buffer itself against the ups and downs of the oil industry. Many New Iberians work in the oil industry in some capacity—at the Port of Iberia's fabrication and oil service companies, in the business offices of the Oil Center in Lafayette 23 miles away, or offshore, working the concentrated shifts that have become a defining characteristic of the oil and gas industry. The town's traditional industries of salt mining, hot pepper processing, and sugarcane no longer employ the numbers of people they used to or pay wages competitive with those of the oil industry.

The Housing Crunch

Our resident researcher arrived in New Iberia in September of 1998. It was the week of the Sugarcane Festival, the town's claim to fame in festival-loving Acadiana. While the researcher hunted for a place to rent in a housing market where apartments had waiting lists, the owners of small mom and pop businesses along historic Main Street tied stalks of sugarcane to their centuries-old storefronts. Those stalks were, to some extent, symbolic of the housing dilemma. The housing shortage is due to the two main industries in the area: sugarcane and oil. Sugarcane ties up the land, restricting the expansion of housing and infrastructure necessary to accommodate an influx of people. Iberia Parish produces the most sugar in the continental United States, and with generous price supports for the crop, land under sugar cultivation is good money. In addition, a portion of the land most farmers cultivate has been passed down in their families for centuries, and to give up this land is to give up their heritage. As a result, farmers are generally unwilling to sell their land for housing developments. Yet, when the price of oil is up and jobs are plentiful, people move to the area looking for places to live. These two factors make New Iberia an overcrowded island surrounded by a sea of undulating cane stalks.

After five days of house hunting and watching numerous houses slip through her fingers to other renters, our resident researcher struck upon a home. Assured a constant influx of potential tenants—although some blow into town when the oil industry is up, and leave unannounced at the next downturn—the landlady rented us the place with only verbal assurance that we would make sure the rent was paid. She pointed to a six-pack of empty beer bottles on the floor and said,

> "The renters before you, they made a mess of the place. They were oilfield divers, and I never knew who was here, there were so many, and they were gone so much…but my husband, he says things are slowing down. Baker Hughes and Halliburton, they laid off people. A lot of people. But the rig count is still up" [I-628].

Everyone in New Iberia, like our new landlady, keeps tabs on the oil industry and quotes the rig count or the price of a barrel of oil like Midwesterners talk about the weather. Indeed, when our first team member arrived in New Iberia, the oilfield was still strong, although there was talk of an impending slowdown. The parish's unemployment rate was already twice what it was in 1989, but the local Louisiana Job Services spokesperson held other factors responsible for this, such as layoffs at the nearby Fruit of the Loom plant and offshore oil workers filing temporary claims due to hurricanes that halted work in the Gulf.

Low- to middle-income housing is especially difficult to find in New Iberia for reasons other than space limitations. For example, when Hurricane Andrew blew the seams of the town apart in 1992, much of this type of housing, both rental and mortgage, was destroyed and never rebuilt. As a result, the housing market became much tighter, and got squeezed nearly shut when oil was up in the early 1990's. When oil is on a downward spiral, New Iberia's housing market faces a glut. Back in the infamous 1980's bust, property managers were including free utilities and even a free weekly housekeeping service to attract tenants.

Some housing development is currently underway in New Iberia, but the new subdivisions are being built to attract professional families, many of whom commute to Lafayette to work, and are priced well out of the range of low to middle income families. As a result, when the oil business is booming, affordable housing for low-income oil workers may consist of some informal arrangement – anything from the back of a car to a room in back of someone's house.

There is a marginal but developed infrastructure in New Iberia to support both local and itinerant labor. While most visitors to the town see the plantation mansions and old oak trees, few notice the motels scattered on the back roads by the Port or near the highway. Rooms rent for $20 to $30 dollars a night, and there are discounts for arrangements by the week, a commonly used option. These "working man's" accommodations, as several study participants called them, cater to the particular needs of the oilfield laborer. Many men and some women working in the oilfield come down for only a portion of the year. Finding a house or apartment in the tight New Iberian real estate market is out of the question, particularly since they may occupy the dwelling only for a few days between shifts offshore.

The population of these motels presents a striking contrast to that of the town itself. Team members spent several weeks at these motels, and met laborers from India, Mexico, Canada, and a dozen or more different states. Their occupations varied from the lowest positions in the oilfield to supervisors and inspectors. Some brought their families with them and turned the motel into a home away from home; others were simply passing through town and looking to make a few dollars before moving on. What they shared was the unwillingness or inability to hook in to the tight-knit community of New Iberia. Instead, the motels' bars, swimming pools, and picnic tables provided an informal meeting place for these people to meet, network about job openings, and to relax after a day in the fabrication yards or a stint offshore.

These motels were bursting with guests during the research team's time in New Iberia, and demand for additional space drove one motel owner to seek a further expansion in the number of available rooms. As the oil industry changes, it appears that the demand for this type of labor – not rooted in the community, highly mobile, and cheaper than its local counterpart – is increasing. The success of the "working man's" motels is merely the barometer of that change, as well as a testament to the difficulty of finding housing in the town of New Iberia.

"Hi Sugar!"

The 57th annual Sugarcane Festival marked the onset of the "grinding season" when cane is cut and processed (see fig. 1.2). After the annual Blessing of the Crops at the Sugarcane Festival Building, the town showed up in force for the grand parade. Families with plastic chairs and men sporting oilfield company hats found their places along the parade route as the sweet smell of barbecue and homemade pralines wafted down the street. Over 100 floats passed by emblazoned with the festival's theme "Hi Sugar!" and held queens with glittery sashes that read, "Tiny Princess Sportsman," "Little Miss Crawfish," and of course, "Queen Sugar." In its first three decades, the Sugar Festival was celebrated separately (but simultaneously) by whites and blacks, including separate coronations of a Queen Sugar and Queen Brown Sugar. The ceremonies were integrated in the mid-1960's.

Figure 1.2. Festival banner

Festivals are markers of community identity and pride, although in recent years they have also been spurred by tourist dollars. The Sugarcane Festival, initiated in 1932 to celebrate the completion of the Iberia Sugar Co-op Mill, is also illustrative of how New Iberia, or some influential groups within it, has attempted to cling to sugar as the town's primary identity. While talking about the Sugarcane Festival, one local explained, “It’s run by the same people every year, and it never, never changes its format” [I-480]. The people he referred to are known locally as the “sugar elite” of New Iberia.

Unlike Morgan City, which incorporated the oil industry into its Shrimp Festival in 1954 to create the Shrimp and Petroleum Festival, New Iberia kept sugar as the only theme of its largest festival, despite the fact that oil currently employs far more people and creates more aggregate wealth. The persistence of the sugar identity is based on continuing local investment in the sugar industry, despite considerable changes in the industry’s organization. The total acreage under sugarcane cultivation has doubled since the 1950’s. Most farmers do not own the bulk of their lands—they lease or sharecrop from other families. In sum, although fewer individuals are farming,[3] many more have sugar interests. Members of the sugar elite continue to have social and political influence and are elected to prestigious positions in the community.

Some local people claim that the sugar elite exhibited, in the past, a resistance to the oil industry’s entry into New Iberia, for example by allowing the Oil Center to be established in Lafayette in 1952. New Iberia had been one of the towns considered for the Center, on the basis of its proximity to the Gulf, its water access by way of Bayou Teche, and the potential for development at the Port of Iberia. Reportedly, the sugar elite did not welcome the possible industrial expansion onto their sugarcane lands, the changes to the local labor base, and the likely influx of new people. One local observer added, “That’s just the way it is. People didn’t want outsiders to come in and mess things up” [I-464]. Despite their efforts, however, the region was irrevocably in transition. The state government actively encouraged industrial development after the Depression, bringing entrepreneurship into relatively closed communities like New Iberia. By the 1960’s, the protectionist attitude subsided, and New Iberia actively pursed outside ventures. The town even welcomed an auxiliary naval air station that, however, operated for only four short years from 1960 to 1964. Upon the base’s closure, the town led efforts to convert the base to alternate uses, eventually creating the Acadiana Regional Airport.

The development of the oilfield service industry in New Iberia and the subsequent influx of oilfield employees created a consumer base that attracted major retail chains to the town. Admiral Doyle Drive, now one of New Iberia’s main commercial thoroughfares, was little more than a road surrounded by rice and sugarcane fields until the 1970’s. As was common across the United States during the period, demand for fast foods and consumer goods took precedence over more traditional elements in New Iberia. Locals recount that the town’s Burger King was literally built on top of the dance floor of one of New Iberia’s last Cajun dance halls. Dr. David Manuel, dean of the University of Southern Louisiana (now University of Louisiana at Lafayette) School of Business said, “Without the energy industry, south Louisiana would still be in the 1920’s.” Local New Iberians echoed this sentiment. One woman said,

> “If it wasn’t for oil, we’d be the size of Jeanerette [a rural town 20 miles southeast of New Iberia]. I truly believe that. Now we have strip malls and food places. We even have a Wal-Mart and that wouldn’t have happened ” [I-017].

Some tension persists today between the area’s two largest industries. Sugarcane and oil vie for a limited pool of skilled workers, leading one prominent sugarcane grower to exclaim, “I wish the oil industry would just go away" [I-470]. Especially in the 1970's, after the Equal Opportunity Act opened the offshore oilfield to African American employment, sugar farmers lost their cheap labor pool of local field labor. Although during the oil industry's lean times the sugar mills provide an escape valve for some oil workers, the high wages of the oil industry still pull skilled workers, such as electricians and mechanics, away from the sugar mills during boom times. The relationship between the harvesting of sugarcane and the production of oil and gas has continued to evolve into what the historian James Cobb identified as "one of continuity and change, not in conflict but in synthesis."[4] One local woman characterized the intersection of these two industries:

> "When you really start thinking about it, [the oilfield in New Iberia] is very intertwined. As a matter of fact, to tell you that New Iberia would fall apart without the oilfield is putting it mildly. Sugarcane is a very big business in this Parish, in Iberia Parish, but it doesn't have the hold that the oilfield does … Sugar is more steady, oilfield is bigger. Sugarcane is regular, but oilfield is more money. You don't make any money cutting cane. Unless you own land or are relation to the owners, you don't make jack. You ain't paid nothin'" [I-017].

In New Iberia, sugar may provide an identity for the community, but oil pays the bills.

Community Perceptions of Oilfield Work

Throughout our stay in south Louisiana, when our team was in search of oil workers to participate in the study, many New Iberians would declare, "everyone is involved in the oilfield." The statement carries a tacit acceptance of the occupation by the inhabitants of the town. Yet, there is doubt whether the town's people are entirely comfortable with being associated with the oilfield. Oil workers and their families often joked about being "oilfield trash," but the days of asserting and valuing that identity with bumper stickers that yelled, "Oilfield trash and proud of it," are largely past.

There was a time in New Iberia's not-too-distant past when the oilfield was not a desirable occupation. Early wildcatting attempts on land and in the marshes were largely local endeavors by moneyed businessmen until the mid-1930's when the "great oil boom" in southern Louisiana and New Iberia occurred in response to federal pro-ration policies that established controls on production in an attempt to prevent oversupply. Outside oil interests spilled into the area from east Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. Men with families, as well as many without, arrived in New Iberia where they found a tight-knit, relatively closed community whose natives sometimes referred to them as "foreigners" or the more derogatory "oilfield trash." In some cases, whole company towns were uprooted and moved to New Iberia, as was the case with Smackover, Arkansas.

Smackover was the site of one of the largest oilfield discoveries in Arkansas in the early twentieth century. After its boom, oil companies like the Texas Company (now Texaco) moved whole sections of their workers to new towns such as New Iberia. Karen James was only a child when she moved with her family from Smackover to New Iberia, but she still vividly remembers her initial reactions:

> "…we were not Catholic, and this was a small community, predominantly Catholic, and they were not really receptive to these oilfield people coming in… Many of the kids at school spoke French, and that made me feel like a little bit of an outsider…. New Iberia has always been a pretty closed type of community" [I-011].

The Smackover group immediately set about making themselves at home, instituting changes that profoundly impacted the socio-cultural fabric of New Iberia. The Smackover group was the core that started the First Baptist Church in 1926, later renamed Highland Baptist in 1942. The church historian wrote of "divine intervention" in the creation of a Baptist church when she claimed, "It was no accident that oil was discovered in this region during the early 1930's. Workers for the oilfields came from Arkansas, Texas and Oklahoma. These people brought their religion with them and worked at it as Baptists ought to do."[5] Even the chimes in the church auditorium were a gift presented in memory of a church member's husband, killed in an oilfield accident.

The differences, both occupational and religious, created a rift between the incoming Smackover group and the native New Iberians. In that first generation of interaction, the two groups tended to socialize in their own circles. Betsy Steen, who followed her oilfield husband to New Iberia, said that although the New Iberians were outwardly cordial, they were not overly friendly: "I never really socialized with them myself, but I had a friend who had them over for dinner. They came, but they never invited her over to their house" [I-021]. Her daughter added, "...a lot of the people began to get jobs in the oilfield, so it was a good thing for the community, too, 'cause it brought money in to New Iberia. …I can't remember any rallies or fights or anything like that because of oil people being there. It was just a little hard for them to accept us at first. We kinda felt like oilfield trash (laughs)."

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, when the oilfield was "blowin' and goin'," men with limited education could achieve financial security equal to or better than those with university degrees. By 1979, New Iberia was completely involved in the booming oil industry and boasted over a hundred oil-related companies. The local newspaper entitled its business section, "Petro/ Business," and included an annual supplement dedicated to extolling the progress made at the Port of Iberia. In 1979, the owners broadened the supplement's scope to include oilfield activities in the entire Gulf region of south Louisiana, and overprinted the section to send out of state in hopes of attracting more business. Many New Iberians recalled the amount of money that passed through the town: private jets may have been for the select few, but gold chains, big houses, and expensive company cars became familiar sights. Oil workers spent their cash at local businesses and, by trickle-down, many small entrepreneurs and individuals in the town experienced unprecedented growth and financial success.

Many native New Iberians remember clearly the arrival of the "foreign" oilfield workers. Anna Delahoussaye, the wife of a retired production supervisor, recalled, "…we had five girls in my family, and when all these oil workers came to New Iberia, Mama told us girls—I was the youngest one—'I don't want you going with that oilfield trash. Don't get mixed up with that oilfield trash.' And I was the only one that really married an oilfield trash, and you know who took care of all of them when they were ill and all in their later years? (Her husband)" [I-211].

The oilfield offered the potential to achieve financial security and the ability to afford material items that were previously only available to the few. Yet, despite the rewards of working in oil, the oilfield identity is not all positive.

During our discussions with families, tones of defensiveness often tinged the appreciation that husbands and wives expressed for the economic advantages that oil provided. When we introduced the project to Mindy Parker, the wife of a 7-and-7 production worker, she immediately commented, "Yes, I think we would be a good family to talk to. We're not your typical oilfield family, and I think that people should know that not everyone is dysfunctional" [I-498]. She went on to talk about how even the local news presents a negative picture of the oilfield, by only covering offshore accidents.

Mindy exemplified the frustration locals feel with conventional representations of the oilfield. Indeed, movies like *Giant*, *Hell Fighter* or *Thunder Bay*, and books like *Louisiana Blue*, characterize the oilfield as the new wild west. Scholars have added to this portrayal of the oilfield by highlighting the boomtown model of the oilfield or focusing on its most "exotic" parts, such as the famed oilfield cowboy culture. At the same time, New Iberians are constantly reminded that as a job, oilfield employment is seen as problematic in the national arena. The *Daily Iberian*, for example, ran an Associated Press article on a new 1999 edition of *The Job Ratings Almanac*. The book ranked oilfield roustabouts as the worst job to hold in the United States in terms of income, stress, physical demands, potential growth, job security, and work environment.

Stereotypes of oil workers are also prevalent among New Iberians themselves. Despite the volatility of the oil industry, the periodic layoffs and their associated familial problems, many individuals outside the oil sector exhibit a marked lack of sympathy for oil workers during these times. One social service employee, for example, told us, "Those oil families are not hurting! Most of those guys are on their shrimp boats when they're not in the oilpatch, raking in the cash." The researcher countered: "When a downturn comes, there are lay-offs. Do you see workers coming in for your services?" The employee replied with a decisive negative: "Then they sit at home, drink beer and collect their unemployment checks. They don't do nothing but laze around. Look, if you want to find some oil families, go outside and find a Cadillac. There's your oil family!" [JJ Fieldnotes, 9/98].

In truth, however, oil work covers a range of jobs and positions, not all of which pay well, and few of which, including relatively well-paid ones, offer security. As a wireline operator commented,

> "A lot of people have a false perception of the oil industry, that if you work in the oil industry you are making a lot of money, and that is not so. The money that you do make, it's good money, but it's not a lot of money.… Now there are some positions out there where you do make a lot of money, but those positions are like anything else: they are few and far between..." [I-554].

In speaking with New Iberians, the resident ethnographer was offered several images of "typical oilfield families" which were in some way associated with dysfunction: a combination of drunk men, rowdy roughnecks, loose wives, high divorce rates, and backdoor "Jodies " (a local euphemism for married women's lovers). Behind the generalizations, however, lay some serious concerns about problems associated with oil work. One such concern was the association between oilfield work and domestic violence or divorce. This association was hard to establish empirically. Local shelters did not see any observable pattern relating the incidence of abuse to oil families. The sheriff and city police departments, however, both reported that as the local economy dips and families feel the economic pressure of hourly cutbacks, job demotions, and layoffs, reports of domestic violence rise markedly. One sheriff's deputy told our resident researcher, "They come back from their 7-and-7 and they beat their wives. They get laid off and they beat their wives" [JJ Fieldnotes, 6/99]. However, law enforcement officials state that the correlation is more precisely between domestic abuse and economic downturns. The pattern is significant enough that both the sheriff's office and the police department claimed to "mentally prepare" themselves for an increase in the numbers of domestic abuse cases when the oil industry takes a downturn.

New Iberia's counselors and priests also identified problems specific to oilfield families. Family counselors reported that families typically sought their help when layoffs occur rather than on a regular basis. One family counselor said that when a downturn occurs, "Husbands experience a lot of stress in their job and that is shared by the family. Husbands and wives drink more, fight more, and then the kids start acting out their parents' dysfunction" [I-378]. However, he thought that few workers knew their health plan included counseling, and even if they did, he doubted many of them would seek help.

Churches saw more regular and long-term evidence of the stresses that families face due to the long absences of the oil worker. One priest told the researcher, "Guys come in here telling me about their problems. They're drinking, they're drugging, they're running around. Still, when they go home, they deny it's a problem" [I-224]. A deacon at another church said,

> "The oilfield has provided good paying jobs, but not a family orientation. The guy's out for 30 days. She may not have children yet. She gets lonely. When people are lonely they look for someone. The first thing you know, you have infidelity working all over the place. … A lot of them coming in here are wounded marriages. The wife becomes the mother and the father. Coupled with that, there is no spirituality. The church recommends that they get in programs so they can spend quality time together and talk" [I-685].

These negative portrayals have, to a certain extent, been internalized by oilfield workers and their families. Many of those we spoke with made disparaging references to this "typical" oilfield family. However, behind these comments was the acknowledgement of real problems. A production operator working 7-and-7 told us,

> "If I have any problems while I'm at work, I try not to bring them home with me, but sometimes I can't help it. I take out my frustrations on her (his wife). I get angry with her. We don't fight and I don't beat my kids because of what happened at work. I can control that part of it, but I might just snap for no reason and start hollering. And I try not to, but sometimes I can't help it. We've gone through several restructuring plans, or whatever they want to call it, which is just a common way of saying 'I'm going to lay

> you off.' It's a fancy way of saying that, which I weathered three or four of them. You get aggravated" [I-372].

Another couple, both of whom worked onshore in oilfield related jobs, described the stress their marriage endured as both their companies underwent simultaneous downsizing. The husband explained,

> "You got two people who work all the time and you come home stressed and you get on each others' nerves and there is just no quality time with each other. It really hits because we are taking a cut in pay [due to recent company cut backs] and not knowing if she was going [to be laid off] and it has a lot to do with it. A lot of stress" [I-459].

Many workers also expressed feelings of scorn or neglect by a national community that heavily relies on the fruits of their labor. Consider, for example, the following conversation between the Delcambre brothers [I-305; I-306]:

> Ken: "Do you remember when the steel industry, when they really went down, late seventies and early eighties, which is about the time the oilfield went to hell and above? Yet, all of these poor steel workers were without jobs and they had more government programs in Pennsylvania [to help them through], but if you were a roughneck without a job, you were just up the creek without a paddle."
> Al: "How many people lost their job in the steel industry would you say?"
> Ken: "I think they said it was 300,000."
> Al: "How many people lost their jobs from 1982 to 1987 in the oil industry? Three quarters of a million. That's a conservative estimate, too."

As the above section suggests, the major problems with which oil families contend center around two defining issues: the concentrated work schedule that offshore jobs entail, which takes a heavy toll on family life, and the ongoing stress caused by industrial uncertainty and its associated job insecurity. Both these were expressed as central problems that oil workers and their families grappled with on a daily basis and to which they attempted to adapt. In many cases, however, families had never explicitly considered, articulated or dealt with these problems until we raised them in our research. The wife of a 7-and-7 production worker, for example, approached our resident researcher a week after first meeting her and said, "You know, I never really thought about the impact [my husband's] offshore work had on my family until we talked about it. I went home and thought, 'Hey, there are some issues I haven't dealt with.' You live with the life so long, you know?" [I-339].

"You jump out early or you stay in long"

Our resident researcher was introduced to the Boudoin family by a friend. "If you wanna meet someone who knows their stuff, you've got to meet Carl Boudoin. Everyone in the Gulf knows him. But be ready" [I-397]. She met Carl and one of his sons over coffee at Shoney's. He sat facing the entrance in order to have a clear view of the people moving in and out of the restaurant, as he talked about his lifelong involvement in the oilfield. Tom, one of his three sons (all of whom were also involved in the oil patch) sat beside him listening, and occasionally trying to get a word in edgewise. As they spoke, groups of other oilmen filtered through the restaurant, hailing Carl, and laughing at the sight of him talking about the oilfield with the researcher.

Shoney's, like Victor's Cafeteria across town on Main Street, was a place to see and be seen. Groups of men huddled over coffee or spread out on chairs to talk about the last seven days out or what happened a couple of hitches ago. Morning coffee houses and local bars form the social space of oilmen, where social and business affairs meld in the characteristic style of the South in general and the oil industry in particular. In an area where jobs are found nearly as often through social contacts and surname affiliations as they are through formal channels, these spaces play a critical role.[6] One oilfield businessman, for example, told us,

> "When times are good, things go well for everyone. Even if you have a bad operation, you're still making money. That's how a lot of this business is run down here, it's not what technology you have, but his brother-in-law and cousin and all…'He runs that business, and I can get this from him so lets help him out'" [I-875].

These networks are just as important for people wanting to get out of the oil business. A local paint storeowner, for example, used to work in the oil industry overseas, but decided to make a career change at the height of the 1980's bust. When he moved back to New Iberia to open up his paint shop, money was scarce. But, as a member of one of the oldest and largest families in New Iberia, he started his business with confidence. He told us "I had family here, a lot of them, and I knew they'd support my business" [JJ Fieldnotes, 10/98]. To this day, his business manages to survive severe slumps in the local economy.

Carl Boudoin's story is a version of the American "success story." He came from humble beginnings in Texas where, after the death of his father, he set out to make his own way at the age of 12. He recalled,

> "(Oil) was the best job I could ever dream about. When I was in the cotton patch picking cotton, we used to be at work before daybreak. We had already had a half a sack of cotton to unload, and then there were roughnecks going, and there was a lot of oilfield there. They'd be driving to work in their clean clothes, brand new shiny car, and there we were, driving an old jalopy, and I'm thinking, "I wish I could be like them." And as soon as I got 15 years old… well, the whole reason I got in at that age was the company with the workover rig couldn't hire anyone else. They were shorthanded. … I didn't have to shave but every three weeks, and I didn't even look like I was 16, but he hired me. …" [I-472].

Carl was hired on as a roughneck working on land rigs 365 days a year. A couple of years later, he met and married his wife, Eva, and they starting "chasing" land rigs together. Eva later described those days to us:

> "We were always called 'oilfield trash' because we lived in trailers, and wherever the work went, that's where we went. You were looked down on if you lived in a mobile home. You just felt like the people who lived in a house or drove a big nice car were much better than you. You were probably making more money than they were, but it was

> taking everything you could make because you had to move so much. It was horrible. It was horrible" [I-477].

For the first year of their marriage, Carl and Eva moved their mobile home 13 times while they followed the company to different drill sites. Carl worked hard, intent on providing financially for his future family and distancing himself from the poverty and destitution of his childhood. In the late 1950's, he was ready to take his next step in the oilfield: "My interest lay in offshore because of the fact that you work for 7-and-7 or 14-and-14. You have a little time with your family." He got an offshore drilling job from a contact he made while working land rigs and started working 7-and-7. He moved through the ranks from roughneck to supervisor, co-owned a drilling company before the 1980's bust, and through the contacts he made, eventually became a successful independent contractor. Carl may be an embodiment of the American success story, but his family does not necessarily agree.

The Boudoins are a typical oilfield family of the 1990's. Carl's success in the oilfield influenced his sons to follow in his footsteps, although he encouraged them to take a different path. Each of Carl's sons entered the oilfield, but not one of them embraced the oilfield and its demands as wholeheartedly as their father had done. Margaret, the wife of Carl's son, Tom, explained to us why her husband was trying to get out of oil:

> "The thing with Tom was, he went into the oil industry for a paycheck, and because that's how he was raised and that's what he knew—not because he had a love for the industry. Tom never has. We've been blessed because he has always been promoted, and he's always worked his way up. His dislike for what he does never permeated into doing the job. He always did the job and did it well. But he would come home and he has never been happy. … The majority of what he wants is to be home with his children, and I think he learned that because his daddy wasn't. I don't think that he has any resentment towards that, but I think probably his lack of loyalty to the industry is because he feels cheated. He was cheated out of a life with his father growing up. When he was growing up with his father, his father worked seven days, he was gone. And then he had a gun shop and still he would go and have breakfast, lunch, and supper with his other buddies. So when he was home, he really wasn't home" [I-514].

Margaret and her husband, Tom, are actively seeking other work that will allow Tom to be home every night, but they have not found any that will bring in the same income.

Bill is the only Boudoin who found his way out of the oil patch. The eldest of the three Boudoin boys, he took his father's absence during his childhood the hardest. His mother recalled his difficult teenage years when she couldn't control him and, shaking her head at the memory, told us, "He was acting out rebellious when his dad was not there" [I-477].

Bill dropped out of high school at age 16. For two years he bided his time as a drafter at a lumberyard: "I didn't want to do that for the rest of my life. The oilfield was where the money was. As soon as I became old enough to get in the oilfield, I went" [I-526]. This was echoed repeatedly by other oilworkers we spoke with: their primary reason for going into the oilfield was, without exception, the money. "But does that balance out with the danger?" the researcher asked. “Being away from your family?” After a brief silence, Bill, a longtime production operator, said, “You’re new to this area, ok, and really that has been the livelihood of this area. Just like you go to other areas and it may be coalmines, or, like Silicon Valley [it’s computers]. This was the central core of making a living, [it] was the oil industry in the state of Louisiana.”

Another worker reflected, “You think about your family, that’s number one, you know. Your family. You look at the money that you’re making out there compared to the money you would make if you were home. You know, you really have to look at the overall picture, of everything.”

Carl tried to dissuade Bill from going offshore, but when he saw how determined his son was, Carl helped him “get on” in his own company. Bill worked his way up from a roustabout to a derrick man, taking dangerous jobs and pulling long hours to impress the company men (see fig. 1.3). With the money he made, he bought a nice car and clothes and started courting his wife. Despite all its rewards, he considered oil work a single man’s job. His mother recalled, “When he (Bill) was in his twenties, he always said, ‘My dad really didn’t care for us very much because he never took us fishing,’ or, ‘He never did things with us,’ not realizing that dad was working to make a living” [I-477]. The recollection of his father’s absence in his childhood spurred his exit from the oilfield:

Figure 1.3. Drilling rig floor

> “I was fixing to get married so I said, ‘Uh uh, I ain’t doing this, I ain’t putting my kids through the same thing of dad not being there seven days, it’s all on mom. Now is the time, it’s now or never, quit or stay with it, because once you get locked in and get married you can’t make that adjustment” [I-526].

He left the oilfield and found a traditional nine-to-five job. He reflected:

> “Like my brothers, I know they have deep family ties, but what’s happened to both of them is they’ve also, which we all do, allowed their lifestyle to change with going offshore. I’m talking money-wise. If they could come and work on land today for even a little less money, just so that they can survive, they would do it tomorrow. But they both have progressed and become higher up (in their jobs) and now they’re making good money to where they can’t come back on land and make the same money. They would have to start over in a new career. Let’s assume they’re making 75 ($75,000 a year), come back on land, that means starting off at the 45 range if they were lucky. If not, the 27 to the 32 range, the average. They can’t do that, they both have houses, both three to five kids. They can’t come back, so they’re trapped in a lifestyle they chose unknowingly. I’m the only fortunate one and the only reason I’m fortunate is because I made up my mind early, before I had the kids. You jump out early or you stay in long” [I-526].

Indeed, Bill's brothers were struggling in their decision to get out of the oilfield. Living in new homes and driving cars that still demanded a high monthly payment, these families found themselves trapped by the level of consumption that to which their oilfield jobs had habituated them. Tina, one of the Boudoin wives, said, "I told him that's where it comes to your priorities: do you want your children or do you want offshore? You make a decision. We are not materialistic people. I don't have a problem with changing my lifestyle, and we don't live high on the horse, but I still don't have a problem with living here the rest of my life and selling the truck or getting a little truck or whatever" [I-521].

Many oil workers recognized the trade-offs of working in the oilfield. The new pickups pulling boats through New Iberia's streets are testament to the heightened expectations of the standard of living that people have acquired. Henry, a former oil worker turned bus driver, remembered,

> "I was the type of person who didn't have a good education, but could always work and get along with the people I work with. My thing when I was growing up was to make money, and that's the thing that I regret, because I missed half of my kids' growing up. Everybody that works offshore misses their family and their kids growing up. And you don't realize that until it's too late" [I-187].

Offshore work and family life have found their way into the consciousness of the south Louisiana region. Balfa Toujours, a popular Cajun band in the region, wrote a song entitled, "Restez, Mom et Pop, Restez," inspired by their offshore working relatives. In the September/October edition of the entertainment magazine, *In Tune*, songwriter Dirk Powell commented,

> This song was written after hearing a story told by Christine's (his wife's) cousin … He had been getting ready to leave for his seven day stint offshore when his children came up to him and said, 'Don't' go, daddy; we don't care about the money. Please just stay with us.' How could they understand that if he didn't work, they wouldn't eat? Yet maybe they were right; maybe being together really was more important than the money he might earn. … Sometimes what we call progress leaves suffering in its wake (p. 14).

Absent Husbands and Syndrome Wives

Our resident researcher first met Susan Segura the weekend of the Sugarcane Festival in late September at her garage sale. "We've already sold one of our cars," she said, wiping the sweat off her forehead and looking around at the hazard of chairs and tables outside her garage. Her husband, Paul, who works in the warehouse for a drilling company at the Port, recently had his hours cut back and the weekend garage sale was an attempt to compensate for the loss of income.

"Is there a downturn in oil?" the researcher asked, eyeing a naugahide chair. "I dunno," replied Susan. "All I know is his hours are cut back. My friend Carla, her husband just got hired on as an anchor man for a rig, so things aren't bad for everybody" [I-003]. Susan and her family have always lived paycheck to paycheck. Paul brings in a little less than $13 an hour to support a family of five. Their budget relies on Paul pulling in at least 60 hours a week, an expectation that is always fulfilled when the oilfield is up. The recent cutbacks at his company, however, dropped his hours down to only 40 hours a week. “You make your money in overtime,” she said, “and right now he’s not making any. So, we’ll sell off this stuff, I really don’t want it anyway, and see if things look up.”

The two women settled on a price for a chair and table and, upon hearing that the research team had just moved to the area, and with typical New Iberian hospitality, Susan went to the house to fetch one of her own chairs for our house. She invited the researcher for coffee the next morning. “Just pass by when you have the time,” she said. We came to learn that the “pass by” is an informal visit, a form of social networking that both fulfills the New Iberian sense of hospitality and helps to establish and nurture existing networks of reciprocity.

A few days later, in early October, the researcher sat on Susan’s front porch and sipped hot, sugary coffee while people passed by. The front porch, like the coffee houses and bars for men, forms a favored social space for women in New Iberia. People moved in and out of Susan’s screened-in porch unannounced, and each was summarily offered a cup of “coonass” coffee, as she called it. The researcher eventually fell into a discussion with Katie and Isabella, who were part of Susan’s regular, informal coffee group. Katie’s husband is a contract electrician in the oilfield and Isabella’s is an offshore production operator working 7-and-7. Katie was talking excitedly about a job possibility her husband Jake had in China. “How long will he be gone?” the researcher asked. “A couple weeks, maybe a month…It’s no big deal, really,” she added when she saw the researcher’s concerned look. “We’re used to this. [Jake being offshore] wasn’t a problem. It was more money. … Jake didn’t want me to work, and this was a way he could make more money so it balanced there. It wasn’t a problem” [JJ Fieldnotes, 10/98].

Figure 1.4. Mother feeding child while her husband is offshore

“To me, I mean, you gotta look at it this way,” Susan chimed in. “The man is going out there putting food on the table, and your responsibility is to take care of the house (see fig. 1.4). It’s something you gotta get used to, but it’s your responsibility.”

“It is a lifestyle.” Katie added pragmatically. “We both regret everything he missed, but bottom line, that’s just the way it is.” With few other well-paid jobs available in New Iberia, and family and friends that keep them there, Katie and Jake accept regular spousal absence and the roller-coaster economy of the oil industry as a condition of life. This acceptance of the demands of the oilfield seemed to underpin the difficulties that many oilfield families we met faced.

As a contractor, Jake’s job is feast or famine, and Katie’s way of life reflects this. When Jake lands an offshore job, the money is exceptional, and he stays offshore as long as he is able, often for a month at a time, to take full advantage of the opportunity. When Jake is gone and the money is coming in, Katie brings donuts or boudin to the coffee group or takes everyone to lunch and margaritas at a local Mexican restaurant. A year ago, when Jake had a big job offshore, she drove the ladies to the restaurant in the new Ford truck he bought her for her birthday. When the oilfield goes down, Jake may be home weeks, even months, although his contracting company tries to find him work outside the oilfield. This was presently the case. Jake was working at one of New Iberia's two sugar mills as an on-site electrician. During these down times, when the cash flow is slow or stagnant, Katie curtails her spending habits and looks for temporary employment, while Jake hustles his own contacts to find a better job in the interim. Jake has changed contracting companies often in the last couple of years, searching for a company with the contacts to keep him offshore longer.

Susan, Isabella and Katie all agreed that the current downturn was no more than the fourth quarter blues. "You wait and see," Katie said. "This happens every year. It's something you get used to." Isabella added, "Ron has never really had a problem with downturns. He always has gone to work on his seven days, especially since he's been working production. Now, he *used* to work drilling and that was different, I think."

Even five months later in March of 1999, when the oil downturn hit bottom with the lowest rig count in history, Isabella's husband was secure in his job. Every worker I spoke with, in every sector of the oilfield, declared that production was the "gravy" job.

Susan's situation was very different from Katie's or Isabella's. She and her husband had officially filed for bankruptcy the previous week. Paul's hours at the Port continued to hover around 40 a week, and his promised promotion to crane operator was now indefinitely on hold as the rig count continued to drop. Susan found various ways to deal with the shortfall in money, such as buying bargain foods at the grocery store and skimping on some of her family's medications to provide extra milk money. Another source of support was Susan's mother, who was not included in the family's bankruptcy report and therefore could receive loans that the family would in turn dip into. This created considerable conflict in the house. "I ain't doing it anymore," Susan's mother complained to the researcher bitterly one day. "They expect me to do too much. And Susan buys stupid stuff with the money anyway" [JJ Fieldnotes, 3/99]. Her loans, along with her social security check, provided a weak financial safety net for the family.

People around town were also talking about the slowdown in oil, but nobody was yet willing to call it a downturn. The real concern being expressed around town was about the increasing mergers. Service companies were downsizing and consolidating: Baker Hughes had, by November, laid off over 75 people in Acadiana. The reunification of the Seven Sisters (the oil 'majors', Exxon, Shell, Mobil, BP, Texaco, Chevron, and Gulf), initiated by the BP/Amoco merger, was also being discussed, but this time it was largely the management that had their heads on the chopping block, and few New Iberians were involved at that level. Most families we spoke with in October/November were following the simple precautions they had learned from living the roller-coaster ride of the oil industry: they began to curtail expenses such as going out to eat. These precautions reverberated in the community, as restaurant owners and gift shops complained their businesses were suffering. Relatively few people, however, were in Susan's position that November; by the following January, things had begun to look more serious.

The conversation on the porch eventually returned to how families cope with oilfield conditions. The researcher brought up the theory of the "intermittent husband syndrome" and explained its triad of telltale signs: anxiety, depression, and sexual difficulties.[7] The women were amused, and made the researcher repeat the theory to other people who passed by the porch that morning, with the same response. Susan then put the theory in perspective for us with a comment that would be echoed throughout the study:

> "I prefer them being gone and then coming home, because to me I think we had a happier life. In those two weeks he was gone, I got to do whatever I wanted to do (laughs). You know, with my friends and all…He was gone and then he'd come back—we had our own lives. In fact, I enjoyed it."
>
> "Umm hmm" Isabella agreed, "I think it's saved marriages. You have time to forget the silly stuff and appreciate each other" [JJ Fieldnotes 1/99].

This interchange challenged some of the findings from existing social science literature addressing family relations and the oilfield in the North Sea, where most of the research on family and the oilfield has been conducted. Studies of the family impacts of non-traditional work scheduling over the past two decades have tended to emphasize its negative aspects. Their characterization of women's responses to their husband's absences as "syndromes," such as the 'intermittent husband syndrome" and the 'submariners' wives syndrome',[8] suggests that these responses are associated with disease or dysfunction. According to Forsyth and Gauthier, the "near universal finding from this research has been that nontraditional work scheduling is problematic for families."[9] Our discussions with oilfield families in New Iberia (and the responses of the women on the porch that morning, repeated many times subsequently) suggested that families' reactions to the offshore lifestyle were more complex and varied.

As the following pages will show, elements of what was characterized as the "intermittent husband syndrome" did appear, indeed were fairly common among women as well as men. However they tended to occur more commonly among couples newly exposed to the demands of the concentrated work schedule. In addition, the anxiety and depression were most acute in the periods directly before or after the worker left for work offshore. After a period of transition, however, the feelings often disappeared or changed. They also varied widely in their manifestations, degrees of intensity, duration and methods of coping, and these variations were found to depend on a wide range of factors, including the family's stage in the developmental cycle,[10] previous experience in the oilfield, and types of social networks. Thus, it is misleading to present these problems as a persistent clinical condition, as the term "syndrome" denotes.

Offshore work carries important repercussions and implies a change in lifestyle for the entire household, but these are not necessarily negative. Concentrated work scheduling accentuates the separation between the worker's work life and family life. In some ways, however, this separation is welcomed, as Susan stated above. For offshore fathers, too, the flip side of being entirely absent for days, weeks, or months at a time is that for that same period, they have the opportunity to be engaged in their household more fully than fathers who are home every night. One offshore father commented, "I can go on my kids' [school] field trips. How many fathers who work nine to five are able to take out the middle of their day and go on a field trip with their kids?" [I-304]. Children, too, recognize the mixed benefits of a father working offshore. One particularly articulate child of a 14-and-14 offshore worker talked about her dad's *presence* half the year and said,

> "When I look at some of my friends who have their dads working in the office or wherever they work, I don't envy them. Like my friend, Becky, her dad's gone all day. He goes off at six in the morning and comes home anywhere from five to nine in the evening" [I-244].

Families have also devised various ways to prepare for the cycles of absence and presence that offshore employment creates, and to deal with the circumstances they generate. Of course, not all households adapt successfully, but the culture of the community in New Iberia, where family occupational traditions, personal endurance, and social networks are all deemed important, quickly teaches individuals that they are expected to adapt and even flourish in the offshore lifestyle. One woman told us, "You can't throw a stick in New Iberia without hitting an oilfield worker," reflecting the widespread acknowledgment among New Iberians that the oilfield is a lifestyle as much as it is an occupation [I-559]. At the end of our discussions, we often asked the woman who had just told us about the struggles and the benefits of being an oil wife, whether, if she balanced it all out, she would prefer her husband to stay in oil. The answer almost across the board was a resounding "yes."

Household Role Development

Peg Blanche is a very busy woman. She is a member of a large extended family, many of whose members are involved in the oil industry, and she takes on so many advocacy, teaching, and charitable responsibilities around town that finding an open date for lunch was a feat in itself. The researcher met Peg at a restaurant to talk about her personal experience with the oilfield. Peg's husband, although recently retired, was a production operator working 7-and-7:

> "Anthony may think that there isn't a problem, a social impact on his family, he may not even realize that. Because I think men as a whole do not have to deal with the household stuff. I mean, I'm not saying they don't, but for the most part they make sure that the wife takes care of those things. … You know all of those things that a mother and a wife should do. I think that is normal, but it was more intensified with the fact that he was gone for seven days and I was home. And I think after that it became a habit. I felt that I was boss, and how dare you come and suggest anything different. … I took care of everything when you were not here, and how dare you come to tell me what to do. Anthony may never say this, but I felt [his] drinking became more [as I took control of the family]."
>
> "Take a look at this culture and the industry, and what contribution does it have upon the family unit? That is the first time I associated the oilfield with the drinking and the control of the wife and that kind of thing. That (drinking and control) was in my household, and evidently in a few others because we had others [in our circle] who also were the same" [I-313].

Peg's characterization of her house as being under the "control of the wife" was common among the offshore families we studied, although the degree of control varied. Both men and women spoke of the centrality of the woman's role in the household, even though most, if not all of these households were characterized as "male-headed." One of our respondents captured this complex relationship clearly when she said, "So I managed everything, the finances, the checkbook, the children, …I was so used to taking care of all of that … He was just the head of the house" [I-560].

Our discussions with families lead us to conclude that some women have, in fact, learned to view the periods when their husbands are gone as opportunities to liberate themselves from what they perceive to be the expected role of wives. Jeanette, the 54 year-old wife of an offshore production supervisor, said that during the days her husband is away,

> "You have time to do what you want for seven days, and don't have to worry about coming home to cook a meal, clean house, this and that. I'm not saying that I didn't miss my husband, I did, and he would call me every night. It's just that you had time to do for you, and just about nothing else. Now, since him working 7-and-7, and any woman whose man works offshore will tell you, they had to be the disciplinarian, they had to pay the bills, if there was a tragedy they had to handle it. They had to learn to stand on their own two feet, whether they wanted to or not. There was nobody, no husband to lean on because he was out there working. So you learn to grow up and handle anything that comes along. It makes you a stronger person" [I-019].

With few exceptions, women in offshore workers' households are the financial managers, primary caretakers, and the social glue that holds the family together, if for no other reason than their constant presence. Men, upon their return from offshore, often struggle to find a role for themselves in a situation where the mother routinely fulfills the majority of parenting roles in the household. Many men and women, however, expressed a desire for a stronger fathering role than simply a financial provider, and as a result many families in our sample reported ongoing negotiations about role transfers when men return home. Men often expressed deep admiration for their wives, realizing, "It is all on her, she takes the whole thing. It takes a special kind of woman to put up with that." Still, some were rather unsettled by their wives' independence and by the breakdown of traditional cultural notions of the sexual division of labor, which the situation engendered. Carl Boudoin, for example, quipped,

> "From what I have seen, a woman whose husband works in the oilfield, she becomes reliant on herself. She learns how to change flat tires, she learns how to jump her own vehicle. She learns how to do all that, and then whenever the man comes in, well, she don't need him around. She's doing better off without him. That's just more clothes she has to wash" [I-472].

Women also reported various difficulties in the single-parent role they assumed during their husband's absence: they were caught between the burden of these responsibilities and their reluctance to surrender them upon the husband's return. One oil wife commented,

> "When he comes home that first week, I would say between he and I, there is a lot of friction, a lot of struggle. You know who the authority figure is. Who's going to step back?… When [my husband] comes home, I have to readjust. I have to let my control down which is not easy, because I am used to doing things my way. And I have to allow him room to step back in as the caretaker, as a provider, as a father, as a husband. When I am used to…I have no husband. I have no provider. I do everything. When something breaks, if I get a flat tire, I take care of it. The pipes bust, I call someone. When Tom is home, I have to check with someone. All of a sudden I become secondary. It's real difficult" [I-515].

The process of negotiating and re-negotiating household roles is ongoing. Family well-being and adaptation is critically dependent on how successfully its members negotiate the shift in roles and routines associated with the worker's absence or presence. The process of negotiation is, not surprisingly, hampered by the long absences and breaks in communication. The early stages of the household's development cycle also tend to present more acute difficulties. One young wife married only a year, for example, remarked that she felt she had only been married half a year because her husband was offshore for six months [DA fieldnotes, 6/99].

The negotiation process was a topic of conversation at a focus group of oil wives that Peg helped us organize. As we sat around a room in the church rectory, women talked about their common experiences:

> Peg: "They (the men) wanted to conquer the world in those seven days [off]. It was almost like Columbus discovering America. You know, 'I'm going to do all the stuff I was not able to do within those seven days.' And sometimes, with my husband, it got progressive. Really progressive. Drinking is my husband, and that got progressive. Because the first day, the second day, the third day, it was, I mean, a lot of drinking. … I had to take that problem. I guess that's why the family depended on me, my family depended on me a lot."
> Paula: "But I think, Peg, I say that, too, but I think that as wives of offshore men we choose to take care of everything because they're gone seven days, and when Michael comes in after seven days, [I say] 'You can't tell me how to do this because I've been doing it.' But I *choose* to do it. Sometimes I have to remind myself 'Wait a minute, this is the man, it is my man, and he has to do it.'"
> Claire: "I have to let him assert himself, but most times, the control is yours."
> Paula: (nodding her head in agreement) "`These are my kids, this is my house,' you know, 'cause I have to do it [most of the time], and I think it's the resentment that you feel because they're gone. When they come back from seven days, it's too late. We take that, we have the reins, and we have to control for seven days, so the seven days they're here… it's the resentment and the anger we suppress, I guess."
> Peg: "… You know, after a few years I'm angry because it's all on me. And then I want to give up, I want to give up some of those controls, 'Hey, you're the man, you need to take charge!' So, there are some feelings of abandonment…" [JJ Focus Group, 3/99].

As this interchange reveals, women recognize the potential for their partners to be cut out of their roles as fathers and husbands, and consciously and continuously maintain a place for them in the household. Lois Delcambre, the wife of a 14-and-14 barge engineer, reiterated this point:

> "You have to address everything [when he's gone], and then you have to remember to relay all these incidences to daddy, you know, to maintain the continuity. He has to know what's going on to be an effective parent. And I think that's why a lot of offshore marriages do break up. I don't know whether it's the communication or what, but what happens to a lot of people is the mom becomes mom and dad, and dad is just a sometime participant. You know, because he's not home with them every day of the week, he doesn't understand how they changed within a couple of weeks, or whatever. And it takes constant reminding him, well, you know so and so, or this is come up this week, and you really need to deal with it… because, you know, I feel very strongly about a father figure for my children" [I-306].

In many ways then, women mediate the role men play in the household, and their relationship with their children. Workers often mentioned the strong bonds that develop between the wife/mother and their children, often leaving them feeling somewhat left out. Sam Charles, an offshore production operator, said,

> "There's a certain bond they have with their mom because she was there all the time. And I notice it more now that I'm home. I'll be sitting right here, and they'll call 'Mom!' to ask mom to do this and she's constantly saying 'Well your daddy's here now, you can talk to him'" [I-241].

Sam's wife, Mary, made a conscious effort to include Sam in the family by redirecting their children to involve him in their lives and decisions. She said, "Usually they (her children) come to me and I look at them and I direct them with my eyes to go to their father. To allow him to feel a part of this family, so he's not feeling left out" [I-330].

Sometimes the roles that women craft for their husbands are counterproductive to their relationships with their children. Eva Boudoin, for example, remembered pushing the responsibility for disciplining the children onto her husband in the early years of their marriage. She was oblivious to the negative effect it was having on her husband and his relationship with his children until he finally confronted her. She recalled his reaction after he whipped the boys for something they did while he was offshore,

> "When he came out of the room, he was crying himself. And he said, 'I'm going to tell you right now, don't ever do that again to me. If they done something you tend to it then and there, don't wait for me.' And that was the last time I ever ratted on the kids again" [I-477].

LaVerle Andre described numerous situations where she pushed disciplinary responsibilities onto her husband, telling her children "wait 'til you father gets home," then rushed to her children's defense when the punishment was meted out. As a result, her husband was cast as the "bad guy" while she became the benevolent parent [I-256].

While most women reported some difficulty in reintegrating their husbands into their lives during their periods onshore, the difficulties tended to be greater in the early part of the household's development cycle, when the children and the marriage were young. Older couples who had already successfully managed the negotiation process expressed few, if any, problems with absence or return. For these couples, the shift from one "life" to the other had become second nature. Even upon retirement, or a change in the work pattern, respondents suggested that the long-established role patterns changed little. The wife of a former offshore wireline operator said, "I still handle everything now that he's onshore. I run the house and everything else. I have the checkbook, and if he needs some money he'll say, 'Can I?' And I'll say, 'Can you? Well, it's your money' 'Well, yeah, but I want to ask you first.' I like it that way" [I-019]. Another woman, the wife of a retired production operator, only half jokingly said, "The problem wasn't when he was gone [offshore], the problem was when he retired and was home all the time. He was always under my feet" [I-559].

Even families who have successfully negotiated their role changes, however, still find themselves in a process of punctuated adjustment and readjustment, a process which led most workers and their wives to describe their lives as "schizophrenic" or a "double life." Solheim[11] described the three distinct social realities operating simultaneously among the offshore oil families he researched: "his offshore life, her single life at home, and their joint life of togetherness." The same is true in New Iberia. One woman, for example, said,

> "[When he was gone] I wouldn't cook. We would eat fast food when he was gone. I would visit my mother a lot. I would visit my friends a lot. I think that was because I felt kind of isolated. I wasn't a single and I wasn't a couple. My friends who were couples would call when he was out, and my friends who were single would call when he would be here, and then they would feel bad. So, it was like I was single when he was gone, and I was a couple when he was here. So, I kind of had to change hats as he would walk in and out of the door" [I-560].

Unfortunately, previous studies on the impacts of offshore on the family have tended to see family coping strategies to this split lifestyle as somewhat static and monolithic instead of flexible or dynamic. Forsyth and Gramling [12] identified five types of familial role structures devised to adapt to periodic spouse absences. This model was later modified by Forsyth and Gauthier[13] in 1991 to include six family role/household structure adaptations. The latter study observed that adaptive strategies change in response to changes in work schedule. Our data reveal, however, that these strategies also change with time, as families experiment with different methods and grow older and more experienced in coping with the lifestyle. The challenge, then, is not to categorize household structure and strategy in any rigid way, but to describe the dynamic process of change that households undergo during worker absence and presence and through time.

Differences in Scheduling

Another factor which affects the negotiation process is the length of the work schedule. Work schedules in the oilfield vary widely from the traditional 7-and-7 and 14-and-14, to 21-7 and 28-28 schedules, and the highly unstructured schedules of 24-hour call. These schedules have profound impacts on the ability of families to switch routines. Families that have to deal with shorter work schedules, such as 7-and-7 and 14-and-14, appeared to adapt more easily. The longer schedules—28-and-28 in particular—are much more disruptive for households. Margaret Boudoin, who is both a young mother and the wife of a 28-and-28 drilling superintendent, reported struggle and conflict every time her husband returned because of the length of his absence.

> "You know what? The worst part about the whole thing is that by the time he has been home for three weeks things are really getting good. That first week there's a lot of friction. There is a lot of power struggle going on really. The kids don't know who to go to, they have a problem, you know, Mom and Dad are there. They are so used to coming to mom, but, man, dad is sitting right there, they don't know who to go to. …" [I-515].

Just as the length of work scheduling has a major impact on how families cope, it also has a bearing on the worker's level of involvement in his home and community. The Delcambre family debated the differences between these work scheduling patterns:

> Al: "Some people find it hard to be away from home for more than seven days. That used to be the standard, 7-and-7. And now people are going to 14-and-14 to cut down on the transportation. Fourteen days away from home is really hard, but you are really at home more because… The day you come home, it is shot, and the day you go out is shot, and for me the day before I go out is shot, too, because my mind is on going out, so, if you are working 7-and-7 you are really home only four days."
> Lois (Al's wife): "Yeah, if it is a week at a time, you still have to adjust and to me that is harder to adjust to every other week than it is two weeks at a time. Because [with two weeks], you get into a routine. You have a longer time to adjust. The same thing with him coming home, it is not like this (snaps her fingers) and it's over. I mean I can think back to when [Al] worked 7-and -7 and then it went to 14-and-14 …. 7-and-7 was okay because it was just us, but for my kids that is a joke. It takes a day to get home and a day to leave, so you are talking five days. They (his company) have nine of those days, I get five. Our family gets five. I call that cheating, I do."
> Al: "That's why I like 14-and-14. To me that is an ideal schedule, it's a long time on the water, but it's not that long. It's a nice time at home; you are not home so much that you're in the way. By the time you start to get really aggravating, it is time to go back to work. Because when I am home I don't have to go to the office, I don't have to go anywhere, I'm home. I'm not like the guy next door who is going to the office every morning at eight o'clock and is going to come home at five o'clock and get the weekend off. I'm home for 14 days, and you try living around somebody for 14 days, when he doesn't have to go anywhere."

> Ken (Al's brother): "They are talking about putting us 14-and-14. … It sucks, to be quite honest with you. That's too long. I'll tell you what you are going to see. Now I haven't called in my sick leave because I figure if I get sick in the middle of a hitch, I can handle it for two or three days. If I get sick in fourteen days, I'm coming home. I am not going to be sick out there for nine days. I think the sickness will go up. Absences will go up" [I-304; I-305; I-306].

Although the family had different opinions about which work schedule was best, they were still dealing with "schedules." The family anticipated the worker's comings and goings, and was able to organize its life accordingly, to establish or shift routines. Wives often counted on the arrival of the husband to set up social engagements, family get-togethers and outings. The community also relied on these schedules. Work scheduling is predictable enough that even the mayor of Gueydan, a small town 44 miles west of New Iberia, was a 7-and-7 offshore oil worker. One worker added however, "Gueydan is not that big. Anything that would happen could wait for seven days" [I-304].

Paul, who works offshore, is also a deacon at the local church. "They schedule meetings when we're in, and try to schedule functions when we're in. You know, they knew it when they got us to do that. They knew our schedules. So we do what we can and they do what they can." The church Paul belongs to has had to incorporate oil workers into its organizational structure because over 50 percent of the church is involved in oil. Email communication is crucial in keeping Paul in close communication with the church and his congregation. The church has also adapted to a constant turnover of congregation members as oil workers and their families follow the oil patch; in fact, as the pastor explained to us, they consider this an asset. "I think we benefit from the new people. They bring in new ideas and help us to grow instead of stagnate" [I-637].

Workers with longer work schedules find it difficult to be involved in community activities. Kevin, who works 14-and-14, told us,

> "You don't get a whole lot of softball Dads or T-Ball Dads or whatever, with that scheduling. It's so hard to do. My little girl is in the girls' basketball league. There's no way I could help coach that. I could help when I come in, but, you see that's one other thing, you try to throw that into 14 days. Your schedule is pretty full as it is" [I-304].

Most problematic of all, however, for a worker's involvement in home and community, is the "24-hour call," common among some groups of offshore service and diving personnel. Though for some professionals, such as doctors, on-call work is compensated for by high pay, in the oilfield on-call status relates to the job instead. Divers and service personnel, for example, must be available to respond in emergencies. Wives and workers both emphasized how difficult the absence of a schedule can be for the household division of labor, household structure, and community involvement. Liz, the wife of an on-call wireline operator, remembered,

> "You don't know what oilfield means until you get in it…so in my mind everybody I knew would work a little bit then come home for a long season. I was not prepared for thirty days on call. I was getting dressed to go to dinner, and the phone would ring and 'bye' he's out the door … I can't plan anything because he's on-call" [I-554].

Her husband, Darryl, agreed:

> "I have actually walked in at the shop and not even called my wife to let her know I was home because I'd have to leave. It was better not to call than to call and say, 'I am at the shop, but I have to leave and go somewhere else.' … I have never coached a little league team because I'm never here and I don't know when I'm going to be gone. You can't do it, you really can't do it. I have a friend of mine, he lives in north Louisiana and he tries and when he is there he's on a church softball team, but he's never there" [I-554].

Another worker reiterated the difficulty of being on call when he said,

> "Even like with the fishing, I enjoy fishing and I have a brand new boat which I have had for about two years. I might have 30 hours on the motor. That is how much I have used it. … When I go fishing, I have my cell phone with me all day and my beeper and my book of phone numbers, everything. There are times where I'll go fishing and I'll have to stop while I am fishing, taking numbers down, calling to order tools, or having to go back and forth because the cell phone didn't work right. Even going out to Tampicos to have a drink, it is like, okay you can't have too much to drink 'cause you are on call" [I-459].

As researchers, we experienced firsthand the difficulty of the 24-hour call in our attempts to set up meetings with families of on-call workers. "Beep me in the morning and I'll see if I get a call [to go offshore]" was a common response to our requests for appointments. One family was repeatedly contacted for two months in an attempt to catch the worker on his days in. Every time our resident researcher spoke with his wife, she said a variation of, "He's supposed to come in on Friday," but when Friday rolled around, he was delayed until Sunday. On Sunday, she found out they had two days together before he was called out on the next assignment. "Keep trying," she assured us. "Sometimes I don't even know when he's coming in." But the days that he was in, she understandably reserved for the family to spend together.

When the oil industry is up, 24-hour call workers are often gone all the time. They essentially just walk in the front door and right out the back. Another former on-call contractor complained,

> "There was NO schedule. That was the problem. I had no schedule. And the strange thing about that is, uh, you get used to that. It normalizes and you forget that you have options. You forget about the option of making plans and even asking for time off. That's what I did. I just gave up my life. I didn't have a life, and I woke up one day without a wife, alienated from my kids, and I said, 'Gee, you haven't had much of a life at all" [I-761].

When the oilfield is down, 24-hour call workers may be home for extended periods of time as they wait for the next job to come through. In October, one on-call contract worker had not been beeped for a job in over a month. "He's driving me crazy," his wife told us as he headed out the door for his fifth game of golf that week. "You caught me at a really bad time. He's been home over a month. That's one month without his income. He needs to leave and get a job!" [I-319].

Working Men and Working Women

Isabella Doucet, whom the researcher had met on Susan's front porch, sat on her couch with her husband, Ron, drinking the ever-present cup of coffee. Our meeting had to be squeezed into Ron's week off: for many working wives whose husband's work offshore, time management is critical. Her husband's week home is scheduled tightly to fit in everything requiring his presence or help. "Everything's measured by the days he's gone," she said as she fished in her purse for the "hitch calendar," provided by Ron's company, which highlights the week he's home in red and the week he's away in blue. The hitch calendar was already filling up with dance recitals, children's appointments specifically scheduled for Ron's time at home, and the "honey dos" of house repair. After looking intently at the schedule, we agreed to a day and time [I-635].

Isabella spoke at length about the pressures of periodic single parenthood while keeping her job as an administrator in the Parish school system. When her children were young, the pressure began to manifest itself in physical aliments. She told me, "I never did sleep when he was gone. I still don't. It was just the sense of responsibility, I'm the only adult in the house kind of thing…[a couple years back] I was sick for nearly nine months, and then the doctor realized, 'You're not sleeping.' And he put me on an anti-depressant to make me sleep" [I-635].

The "double life" of the oil patch is especially pronounced for working wives. Isabella stressed the disruptions that her husband's comings and goings create in the household's carefully maintained routines:

> "He'll come in, and that's the hardest part about the offshore thing, the routine's different with the children. They have to have two different routines, I have to have two different routines, and he does."
>
> "When he's gone, it's like they know. I'm going to get dressed, we all have to leave at the same time, I don't have time to come tell them three times to put on their shoes. But when he's home, we might have to tell them three or four times. And, he might have to threaten them…but they don't do that to me. And it's not because they respond better to me, it's like they know that I don't have time. And they learn that. Those kinds of things get me really frustrated….Going to bed at night, they know I want to go to bed, and if they don't get ready for bed, I'm going to hit 'em! (laughs) You know, 'Don't make me come back in there!' And with him (imitating Ron) 'I told y'all to go to bed. Why y'all talkin''?' It's like 20 times! And it's like, 'Why are we still doing this? We've been doing this for an hour.' It's not because of him, it's because it's a different routine" [I-635].

In many ways, oil workers' "days off" can be a relief for working wives because the pressure and responsibility of single parenting is lifted. When Ron is home, he drives the kids to school and other activities, runs errands, and does basic maintenance on the house. Some men even take over domestic responsibilities usually seen as women's work. A production operator working 7-and-7 said,

> "My wife, she has a very, very stressful job. And her dad – he's living with us now in the bedroom in the back. He's been with us for six years so, he's seventy years old, and the

age is taking a toll on him. So, she's not only dealing with the ladies at work, she has to come home and, uh, she has how many jobs? I want to say she has a regular job, a job with the kids …, a job with her father, a job paying the bills and getting the groceries. She has five jobs. … On my days off, I do my part. Daddy's home now, you take your vacation. … When I come from work, I make sure the house is tidy, and everything is together so in turn when she comes home from work, I make sure the food is cooked, make sure her daddy is taken care of, the bills is paid, and the kids' homework is done. 'Cause being away from home 7-and-7, at times it does make it stressful. Sometimes it gets a little stressful" [I-009].

Not all men, however, return home with the idea of pitching in with household tasks. Ron and Tina Boudoin have not yet worked out a smooth transition of routines and roles. Ron, a 30 year-old driller, comes home from working at least 12 hour shifts for 14 days offshore and feels his days off are hard-won. Those days off take on the flavor of a vacation. Ron reluctantly spends some time on household chores, but he spends a lot more time fishing with his friends, visiting people he hasn't seen in two weeks, and making the most out of being back in what he refers to as the "real world" (see fig. 1.5). The relaxed tempo Ron sets on his "days off" disrupts the pace Tina has established for the household in his absence and results in marital tension. Although Tina can financially afford to be a full-time mother, her work gives her a sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency, and she considers her job as important to the household as Ron's work. Consequently, she expressed considerable frustration that Ron did not assume "his part" of the household responsibilities during his days off.

Figure 1.5. The "real world" of the Louisiana bayou

"Well, it is hard," Tina said, "because I have a full-time job, too… I work full-time and take care of kids that are in everything. Just like [my sister-in-law's] kids who are into everything, she's running the roads. I'm working and running and taking care of my kids. So he comes home, and I am just like, 'It's your turn'" [I-521].

Ron, who was sitting beside her, added, "`It's your turn and I am like 'Can I have some days off?'" [I-520]. "Yeah," Tina retorted smiling. "He says, 'I just came home and I have 14 days off. Can I go fishing?' and I am like, 'No'" [I-521].

Then there are the stories of men returning home from their hitch, already drunk on the beer they bought on their drive home and spending most of their time with friends in the hunting blinds. This is the stuff of local legend, and throughout our 10 months of fieldwork, we only encountered a handful of these cases. Most families we met, and particularly those with young children, were struggling to find a balance between offshore work scheduling and family life.

Doing for Each Other: Social Networks in the Oilpatch

Regular mid-morning cups of coffee on Susan's front porch provided the resident researcher with close insights into the workings of informal social networks in New Iberia and their role in supporting wives of offshore workers in particular, and oil workers and their families in general. The informal "pass by," in which women drop in to drink coffee, exchange gossip and catch up on one another's lives, maintains friendships while keeping open the lines of reciprocity. Susan Segura is involved in numerous overlapping coffee groups that form a complex of interlocking social networks. The social networks created on the porch, centering around women, and including both kin and non-kin, proved to be critical in assisting women and their families both through the regular periods of spousal absence and through the occasional economic difficulties of lay-offs, job losses, and crises in family budgets. Susan gets some support from her kin, but because she is relatively new to the area and does not have the benefit of a local extended family, she relies heavily upon non-kin support. Almost all of the women involved in Susan's social network are the wives of offshore oil workers, and many have known each other since adolescence.

The designation "new to the area," and the distinction between native and newcomer is, of course, not clear-cut. Cindy, the wife of a helicopter pilot in the Gulf, said,

> "You know, I've lived here 11 years and I'm still considered a newcomer. It took me two years to feel accepted in the community…of course I'm sort of an introvert. But you (she pointed to the researcher), they won't know how to figure you out because you haven't even been here a year! … Part of it is that people around here are judged as much by their family's history as who they are. I didn't have a family here, nobody knew my people, so people didn't know where to place me" [I-523].

Bianca Warner echoed this sentiment. A native of Mexico, she moved to New Iberia when she married her husband, a native New Iberian. She characterized her first two years as being very "isolated."

> "People around here are very open and very friendly," she said. "Yet…you're always a foreigner and a stranger because this community is so small, and everybody knows everybody from way back when. And when you don't know them from back in high school, it's really tough to establish close friendships" [I-189].

Susan Segura's father, who was in the Navy, moved his family to New Iberia from South Carolina in the early 1960's during the brief four years that the naval base operated on the outskirts of town. Susan was about to finish high school in 1964 at New Iberia Senior High when the government closed the base and her father was re-stationed in Kansas. "I knew I always wanted to come back to New Iberia. When I had a chance to move back, this was the place that felt the most like home. It's like what they say, 'once you taste bayou water you never leave'" [I-003]. Susan moved back to New Iberia in 1966 and re-established her friendships with other naval families. Like many other women and men associated with the naval base, Susan married a New Iberian native and settled there. The core of Susan's social support networks remains these families from the base, although she continually incorporates other newcomers, such as our resident researcher, into this network.

Susan particularly relied on her networks when Paul was an offshore motorman working 7- and-7. When something happened that she was unable to handle herself, "…and it always happens when he's gone— the pipes break, the heater goes, the children get hurt—I either took care of it myself or called on my friends or family to help" [I-003]. Even now that Paul works onshore, the time-worn social networks are still active. Susan currently provides babysitting for a friend who is back at school and whose husband works offshore, in exchange for help with house repairs. Other members of Susan's social network call upon her contacts when they need a favor. Katie, Susan's best friend, was offered a part-time job by Susan's brother when her husband Jake was out of work.

Mae Quintero, the wife of an on-call offshore wireline and snubbing operator, explained her own network and its reciprocal obligations simply: "We do for each other." When Mae gave birth to her second child, bad communications prevented her husband from being present at the birth. Her friend, Cheryl, also the wife of an offshore oil worker, was in the birthing room with her. "…and I was with her when her second one was born, her husband was offshore, too," Mae said, "So we did for each other, a lot of us. The wives survived because of each other, you know? They work together." These exchanges occur on a daily basis, in the form of favors such as watching children or providing emotional support, but the network really swings into action in times of crisis. Mae recalled a time when her child, then only a couple of months old, suffered a seizure. "[My husband] was offshore so [Cheryl] took me to the hospital and stayed with me, with her two kids, my two [other] kids and that baby in the emergency room, and then took my kids home until my mother could come and get them. The wives survived with emergencies in that aspect. We did for each other, and that was it…all the time" [I-627].

Unlike Susan, Mae is native to the area and has a large extended family, by both blood and marriage; her support networks, therefore, involve kin and non-kin groups that, as in the case of her son's seizure, interlock and/or work in tandem. Another woman reiterated the importance of the extended family to native New Iberians: "If something happened, I called my mama or his (her husband's) mama, and someone always came with me. I never had to actually do it by myself. … Someone was there to support me. 'Cause when you're young, by yourself, it's scary, you know? If you have a young child who needs help…They were there." [I-627]

The centrality of family to native New Iberian networks is tangibly represented in settlement patterns. It is not uncommon for young couples to move into a small cottage directly behind the parents' house or for family members to live within blocks of one another, arrangements that have often proved extremely adaptive to the conditions of the offshore lifestyle and for strengthening the bonds of reciprocity and support between women. Mae, for example, moved into a small cottage beside her parents' house after her marriage and lived there for four years, during which time she had her first two children. Her mother, the wife of a 7-and-7 offshore cook, was in close physical proximity to help Mae transition to the life of an offshore oil wife. Although Mae has long since moved into a house of her own and her children are grown, she still lives within two blocks of her mother and her mother-in-law.

Also unlike Susan's, most of Mae's kin are in some way involved in the oilfield. Oil work often runs in families; such multi-generational oil involvement helps build adaptive strategies and support networks. For example, Marie Breaux's husband was one of the first locals to go offshore, as a driller on the first platform out of sight of land. The husbands of all of Marie's seven sisters eventually went into the oilfield. Today, most of her children and even some of her grandchildren work in the oilfield, and most live within a couple of miles of each other. The physical and emotional immediacy of kin is an advantage of being "native."

Lois is another woman whom the resident researcher met on Susan's front porch. Like Susan, Lois came to New Iberia when her family was stationed at the naval base there. She met her husband, Al, a native of New Iberia, and married into the oilfield. "For myself [my husband's absences weren't difficult] because my dad was in the military. So, I was raised without daddy always home" [I-244]. All three of Al's brothers are in oil, as was his father, and the extended family relies heavily on one another for support.

> "And that's probably what keeps us here, is family. Because the way he works we could live just about anywhere. But you have to have a good support network, I think. I don't know how some women would do it without the support network."

The strength of social networks depends on several factors. A network in which several members are in the early phases of their household's development cycle may be less resilient than a network consisting more of women with older children: in the former, women as primary caregivers are overburdened with household responsibilities and in constant need of assistance, while in the latter, members may be free to devote time to helping other members.

Another factor affecting the strength of a network is its relative composition of working women. Working women often expressed concern about overburdening their networks, and therefore either paid the high cost of childcare or did for themselves. Isabella is the only member of Susan's front porch circle who works outside the home. As a result, she rarely has time to visit the porch, although she still makes an effort to pass by when her husband is gone, sometimes bearing food or other gifts to maintain her ties to the network.

Tina Boudoin exhibited both of the above factors: she is employed, and has young children. Her familial social network is heavily impacted by the oilfield's concentrated work scheduling and has many members with young children. Tina's family members pitch in to help her when they can, but the holes are apparent. During the middle of our meeting, for example, she received a call from the school reporting that her son was suspended for fighting. Her husband, who happened to be home on his 14 days, went to pick him up from school. After he left, the researcher asked her: "What do you do when he is gone and something like this comes up? Is there somebody you can call?" Tina replied with a sigh,

> "I could, but not really. Margaret (her sister-in-law) has four children and she is running the roads herself. His (her husband's) mom, it takes her a long time to get here. She lives on the other side of the airport. My mom works. Daniel's baseball coach lives down the street, so like yesterday I could have called and said, 'Todd, Daniel is going to have to go with you' and that would have been fine, but I would have to go back to the baseball park

> after I dropped my other kid off at dance class. … So no, I don't know who I could call. I just do it" [I-521].

There are, thus, situations when even the densest social networks in the oilfield can be overburdened by pervasive need and a general scarcity of resources.

"You need to leave!": Forcing Separation

"Now this used to occur, it doesn't occur anymore. And I've talked to a lot of women and they go through this, too." Lois Delcambre, the wife of a barge engineer working 14-and-14, turned her coffee cup in her hands as we sat in her modest farm home in the New Iberian countryside.

> "A couple of days before they leave to go offshore, invariably a fight will occur, or something. A forced separation. It's like a grieving. And I've talked to a lot of women, and for every one of them it's the same thing. Something stupid will come up, and it's always petty, and it'll come into an argument so it helps that break. … What it is is it's an emotional closure, it helps to separate, you know, rather than be completely open when they leave … Now we don't do that anymore. We've learned, you know, we've learned to appreciate our time together. Between his [offshore] accident and my heart attack we don't do that" [I-306].

The fight Lois mentioned was the first time, but certainly not the last, that the resident researcher heard of the actions that help some oil wives cope with routinized spousal absence and that mark their transition from the dual parent household to the single parent household. The fight also underscores the fact that household adjustment and readjustment to the worker's absence and presence are most pronounced on the days surrounding the worker's arrival and departure. In this transitional period, a set of rituals is brought into play to mark the separation of the individual from his/her previous status. Lois's use of the word "grieving" in connection with her husband's departure offshore invokes Morrice's[14] characterization of the periodic but total physical separation inherent in non-traditional work scheduling as a loss, much akin to bereavement. He observed quarrels, tears, and tensions among oil couples as typical reactions to this impending loss. These reactions appear to be particularly concentrated among families in the early part of their development cycle, when feelings of abandonment set in. Isabella, the young wife of an offshore driller working 14-and-14, said,

> "It's like I go through three days of mourning when he leaves. I have a friend who's the same way. Her husband works offshore and she goes through the same mourning. When I haven't called her in three days, she'll call and say, 'He left, didn't he' and come to console me after three days of, like, seclusion. It's like I get a little sick feeling inside [when he leaves]. I don't want to see anyone or go anywhere. I cry. Sometimes I'll watch him leave and then go fix myself a big cup of coffee, sit in my rocker and just cry as loud and hard as I can" [I-635].

To cope with these feelings of depression, Isabella, like Lois, devised a way to make an emotional break:

> "Two days before he leaves, I pick up an attitude. You know, like, 'You need to leave!' Sometimes I don't even speak to him. He comes to the bathroom door and asks 'Hey baby, you ok?' and I say 'Umm hmm' and go on a soaking [in the tub]." Her husband finally told her how hard it was on him when she acts like this to which she replied, "I'm weaning myself from you before you go" [I-635].

The fight seems to act as a ritual that helps the family enter its period of loss. Once the transition is over, workers and their families slip into patterns they have developed to deal with spousal absence or presence. The regularity of these emotional cycles is part of what leads many respondents to characterize their lives as "schizophrenic" or a "double life."

Respondents noted that these transitional stages can last anywhere from one day to three days or a week, depending on the length of the work schedule. Margaret Boudoin, for example, is a young mother of four whose husband works 28-and-28. She told our resident researcher over breakfast one day, shortly after her husband left,

> "…And then it is time [for him] to go again. Then you have that angst, that anxiety starts happening, you get nervous, you get sad. It starts all over again. He leaves and those first few days when he leaves, I am mush. Don't ask me to do anything. All of my friends, they know this. If Tom leaves on a Tuesday, don't call me until Thursday, because Margaret doesn't want to do anything. A little depression comes out. I'm not depressed as far as clinically depressed, but there is a sadness. It is like 'Here it goes again.' Everything is back on me because there is no support. I have no one. The better part of you is gone. So you have to readjust …. The first week is yuck, but about the second or third week, you're adjusted" [I-515].

Women in households that are further along in the development cycle, when children have left the nest, tend to experience less emotional stress. Wilma, for example, is a 50-year old wife of an offshore maintenance supervisor currently working 28-and-28. Her husband did not take jobs longer than 10-and-10 until the children were older. As soon as their last child graduated from high school, he accepted a job to go 28-and-28 in the China Sea for higher pay in the hope of retiring sooner. Wilma commented on this decision, "It's not like when we were young and the kids were home and all of that. Well, then [if he worked 28-and-28] maybe there would have been problems because of the length of time [he was gone]" [I-447].

Men also struggled with the adjustment from the home to the work life. Many expressed loneliness and anxiety similar to what the women underwent. One offshore driller working 14-and-14 articulated the tension men experience,

> "Coming home from work I go through a change: I am John the daddy, John the husband. When I go to work, when I get to the boat I am 'Tadpole' [his work nickname]."
>
> "I liked 28-and-28. The hardest thing about working in my job is going to work, the last day home. That last day home I am PMS-ing. Don't even talk to me because I am aggravated. Getting to work, and having to work that first tour …all you got on your mind: the house, your kids. Once that first day is over with you start getting in the

groove. And the less I have to make that first day, the better off I am. So 28-and-28, I didn't have to do it too often. Everybody says they like 7-and-7, well, 7-and-7 you spend half your time driving back and forth to work, and then you got more of the 'first day blues.' That's what I call them. 'Crew change blues' is what they call it. Everybody's like that" [I-520].

Another oil worker suggested that you never really get used to either being away or coming home. Instead, he reported a chronically transitional existence. After comparing his home to a military home, he added as an afterthought,

> "It is really worse than military lives because if you are in the military, you go on a Persian Gulf cruise, and you know you are going to be gone for 90 days or 120 days, but you are going to be coming back. Here you are either 7-and-7 or 14-and-14 and you never really get a rhythm. It's so easy to break up a rhythm. Because when you are gone she has to do everything, and when you get back, you are kind of a stranger in the house and I'm sure that goes on in the military, but at least you are back long enough to fit in. By the time you are fitting in here it is already time to go back offshore" [I-521].

Another worker said,

> "It's lonely from the aspect that you're on this platform in the middle of nowhere (see fig. 1.6), you can't see land. As far as you see in all directions is water. When you knock off tour at night, you look out and you think, 'What's the real world doing right now?' You're in this nowhere, but then you have to justify it to yourself saying, 'This is what I do. I'm out here to provide them to go to Burger King and go to dance recitals'(laughs)" [I-526].

Figure 1.6. Production platform

In general, the rewards that offshore work offered for workers and their families were considered to be worth the ongoing pain of separation. As one wife admitted, "I just kinda remained driven all the time because I wouldn't allow myself to think about how difficult it was."

The Glory and the Gravy: Returning Home

Lois Delcambre refreshed our coffee mugs for the third time in an hour and sat down again to play with her mug. "If there's a transition when he goes away, is there a transition when he comes home?" the researcher asked.

> "That's true. My husband Al, as a matter of fact, with the kids and with me, too, he'll be barking commands before he realizes it. Because he's a supervisor offshore, he's used to telling his crew to do the work (see fig. 1.7). And it's loud, you know, the machinery is loud, and half of them are losing their hearing anyway, you know. And I have to often

remind him, 'Honey, I'm not a roustabout, I'm your wife' (laughs) Please and thank you are very nice.' … Like I said they're 24-hours a day seven days a week [working offshore]. My husband, for example, will come home and give me a list of things he needs done. Whatever, get the car in or make a hair cut appointment, whatever. But it's Saturday afternoon and in the real world everyone works Monday through Friday until five, you can't just do all this. So it's a transition for him" [I-306].


Figure 1.7. Drilling rig floor

Al, who had come into the kitchen to get a cup of coffee himself, listened to our conversation and added,

"Yeah, and the husband must realize what is going on. He has to work at it, too, and you see so many of them out there where 'Jake Bob' is only interested in getting home to go to the field or to go hunting or fishing and wonders why he's on his second or third wife. That's through the whole economic scale all the way from the beginning hands-on up to company representatives" [I-305].

As with the exit, respondents reported that the period of re-entry and readjustment to family life takes anywhere from one to three days depending on the length of the work schedule. Unlike the exit, however, men rarely professed difficulty with readjusting. For them, the adjustment to home is largely a physiological one, centering around sleep patterns and changes in diet. Al told us that on his first day home,

"I go to sleep. The schedule I am working now is nights, and I'm trying to flip-flop back [to days when I'm home]. So, I go to sleep and Susie will get me up about four in the afternoon. If I get home that morning and I'll try and stay up for a little bit and go back to bed when I'm supposed to. It gets a little confusing, and working the night schedule like I have been..." [I-305].

"Yeah," added Susie, "He sleeps the first two days so I really only get him home for 12 of his 14 days off. No, 10 days, the other two he spends getting to and from work" [I-306].

Darrel, an on-call wireline operator, explained another issue in making the transition from work to home:

"You are used to being out on a platform and not used to driving a vehicle and you come back in and you drive a vehicle and you are all…it is hard to explain, but there is a physical difference (see fig. 1.7). You are used to looking at the ocean or the Gulf and not seeing moving objects. Everything you are working on is your platform, so depth perception becomes another whole subject when you get back here because now your eyes have to focus back on depth perception. So, it is just different things like that that, I mean the farthest you are going to look at when you are out there is the platform you are on. When you get here, and you start driving down the highway, and you start looking at

> a vehicle that is down the road, you got to readjust to all of that. And it normally takes about a day or so" [I-554].

Beyond that, he said, "There is absolutely no adjustment to coming back. It's all glory and gravy after that."

"Glory and gravy" sums up the two rewards of working in the offshore oil industry that, for men, compensate for all its hardships. The glory refers to the sense of pride and accomplishment that men experience on returning home with a fistful of cash, hard won by 12 or more hours a day of continuous work for weeks on end. The gravy refers to the days off, the relaxing for equivalent lengths of time. "It's great," one worker recalled, "We barbecue. This time when I came home I brought three-dozen crabs and we boiled crabs and all the kids came over in the neighborhood and ate crabs. It is kind of like a celebration. … Coming home is like a high" [I-520].

Yet the re-entry, like the departure, has its sharp edges. For both the returning worker and the family at home, these involve issues of place and space, of physical adjustments. Margaret Boudoin identified cleaning as a re-entry ritual performed before her husband's return home. The ritual involved more than simply straightening the home for his arrival; it became a symbolic act of preparation for the change in household structure "I clean to sweep away my role as a single head of household and prepare my heart and mind for his re-entry" [I-515].

The re-entry period also carries some aspects that are not easy for many couples. Expectations are heightened on both sides. One woman recounted carefully,

> "There's kind of like this pressure, you know, to have sex and stuff like that. To make up… And I'm exhausted and I'm like, '…give me a couple of days to recoup, you know.' … When he comes home, even after all these years, I mean 16 years, we have a little re-entry period. We don't quite jive the first day, you know, it takes a couple of days… So, we do go through a little re-entry. I find that interesting after so many years." [I-189].

Some men are also sensitive to the adjustments. An ex-driller turned assistant production field foreman said,

> "For both of us, and we're aware of this, it's a psychological adjustment. … I come in from offshore, from a near emotionless situation. There are no women, or very few women offshore. It's a business environment, it's a rough environment, the guys out there, the vast majority of them have no mercy. They work hard, they play hard. It's nothing to dump a bucket of ice water on you while you're taking a nice hot shower at the end of the day. … There is no sympathy, there is no emotion out there. None. Zero.
>
> "So, I come in from that environment, and I come into a loving family and *it is an adjustment*. And I have caught myself, let's just say 35 or 40 thousand times, where Joann has a minor problem about such and such … and I say, 'Oh yeah honey, don't worry about that crap…' That's not what she wants, and that's not what a woman needs. And over the years, being married to the wonderful lady

> that I'm married to, I've come to learn these things. Women need comfort, they're more emotionally, (pointing at me) you're a woman you ought to know, they are more emotionally motivated. Whereas men, we're a bunch of butt-heads. Men are crass, no-good-trash emotionally. I'm sorry, that's the way we are. It's a survival tactic, I would imagine. And offshore people are probably more so because of the environment that they work in half of their lives" [I-626].

Like the exit process, the re-entry becomes smoother during the later part of the household's developmental cycle as the gears of the transition become well-worn.

To Stay or Not to Stay… Memories of "The Bust"

Our resident ethnographer sat with Susan at the latter's kitchen table. January had turned cold, and the stove burner Susan lit gave less heat than the coffee mugs they cupped their hands around. By this time the town's newspapers were splattered with front page titles such as, "Loss of 2,000 petroleum jobs expected," and, "Oil rig count drops to all-time low." Katie was at work at her new temp job at the local hospital. Her husband's job at the sugar mill had ended. The mill kept only a handful of year-round employees to dismantle and service the machines in preparation for the next year's grinding. Katie came over later that day, bragging about how her job might become permanent. A week later she had lost the job.

Christmas had passed. The courts had allowed Susan and her family a month's grace period before the bankruptcy, which gave them the leeway to buy presents and have a large Christmas dinner. Paul was home for Christmas, something that was only occasionally possible when he worked offshore. "They hit Christmas for seven years, and then they miss it for seven years" [I-252]. Many families around town celebrate Christmas on the worker's day off. A week before Christmas, for example, the researcher called on a family she knew and interrupted them opening presents and having Christmas dinner. The worker in that family later described Christmas day offshore:

> "We put a Christmas tree up and it is just another day. … The drilling guys work, but production, we just kind of put our dress clothes on, you know we work like this (pointing to his khakis and golf shirt). Maybe a nicer shirt. We just stayed in our flip-flops most of the day and didn't go out. We just watched football games and did our reports in the morning like we always did. We tried to be as festive as we could. We cooked some turkey and had a little meal at night, but it's not the same. We had a bunch of guys out there. It's just another day" [I-319].

Another oil worker summed it up in the following statement: "It's a man thing… There are no holidays, and it don't rain in the oilfield" [I-157].

Talk around town about the slowdown in the oil industry had turned serious. Unemployment was still much higher than it was at the same point the previous year (8.3 percent in January 1999 compared to only 5.6 percent in 1998), and the local workforce had decreased by about 200 from the previous year.[15] The Iberia Development Foundation (IDF), established in the mid 1980's to diversify and develop the parish's economy, announced that they were working on a management plan with hopes of "developing long term diversification strategies for IDF members with an oilfield specific database" (*Daily Iberian*, Jan 27, 1999). IDF was also lobbying to have New Iberia included in the next Lafayette Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) database on population statistics and infrastructure. It was hoped that inclusion in the Lafayette MSA would attract "big box" companies and other economic possibilities to the area. A month later, in February, IDF formed a committee composed of Port of Iberia executives and other industry representatives to seek diversification for area businesses. A potential panacea for New Iberia's oil dependence, this committee believed, were the pharmaceutical companies that could utilize the vacant buildings at the old navy base, since 1970 called Acadiana Regional Airport. One veteran community leader was, however, rather cynical about all the excitement, commenting to us, "When the oil industry picks back up, people will become lax and rely on it again. This talk about diversification won't start again until the next downturn" [JJ Fieldnotes, 4/99].

Indeed, during what locals refer to as "*the* bust" in the 1980's, only two diversification strategies took hold: an ethanol plant which produced only one batch of ethanol, and a seafood processing plant that closed after a couple years of operation. By the time these attempts had run their course, oil had come back up. With the exception of the IDF, which continued to pursue some leads for economic diversification, the town largely put all distractions behind them to milk the upturn in oil.

Our resident researcher asked Susan if she saw any similarities between what was happening at that moment and the 80's bust. "No, well, I don't know. I'm not leaving, not this time. I got a house. Besides I hated moving from here. I hated Oregon" [I-003]. Susan and her family were among those that had left during the 80's bust. Paul, who at that time was working offshore as a toolpusher, had had his hours cut down drastically, and at first found small jobs to keep the family afloat. She told us,

> "The day my second daughter was born they laid him off…Paul worked at anything he could possibly do. They'd call him off to go offshore maybe once a month for a week or so and then he'd take odd jobs...He had a friend who was a carpenter who would call him to go to work. So that's how me made our living…And unemployment. Yeah. And so then we had to go on WIC (Women and Infant Care, a government entitlement program), had to get food stamps and, well, we had the unemployment so we couldn't get other money from the government. And that's what we lived off of. And we're not the only ones. Lots of them had to go, lots of them lost their homes, cars, everything" [I-003].

For two years, Paul struggled to make ends meet and keep the family in New Iberia. Susan didn't want to leave New Iberia. "A lot of people stayed, but with two little bitty tiny kids, we just couldn't." Susan and Paul moved to Oregon. When the Oregon jobs promised by family and friends did not pan out, they moved on to Seattle where Susan had a relative, all the time keeping an eye on the oilfield and staying in contact with their friends in New Iberia. Susan hated the four years they spent in the West—she felt trapped and isolated, cut off from her friends and social networks.

"So we came back when we heard that the oilfield had picked up. Paul was hired back (snaps her fingers) that quick. But of course, he lost everything. He had been a motorman for like, 15, 16 years, and he had to start again as a floor hand and work his way back up on the rig. So, uh, finally he got the warehouse [job], same company, you know, it was on land … making quite a…well he's finally up to $11.50, lets just put it this way (laughs uncomfortably). Finally. So he started off really, I think back then it was $8 an hour. It was really not very much at all" [I-003].

Many people, in fact, did weather the economic storm in New Iberia. Rob Auillard, for example, was an offshore crane operator when he was laid off in the 80's bust (see fig. 1.8). With a glut in the local job market, Rob, along with scores of other laid off oil workers, returned to his family's traditional occupation, crawfishing. Rob invested in crawfish traps and lived off the crawfishing through 1983 and 1984. "It was a bad time to go into it. The crawfish harvests, they were low. The price of crawfish, low. And everyone was trying to do the same thing" [I-156]. Other former oil workers found small jobs, or lived off unemployment benefits that were extended by the federal government from six months to a year and a half.

Figure 1.8. Offshore crane

Not everyone lost their job in the bust, but if they were able to hold onto it, they inevitably took a significant cut in pay and position. One worker recalled,

"I went from a helper to an operator in two and a half years. Right about that time, somewhere around 1983 or 1984, the oilfield crashed. And when that oilfield crashed, everyone who had moved up got pushed back down because the guys below them got laid off. So everybody went back down the ladder. So it was kind of like starting over, which I did. I went back to an operator and then I went back to a helper. I don't remember the exact time, but probably by 1987 I was already back up to a position of lead operator or service supervisor, somewhere in there, in that time frame" [I-554].

The plunge in the oilfield created concentric rings of economic hardship in the region. Even for people not involved in the oil industry, things got tough. The daughter of an extended offshore family recalls,

"Things really got tough around here in the 80's. …I had been working at the bank for ten years. After the fourth layoff, they called a bunch of us in and laid us all off. Everything was affected. This place was a dead town, and you couldn't find a job for anything. I moved in with my mama and got food stamps. A lot of people did that around here" [I-011].

Consolidating resources and moving in together was a common coping strategy for many families who stayed in New Iberia through the bust. One local family counselor ascribed the ease with which whole families moved into their parents' homes to the Cajun Catholic culture. However, several non-Cajun families also mentioned adopting this strategy, which suggests it was a local pattern as much as a Cajun one.

Not surprisingly, the Port of Iberia took a bad beating in the bust. Many Port companies went out of business, and the companies that managed to stay afloat found innovative ways to retain workers and keep the company in the black. A welding foreman at a Port company remembered,

> "In 1985, as a matter of fact, it got so slow that [this one company], they laid off everybody in the yard and they let them collect unemployment for like a month, and then they got a job. And what they did to be able to get this job out with a small workforce they would work people five days a week at minimum wage and these are craftsmen…I mean, people with skills you know, welders, fitters and everything else. People that could lay out anything, build from the ground up. They paid them minimum wage for five days and they rotated. They'd work a crew of like 20 men for five days a week at minimum wage and then they'd let them go collect unemployment for a week and then they'd pull in another 20 individuals and they'd work for minimum wage five days a week. And that's what they did to get their work out" [I-627].

The survival strategies devised by companies during this period were the same ones used in subsequent downturns. Some companies used downturns to their advantage. Local supply stores reported that downtimes were good for restocking because small companies or those without financial nest eggs tended to liquidate their assets. Other companies reported that downtimes were the ideal time to cull the workforce without compromising their good name or risking a lawsuit.

The Port foreman went on to recount the working conditions for Port employees during the bust:

> "Yeah, they really pressed you. The pressure at that time was unbelievable. They'd have signs inside the bathroom, you know …, and they wouldn't have any doors on the bathroom stalls, if you were in the bathroom and had to use the toilet the sign read, 'Don't let yourself use the bathroom out of a job.' And someone reported them to the Board of Labor, who made them take it down. I mean, you had a foreman walk up to you at any given time and say, 'Hey, if you can't produce better than that, they got 10 men on the other side of that fence that want your job.' So they drove you hard. You really had to be humble and you had to be hungry to keep a job" [I-627].

The stress and pressure of working at the Port at this time drove many workers permanently away from the oilfield. Some workers even requested that they be laid off because the stress was too much. Even during the relatively minor downturn we were seeing during our research in 1999, some workers reported working conditions similar to those described by the foreman and talked about ulcers and heart pains resulting from the stress.

In 1983 the Port was designated an enterprise zone to stimulate business. This designation exempted all businesses locating there from all state and most local sales and use taxes on machinery, equipment and materials used in construction. Businesses that moved to these zones also received a one-time tax credit of $2,500 for each new job created during the first five years of operation. Even today, the Port's status as an enterprise zone continues to lure new people to the area. The negative implication of this designation, however, is that New Iberia loses a considerable tax base from the Port.

Sugarcane was perhaps the one strong point in New Iberia's weak economy. Significantly, from 1986 to 1992, the numbers of sugarcane producers shot up markedly. Sugarcane may have kept the economy buoyant during the bust, but, with increased mechanization requiring only a small labor pool, it did little to absorb the scores of laid off oil workers.

The 1980's bust turned out to be a temporal landmark in the consciousness of many in New Iberia, where "pre-bust" is remembered as a time of unlimited prosperity, and "post-bust" is considered unstable, unreliable, and, for some, unbearable.

Power and Resistance in the Oilfield

Our resident researcher walked with Mark Broussard through the oilfield tools warehouse as he pointed out different drilling rig parts with the nubs he had left of two fingers—relics of his years in the oil industry. He was putting the finishing touches on a pile of oilfield parts to be delivered that day: a couple of cases of beer pulled and a cooler of fresh frog legs and fish fillets. When asked about these "finishing touches," he said,

> "It's all part of the game…I know guys who painted the boss's house, or whenever they went shrimping they'd drop him off a 100 pounds of tails, a 100 pounds of shrimp tails, and that's how they got promoted. Especially with [this one company]. [The company] was big time into G and C: graft and corruption. … throughout the 70's, most of the 80's and into the 90's, uh, contractor companies, employees, if you wanted to advance, you played a political G and C game. You lined your boss up with something…Drilling companies, construction companies, supply companies, all of them [did this]. And the industry as a whole, starting the early 90's, mid 90's, has clamped down on this: watching invoices, watching for overcharges, stuff like that. But this stuff (he pointed to the cooler), it's how you keep the customer happy. It's just part of the game" [I-157].

Mark's nonchalant manner illustrated how much this way of accomplishing work in the oilfield was taken for granted. Yet the winds of change were stirring up dissatisfaction: the arbitrary nature of the oilfield's routes to jobs and promotions emerged in our research as a common bone of contention among workers. One production operator explained,

> "So I mean time [in the company] don't mean a thing, or job classification. If your supervisor doesn't like you, and he decides to give you a bad evaluation, we are going to bump you. Now we are coming through with a testing program which they say, 'Oh, this is just to find out where we're weak at. We can train you and send you to school to pick that up.' In the next breath they say, 'Well, we don't have enough money to send everybody to school' or, 'We are going to try to have some in-house training.' … This is one of the things they're going to use to lay off people in the future. They say it shouldn't

> affect your evaluation, but I think they're lying. I really do. And our room for advancement has been narrowed very much" [I-372].

Despite efforts of oilfield companies to standardize their promotional procedures, our research indicated that workers still perceive rankings, evaluations, and promotions to be arbitrary or based on something other than performance. We were repeatedly told that success in the oilfield was substantially based on knowing the rules of the "game" and how to manipulate them. These routes of power left many groups feeling powerless and disillusioned with the oilfield. These included, in particular, African American workers.[16] Workers handled these feelings in various ways, ranging from resignation to getting out of the oil industry altogether. Among the more drastic responses we encountered were small acts of sabotage. A contract employee recounted to us how poorly he was treated by the company man. Then he said,

> "If you have 150 pounds of air pressure coming out and a rock gives off a spark, the whole platform can go up. … I deliberately put a hole in the pipe myself one day because a man made me mad. But it just so happens that the well was shut down. And I didn't tell them nothing when they had to turn the well back on (laughing). When they turned it back on, they found a hole in the pipe" [I-275].

Another method that oilfield workers are using to combat powerlessness in the oilfield is organizing. Organized labor has not been common in the oilfield, and some scholars even questioned if it was feasible given the geographic dispersal of workers, staggered work schedules, and the profound anti-union climate in the region.[17] Louisiana has been a Right-To-Work state since 1954, after the 1953 sugarcane workers' strike following which sponsors of the growers and employer organizations outlawed union shops or compulsory unionism. During a discussion at a Lafayette union, which was working on unionizing workers at the Port of Iberia, one old hand described the area's anti-unionism:

> "It's the way we are. The way a Cajun is, he is independent. He talks to the boss himself if he has a problem. And with a union, well, they say, 'I don't need no one telling me what to do!' But the company is already telling him what to do. Besides, many workers, they work for little mom-and-pop shops, many times for friends or family. Why would they want to unionize? Maybe those mergers will get the workers to see they have no power without each other. But those Cajuns, you know, they got hard heads" [I-387].

Workers reported that many oil companies actively foster anti-union sentiment in their workers. An assistant field foreman asserted, "You are actually conditioned the day you go to work to be anti-union. Also, there was a bit of fear. If I vote for the union, and this is going to be known in one capacity or another, if I outwardly support them, this is going to hurt my career later on" [I-626]. Indeed, that worker's company had a unionization push in 1979, and with aggressive campaigning by the company, it was voted down by more than 90 percent of the workers.

Despite cultural and structural barriers to unionization, however, unions are slowly making their way into the oilfield. On August 6, 1997, Air Logistics, one of these three major helicopter companies in the Gulf, voted to unionize, and announced that some 70 percent of its pilots favored the move.[18] The largest helicopter company, the Lafayette-based Petroleum Helicopters

Incorporated (PHI), voted unionization down later that year, but the union contested the vote and eventually won.[19] One of the union organizers told us,

> "In the past I was anti-union for a long time. I always thought that the nature of a pilot is, he's a very independent individual. We all come from the same military mode, and we all were independent thinkers. … I finally realized all this in-house fighting, bickering, we're hurting ourselves and we started to get together. Of course, the company helped us a lot- they have rules, and every time the rule doesn't suit them, they change it … One thing that will sum up the [reason why unionization worked] is corporate greed. They could have killed that union with a ten percent pay raise across the board. They could have stuck a knife in its heart at the beginning. The company showed the other members of the company, the non-union members, that the union was not going to do us any good, that the pilots were going to suffer. The mechanics, helpers, secretaries, they're not union. They realized that they got a raise because of us, and they thanked us. … Those pilots were bitter enough to see [unionization] through" [I-474].

According to union organizers, technology was the key to unionization in the helicopter industry, primarily technology that allowed geographically dispersed workers to communicate through email listserves and mass mailings, both of which fostered a sense of closeness among pilots that may only meet in passing at the office. Also, there are characteristics of helicopter pilots that help explain how unionization began with them: they are generally not from southern Louisiana, they are tied to national standards and trends, and as pilots they are members of a profession with a history of union activity.

Union representatives claimed that their recent success might lead to the unionization of other sectors of the oilfield, and, as recent events have proved, they were right.[20] Still, local conditions in New Iberia made workers acutely aware of the vulnerability of their employment and inhibited their desire to rock the boat. For example, when the Fruit of the Loom plant in the neighboring town of Jeanerette laid off a majority of its workforce in 1997-1998, opting to send work overseas, oil workers began thinking more seriously about the implications of globalization for their own jobs. Two workers commented,

> Ken: It's a catch 22; I can see it coming. I really can see unionization coming because of some of the things that are going on and especially if they have another slowdown and it gets as bad as it got in 1986 and 1987.
> Al: Its getting there real quick. [A large local company] has laid off over 2,400 people, [another company] has laid off, [a third company] has laid off and everybody they have hired all these new contract engineers….Well, [if the oilfield unionizes] there won't be anything. Nobody is going to go out there and drill for 30 dollars a barrel of oil, that's what it is going to have to take. It'll all go overseas where safety and regulations don't matter as much" [I-304; I-305].

As the industry becomes more global and workers become more dissatisfied with the terms in which their labor is incorporated into the industry, formal workers' organizations and struggles are starting to gather force in the area.

CONCLUSION

Before the resident researcher left New Iberia, she paid her last visit to Susan's house. Katie was talking about a new income-generating opportunity. "Jean's been teaching these courses on accounting. It'll be perfect. All we have to do is take the course to understand the program, find a client base, and work from home." The talk on the front porch had, since the deepening of the downturn in early 1999, focused increasingly on income alternatives.

The situation was, in fact, looking rather grim. The rig count, recorded by Baker Hughes since 1944, announced that the numbers of rigs actively exploring for oil and natural gas in the United States had plunged to a record low of 502. The New Iberia office of the Louisiana Job Services reported that they were seeing a lot of people being laid off from the oilfield, drilling and fabrication companies. The situation sent many families out in search of alternatives. Only a month earlier Katie had bought a property management self-teaching tape in the hope that Jake would get out of oil and they could manage properties together.

The complexity of linkages within the industry is revealed by the fact that about the same time, in the spring of 1999, gas prices at the pump had risen to the point of provoking national consumer protest in some arenas. Our team members received an email chain letter entitled, "The Great Gas Out." The message said,

> "It's time we did something about the price of gasoline in America! We are all sick and tired of high prices when there are literally millions of gallons in storage. Know what I found out? If there was just ONE day when no one purchased any gasoline, prices would drop drastically. Let's have a GAS OUT! Do not buy any gasoline on APRIL 30, 1999!!!!! Wanna help? Send this message to everyone you know. Ask them to do the same. All we need is a few million to participate…"

The irony of its timing revealed how little the rest of the nation realized the impacts that a cheap gallon of gas could have on the people of New Iberia and the rest of the region.

It is now over a year since we closed the doors of our project's rental house in New Iberia. As we write this report, oil prices at the pump continue to rise, OPEC has agreed to increase oil production, and the American consumers complain about the high cost of gas. Nowhere is there a mention of the oil workers. Our correspondence with the families we came to know in New Iberia is laden with accounts of Port jobs lost, companies downsizing and merging, and husbands' offshore schedules being lengthened.

For New Iberian families, involvement in the oil industry spells a complex of contradictions. It puts food on their tables, but threatens to take it away with changes in oil prices, overseas agreements or changes in technology. It gives workers the opportunity to own boats and cars, but keeps them away from their homes for weeks at a time. It fosters independence among oilfield wives, but this independence is hard-won through the travails of periodic single parenthood. It keeps people in town, but it threatens their community. Even the town, which has benefited from injections of oil money, offers few support services to cushion the community against the peaks and dips of the industry. Oil has been a part of New Iberia's economic and social fabric for over 50 years, and yet the town and its inhabitants are ambivalent about its role in their lives.

Despite being a significant part of the town’s history and culture, then, the oil industry, like other newcomers, is still an outsider. Our study revealed that the negative impacts of the oil industry have, in the past, been buffered by New Iberia’s historical resources, by the diversity of its economy, and by the deep roots and wide networks of its people. Despite these buffers, changes in the oil industry will make involvement in the oil industry increasingly more difficult. As the rigs get pulled further offshore, technology becomes more specialized and employment stability further compromised. As a result, involvement in the oil industry may not be a desirable, or even possible, occupation for many New Iberians in the future.

APPENDIX

Life on an Offshore Platform: Notes From the Researcher’s Field Diary

Throughout our research, workers often asked if we had been offshore. One worker asked, “How can you understand what we go through if you haven’t been there yourself?” This question could be applied with even more force to the families of offshore workers: the stark difference between home and work for these workers is hard for many families to understand if they have not been offshore themselves. In the past, some production and drilling companies had offered a “family day,” in which wives were allowed to visit offshore platforms and see where their husbands worked and lived for half the year. Company picnics were also common, offering wives an opportunity to exchange information with other women coping with the same non-traditional work schedules of oil workers. The wife of a 7-and-7 production worker told us, “They don’t have as many functions anymore for the families as they used to have, because the company has moved to Houston. But that is when I would hear most of the feedback. I guess me being so young at the time, you hear the conversation of people who have been offshore for 20, 30, or 40 years and all, what they have gone through, and the adjustment and lifestyle when [their husbands] are home as opposed to when they are not home.” Unfortunately, offshore visits, company picnics, and other family- oriented activities have been dropped by most companies in recent years due to funding restraints and company restructuring.

It was not long before workers arranged for our resident researcher to visit an offshore platform. During her stay in New Iberia, she had the opportunity to visit three production or drilling operations and speak with their crew: a stacked jack-up rig, an inland barge drilling rig, and an offshore platform. The following extracts from the researcher’s field diary describes her impressions of these worksites. The sites differed considerably from each other, but for the purposes of this discussion, and to maintain the confidentiality of those involved, the experiences will be combined as one experience.

> My offshore odyssey started at 1:00 that morning, the usual time Kevin leaves for Venice, descriptively known to oilfield workers as “the end of the world.” Venice is a small port town that serves as a staging area where workers board the crew boats that transport them to the platforms and rigs. Later that morning, around 9:00, our crew boat eased toward the platform-rig in the Gulf. As we pulled up alongside it, I scrambled for my life preserver and

followed Kevin out the small door to the deck, where the expanse of blue sky and water was broken only by hundreds of distant wells. I carefully timed my step off the boat deck onto the platform's metal grating with the gentle sway of the boat. Kevin looked back at me and said, "It's not always that easy. Imagine the boat doing this," as he wildly moved his arm up and down. In those situations, workmen are hoisted onto the platform in a crew basket that is suspended from the end of a crane, and, due to its exposure to the whims and hazards of the environment, has earned the popular title "widow maker."

As I crossed the deck, I was aware of the curious looks I received by the all-male crew as I passed them, my pony tail hanging out the back of my hard hat and my notepad in hand. The platform rig I was visiting, unlike the majority, had accommodations for women, and a couple of years ago two women worked from this platform. To date, only a small percentage of the workforce is women. One drilling company's human relations manager assured me, "They (the male workers) still hold doors open for women offshore and give them first dibs to the shower. We've had many female service hands from Schlumberger and Halliburton, (and) they've had no problems." But by the conversations I stopped by walking into rooms, it was apparent that a woman's presence offshore was still considered unusual if not disruptive. There were several indications that men had difficulty reconciling themselves to a woman's presence in the offshore work environment. One of the workers told me, "Why would a woman want to do this work? It's dirty and smelly. No offense, but she's just not as strong as a man, and if you can't do the work, you shouldn't be out here." Indeed, women who worked offshore in manual jobs were described to me in masculinized terms as "butch" and the "drill sergeant type," while women who were engineers and non-manual jobs were considered more feminine. Another production worker said, "[Having a woman offshore] wouldn't be that bad, no. But think about this, having to come home and tell your wife that there's a new girl working out there with you. I think it would pose problems…because, yeah, men and women are naturally attracted to each other and they get to working and…" his voice trailed off and he shrugged.

Kevin led me to the platform meeting room and introduced me to the company man, the toolpusher, and the production foreman before he excused himself to catch up with his friend, Curtis. Kevin and Curtis were the only African American men on the platform. Kevin was obviously very much at home in this setting and with his co-workers. "They're my family" he told me one afternoon as we sat, swinging our feet over the Gulf's waters. "We may not always get along, there are even guys I'd prefer not to be around, but it's a good place to work. You'll see that while you're here." Most of the production crew was from Louisiana and had known each other for years, the "greenest" of these had worked on the platform for seven years, and they joked with one another about their families, talked about their financial problems, and seemed at ease with each other. When I described the goals of our research to management team, the toolpusher laughed and said,

> "If I was a psychologist, I'd make a fortune out here. Most of these guys working on the rigs" he pointed out of the window towards the anthill of men moving about the derrick behind him, "are having marital problems, or problems with the law. They come on the rig and talk to me about it. We're like a family. We spend 12 hours a day with each other seven days a week (laughs). Hell, they don't even spend that much time with their family.

I had one guy building a house, wanted me to come out there to check on it to make sure they're doing it OK. And other guys, they call me at home to talk."

The drilling crew was markedly different in these respects: they reported a fairly regular turnover of floor hands and roustabouts, and worker origins were geographically dispersed, coming primarily from the southern states of Mississippi, Arkansas and, to a lesser extent, Louisiana. There is a lack of drilling hands in New Iberia and in south Louisiana in general. "It's because there's no jobs up north" or "New Iberia's mostly oilfield service" were the reasons workers often gave for the small numbers of New Iberian drilling hands.

My room was called the VIP room because it had its own bathroom; it came complete with a stack of Playboys that were spirited away later that day. The room had been converted into a library of safety manuals and a computer station where the production crew undertook their T2 training. T2 certification is necessary for most production workers, and workers must be re-certified every three years. The training used to be held at an onshore training facility in Lafayette, but the previous year the company bought a computer program that simulated the original equipment, and then recorded the results to send to MMS. I had the opportunity to watch one segment of the training: a production operator of 15 years was unable to get the procedure correct and the computer sent him back to the beginning of the process three times. The production operator was frustrated and embarrassed, assuring me that the simulator was not very realistic. Finally, he fetched the production foreman who, after watching the procedure, agreed it was not realistic and that the ordering of the steps was too rigid. "I like it, though" the production operator said. "At least when I do it here [on the platform], I don't have to use my days off doing this training."

Kevin came by to give me a tour of the facilities, checking first to see if I had steel-toed boots and ear plugs. He said, "Safety is job one you know." Kevin, like many other workers we met, was excited about our research project and its focus on family impacts of the oilfield. "You know there's a lot of issues that need to be addressed and it's about time someone started looking into them." He showed me the basics of the production process and we went into one of the 'doghouses,' small offices on the platform, where two production hands were lounging around the office, one cutting an apple with his penknife, another punching out an email to his wife. Kevin told them that he was going to introduce me to the rig hands, and they laughed. When I asked why, one told me, "They're a different breed. I went to college, and with production you have to use your head. With drilling, all you need is a strong back and a weak mind." I remembered an old wireline hand telling me once, "I wouldn't have worked on a rig for my mama. Because it's nasty. There's blood and black magic. There's all that nasty calcium fluoride. When you break up that pipe up and pull it up, all that water and salt water- you gotta wear a slicker suit. I wanted to be on the production side." Another production worker in New Iberia said, "Roughnecks offshore are like the Wild West cowboys. They have the same reputation as cowboys in the West. They're individuals. They live and die by what they do. And they don't go tell people when they have a problem. They handle it." As we talked, the production hands talked about how little they have to do and how much of their time is spent sitting around waiting for the next report to be written. Researches of North Sea communities have noted the "boredom syndrome" among platform communities.[21] One researcher found, "For most offshore personnel, it seems to be a lack of meaningful activity and the long hours of waiting and strained work relations that wears people out."[22]

Kevin ushered me over to the rig and left me at the driller's booth. The booth overlooked the roughnecks as they moved in synch with one another and with their heavy power tongs to "make up" the pipe. The driller, an older man who saw the world through Coke-bottle glasses, told me a little about the process, pointing to the control panels of his booth. "What it is, is the technology. The technology is unreal. When you're still running drill pipe, those roughnecks, they've still got to put that pipe together. There's no technology that can do that. Drilling, [I] used to have to stand there on that break and watch this weight indicator. You keep so much weight on the bit. And as the weight lightens up, you ease off that break and put a little more weight on it. Now they got a computer there. I can just stand there and watch the computer. The computer, as the weight gets lighter, the computer will tell me 'come on down a little bit.' It's more or less all computerized. But a computer is nothing without a person running it."

We watched the workers pull the slip and the pipe move easily down the hole. "You know what bugs me?" the driller said, "All these years, they never classed a roughneck, and you got to be able to do all these different things, and you got to do them well." Two roughnecks heaved power tongs onto the pipe. The third roughneck clamped a device on top of the tongs that threaded the pipe by operating a set of joysticks. The driller went on, "Anybody can do it if they have the heart and will. But they didn't classify them as skilled, and it's definitely a skill." The assistant driller added, "It's got to be the highest paid skilled labor there is. If you think about a guy with a 12th grade education, which is all I have, and making what I make, I believe that I'm in the top 10 percent skilled labor division to make what I make without the education." The driller jerked his head towards where Kevin had exited, "They don't have to work for a living. They just kind of lounge around for a while and read a chart every now and then. Jesus, anybody could do that. Drilling, now that is a different story." He looked at the derrick man perched high above the drill floor on the "monkey board" and called a joke out to him over the intercom, then to me, "Production is boring. I don't know how those guys survive for seven days twiddling their thumbs. There isn't a whole lot to production. In drilling there is always…especially when we're drilling or working over- it's constant. I've seen some bad blowouts before and it's an adrenaline rush. One time the chain broke and you see where that guy is over there?" He pointed to one of the roughnecks, stretching his shoulders while the top drive tripped the pipe in the hole "It hit him in the chest. He fell down and I was just frozen, like this (demonstrates). Just got the wind knocked out of him, but I thought I'd killed him."

The stories of the inevitable offshore accident or even the close call illustrate the stress these men deal with daily, although the days when accidents were taken for granted in offshore work seem to be past. Older workers remembered when "They used to give you so much per knuckle and so far down. Your thumb was worth more than anything else. A pinkie's not worth that much. I had my thumb ripped clean off, and the toolpusher gave me the keys to his car and told me to drive myself to hospital when I got onshore. I damn near passed out." In those days, tales of daring and disaster were part of the identity of the offshore worker. One old hand recalled,

> “It was the danger, the challenge, the excitement. I’ve been blown off two platforms (laughs). I had a lung collapse on me when I was on the job, they took out the top lobe of my lung. I was going out on the job when I was married to her (nodding at his wife) and I crushed a disk in my neck in rough water, they had to operate on me. I’ve had three heart attacks and a quadruple bypass, and I’m still in the oil patch.”

Although some workers still describe their work with words like “time bomb,” many felt confident about the increase in safety measures. One barge engineer told me, “I’ll compare our safety record to anybody’s industry because … offshore drilling is a very safe profession. … Yeah, we have accidents out there, but we’re not crippling somebody every week. Like people have this mental attitude that it is just really dangerous out there. It’s not, and we are very safe.” Safety has now become a central issue in the oil and gas industry. One offshore motor man commented, “Right now, safety is the first thing. When I started, you could horse around a lot. Now you can get fired for it ‘cause a lot of people got hurt horsing around.” Rigs have come up with various ways of emphasizing safety: they give safety awards and demerits, one rig even had an “ugly hat,” an old painted hard hat that had to be worn by an individual caught in a safety infringement.

Not all workers, however, were so convinced that safety was the number one concern. Safety records have become a bargaining chip for getting jobs and contracts. Some workers still expressed concern that their companies were cutting too many corners to save expenses. At the same time, however, workers complained that the manner in which safety is documented has gotten out of control. One worker commented, “The work isn’t interesting anymore. I have so much paper work to fill out, and there are so many regulations that I can’t do my job anymore.” Workers expressed some ambivalence between feeling that there were not enough *enforced* safety regulations, and at the same time too many hoops to jump through due to increased regulations. The ambivalence points to the tendency for oil companies to emphasize paperwork at the expense of basic safety procedures.

Workers in management positions confided that sometimes safety took a back seat to getting the job done on time and within budget. Lawrence, a supervisor for an onshore processing facility, confessed, “I was a part of that. I was the devil at one time, because one of my operators one time said, ‘This is a hazard.’ Well, we’ll go look at it. But I’m thinking about one thing, what is this thing going to cost me out of my budget? Can I afford it? ’Cause part of my goal, part of *my* evaluation is am I going to meet my budget. If I can’t meet my budget then hey, I failed.” Other people in management level positions concurred.

Service company representatives suggested that safety regulations were being observed in ways that passed the burden onto small lower-end companies. One wireline worker told us,

> “The thing about it is … the service companies bear the brunt of the burden when it came to that. It is hard to provide a service and bring quality up when the oil producer is not required to meet those same standards because it rolls down hill. MMS sends whatever regulatory company that comes in and says [to the major oil company] ‘Okay, this is what we want you to do’ and they say, ‘Well no problem. We’ll push it down to the

> service company and make them [meet this regulation].' If a regulation comes up that says…let me see, an example…'Nothing comes on your location unless it has safety shackles and exhaust racks.' Well instead of the major providing that at their dock, they call up the service company and say, 'You can't bring any of your equipment to our location unless it's racked and you provide the safety shackles and clamps.' So now the expense is pushed all the way down here. But at the same time, they are saying, 'Well it is more competitive nowadays guys so you have to increase your discount.' It is harder to make a living as a service company."

I stayed in the drill booth, watching the drilling process and yelled conversations with the driller and assistant driller over the scream of the engines, until someone motioned for lunchtime. The driller suggested I go in first, and I obliged, ready to taste the offshore food I had heard so many good things about. Lois Delcambre had told me, "Now I do know, my biggest gripe about offshore health wise is their diet is deplorable. They eat, I'm talking about heart healthy. They don't get fresh vegetables, everything is smothered in butter or fried in gravy. I don't mean it's terrible as in tastes terrible but it's not, I mean their version of a vegetable is rice and gravy. It's just not heart healthy. I bet you that most of these old coots have heart attacks."

Company personnel were always first in line at the mess, followed by the contract service hands. In this case, the service hands worked and lived on a wireline jack-up boat that serviced the many facilities, and the food was brought out to them by boat. Contract hands are often treated as second-class citizens; on some platforms and rigs they are not even allowed to change the channel on the TV. One company worker in line explained, "We have to live on that rig, so we treat it like our home, they don't."

I sat at the table, ate my food, and listened to the workers discuss the recent developments in Louisiana politics, the stock market, and of course, the price of oil. Workers were also discussing their after-work activities: a movie, working out in the weight room, and a Bible study. These are the very activities that Solhiem noted as creating a more socially stimulating and "normal place to live and work [which] would ease the transition of life at home and relieve pressures on the families." [23]

Around 2:00, Curtis knocked on my door, "You ready for your next stop on the grand tour?" We headed down the steps to the small boat that serviced the surrounding facilities. The boat captain threw open the throttle and we motored far from the platform, where Curtis checked the outlying wells by performing a sort of industrial angioplasty: he passed small rubber balls through the pipes to check the pressure and clean out the paraffin build-up. The boat docked at one of the facilities, and we scrambled up the ladders. As he dropped the balls through the pipes, I asked him about working offshore. "I like it," he said dismissively. "I've been working here for ten years, put my three kids through school, and am putting away for their college." "But" I hedged, "what is it like working offshore and being African American?" He stopped his activity and eyed me for a moment, then dropped the next ball in the pipe, "I don't know if it's all that different. There's prejudice. Like Joe (one of the guys on the platform) he hates blacks. But that's just the way he was raised." He dropped another ball in another pipe. "It's your mental attitude" he added, and then changed the subject. When he was done, Curtis gathered the rubber balls that had completed their rounds and we boarded the boat. We passed the wireline boat doing a gas lift, and on to the next facility.

It was dusk by the time we returned to the platform. That night I caught three speckled trout with the workers and the few lingering pleasure boats that had come to the platform for the good fishing. As the flares burned through the dark, we watched the water boil with fish jumping for the insects attracted to the bright flames. At daybreak, I would return to my family on land, and leave the workers for four more days until they rejoined theirs.

ENDNOTES

[1] Much of the information in this section is from Conrad, Glen (ed.), 1986, *New Iberia: Essays on the Town and Its People*. Second Edition. Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana.
[2] The term originally referred to the mixed descendants of new world French and Spanish settlers in Louisiana; it is now a more ambiguous and debated term, referring to a range of mixed ethnicities in the area.
[3] According to Boudreaux, the number of producers in Iberia Parish dropped from 785 producers to 123 between 1951 and 1998, primarily due to the cost of mechanization. See Boudreaux, Shelby. 1988. *Effects of the Declining Oil and Gas Industry on Elementary and Secondary Education*. Ninth annual Gulf of Mexico information transfer meeting. New Orleans: U.S. Department of the Interior, Minerals Management Service, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region. Pp. 366-369.
[4] Cobb, James C., 1988, Beyond Planters and Industrialists: A New Perspective on The New South. *Journal of Southern History* 59(1):45-68.
[5] Sealy, K.H., 1976, *First Baptist Church, 1926-1976.* New Iberia: First Baptist Church.
[6] This culture, however, is changing. See Part 4 of this report series, “Captains of the Road and Sea: Providing Transportation for the Gulf of Mexico Oilpatch”, for more on these changes.
[7] The intermittent husband syndrome was first coined by Morrice, J.K.W. and R.C. Taylor, 1978, Oil Wives and Intermittent Husbands. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 47:479-483. They used it as a psycho-social explanation of the “special problems” associated with oilfield’s non-traditional work scheduling.
[8] Isay, R, 1968, The Submariners' Wives Syndrome. *Psychiatric Quarterly* 42: 647-652.
[9] Forsyth, Craig J., and Deann K. Gauthier, 1991, Families of Offshore Oil Workers: Adaptations to Cyclical Father Absence/Presence. *Sociological Spectrum* 11:177-201.
[10] The developmental cycle refers to the evolution of household structure from parents with young dependent children to parents with decreased responsibilities towards their adult independent children.
[11] Solheim, Jorun, 1988, Coming Home to Work: Men, Women and Marriage in the Norwegian Offshore Oil Industry. *Women, Work and Family in the British Canadian and Norwegian Offshore Oilfields.* Jane Lewis, Marilyn Porter, and Mark Shrimpton, eds. Pp. 140-161
[12] Forsyth, Craig and Robert Grambling, 1987, Feast or Famine: Alternative Management Techniques Among Periodic-Father Absence Single Career Families. *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 17:183-195.

[13] Forsyth, Craig J., and Deann K. Gauthier, 1991, Families of Offshore Oil Workers: Adaptations to Cyclical Father Absence/Presence. *Sociological Spectrum* 11:177-201.
[14] Morrice, J.K.W, 1981, Psychosocial Problems in the Oil Industry. *Update*, vol 22. Cited in David Clark and Rex Taylor, 1988 Partings and Reunions: Marriage and Offshore Employment in the British North Sea. *Women, Work and Family in the British Canadian and Norwegian Offshore Oilfields*. Jane Lewis, Marilyn Porter, and Mark Shrimpton, eds. Pp. 112-139.
[15] Landry, Felicia, 1999, Jobless Rates Climb in Iberia, St. Mary Parishes. *Daily Iberian.* Wednesday, January 27, 1999. P.7.
[16] Race relations in the oilfield will be discussed more fully in the final report of this project.
[17] This is argued, for example, in Gramling, Robert B, 1996, *Oil on the Edge: Offshore Development, Conflict, Gridlock*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
[18] Turk, Leslie, 1997, State of the Union. *Times of Acadiana*. October 22, 1997. Pp. 49-54.
[19] For a discussion of more recent developments in labor organizing in this sector, see Part 4 in this report "Captains of the Road and Sea: Providing Transportation for the Gulf of Mexico Oilpatch."
[20] Again, see Part 4 "Captains of the Road and Sea: Providing Transportation for the Gulf of Mexico Oilpatch" for more information on unionization efforts in other sectors of the oilfield.
[21] Holter, Oystein G, 1984, *Catering for Oil: Catering and the Reproduction of North Sea Communities*. Oslo: Work Research Institute. Cited in Jorun Solheim, 1988, Coming Home to Work: Men, Women and Marriage in the Norwegian Offshore Oil Industry. *Women, Work and Family in the British Canadian and Norwegian Offshore Oilfields*. Jane Lewis, Marilyn Porter, and Mark Shrimpton, eds. Pp. 140-161
[22] Solheim, Jorun, 1988, Coming Home to Work: Men, Women and Marriage in the Norwegian Offshore Oil Industry. *Women, Work and Family in the British Canadian and Norwegian Offshore Oilfields*. Jane Lewis, Marilyn Porter, and Mark Shrimpton, eds. Pp. 140-161.
[23] Solheim, Jorun, 1988, Coming Home to Work: Men, Women and Marriage in the Norwegian Offshore Oil Industry. *Women, Work and Family in the British Canadian and Norwegian Offshore Oilfields.* Jane Lewis, Marilyn Porter, and Mark Shrimpton, eds. Pp. 140-161.

PART 2
MORGAN CITY CHRONICLES: LIVING THROUGH A DOWNTURN

Rylan Higgins

INTRODUCTION

> "You do not know what the impact is, because the effects are so evolving. By the time you figure out what is going on, everything has changed" [I-005].

During the nearly two years our research team collected data in Morgan City,[1] Louisiana, things certainly changed—as this community leader predicted they would. Coming in from the west, our first glimpse of this community involved two now-familiar city icons: their retired shrimp boat and welcome sign (see fig. 2.1). From the start, it was obvious that Morgan City stood poised to experience a shift from good economic times to bad. After approximately two years of promising developments in offshore exploration and production, the price of a barrel of oil began to fall steadily in early 1998, and the resulting drop in industry activity had just begun to impact local oil and oil-related businesses when our team arrived in September of that year.

Figure 2.1. Entering Morgan City

This economic shift affected how people felt and acted in profound and complex ways: it influenced important decisions about life and business for individuals, families and communities. In Morgan City, such change was anything but new. For nearly five decades, the community has faced the benefits and problems that accompany the ebb and flow of oil activity. Some have claimed that the people of southern Louisiana have learned little from these past cycles, but our on-the-ground picture provides a broad look at a people and a community struggling—sometimes successfully—to keep the past from repeating itself. However, for all the similarities of the recent downturn to the past, the current juncture in the evolution of this global industry presents new hurdles and unforeseen challenges.

Now more than ever, events taking place far from the Acadian oilpatch shape the lives of Acadian people. As the industry moves to deeper waters and more distant lands, the people of Morgan City pin their hopes on playing an important role in the changing industry. Yet this role is not assured. While their city was once *the* hub of offshore activity, the changing demands of the industry have some people worried that Morgan City might be left on the sidelines.

During our stay in Morgan City, our research team noted both changes and reactions similar to those of the past and others representing something entirely new. We geared our methodology toward documenting these different types of change. One team member took up residence for eleven months, while others came in for weeks at a time, focusing on particular aspects of the Morgan City story. Both perspectives were important. One allowed for constant attention to detail; the other brought fresh eyes to new circumstances. Additionally, we trained and hired local schoolteachers as research partners, and, as members of the community, they provided a third viewpoint from which to track change.

We visited some families participating in the study multiple times and recorded other types of data throughout the year. *The Daily Review*, Morgan City's newspaper, was an important source. The resident researcher kept a database of articles from this publication, which helped in recreating the period. We regularly visited local Job Services representatives, government officials, and other civil servants. Researchers attended a local job fair, city and parish council meetings, the American Petroleum Institute's monthly dinner, school board meetings, and a variety of other public events and community activities. The research team also conducted short, periodic discussions with local merchants. Our resident researcher purposefully selected fifteen businesses that he and other team members visited five times, gauging the pulse of Morgan City commerce. Finally, we gathered parish unemployment rates and other demographic information to compare these data with national rig counts and oil price fluctuations. Locally, we had access to the number of checks written by the Job Services office (see fig. 2.2) and information from the local court about crime rates in Morgan City.

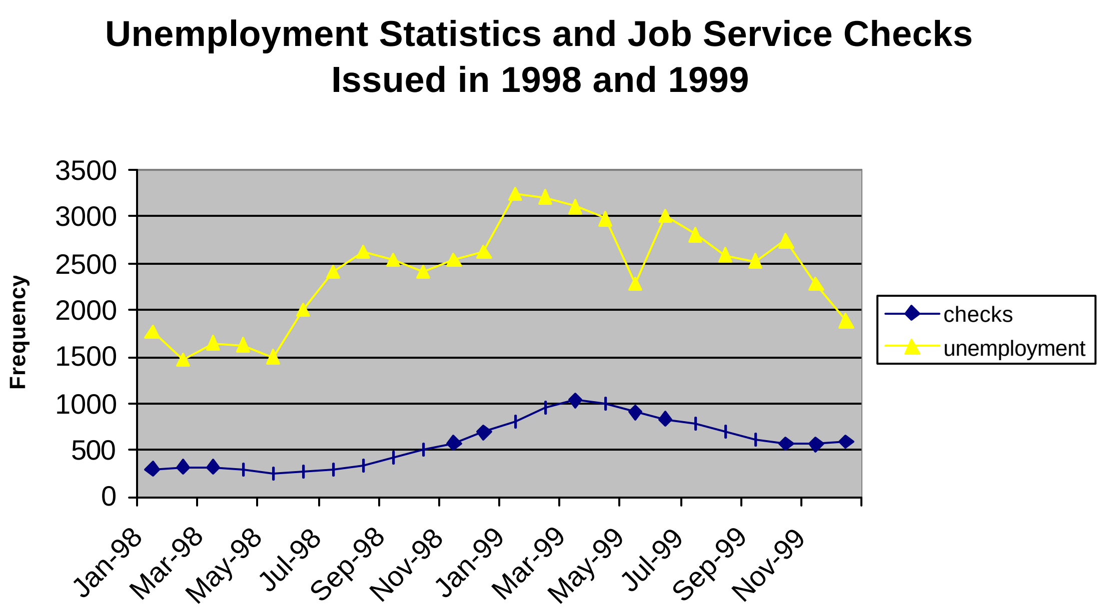

Figure 2.2. Unemployment statistics versus Job Service checks

Our team selected the family and individual stories presented in this report in an attempt to represent the wide range of experiences we recorded during our stays in Morgan City. Though four stories cannot represent the entire community, we do feel our reasons for selecting these families over others are sound, and that the result is a set of voices telling specific stories that provide a meaningful look at life in Morgan City. In keeping with this goal, we chose family/individual stories affiliated with different sectors of the industry. There was an additional consideration that influenced why we chose these particular stories. The Mills and the Jones families represent people we met early, and more importantly, before we were certain that major changes would take place in Morgan City, and thus in their lives. The Deans and Andrew Michaels came to participate in the study because we were looking specifically for people affected by the slowdown.

We gleaned tremendous amounts of information from these and the many other families we met and whose lives we got to know: we learned what it means to live and work in communities that support the offshore oil and gas industry. Perhaps our most salient lesson was that uncertainty pervades most stories and shadows many of the important issues. People were constantly struggling with not knowing what could happen next. This made peoples ability to make sounds life and business decisions problematic, and it made our jobs particularly difficult at times. Trying to understand the dynamic processes of changed was tricky enough, but it was complicated even more by the fact that families were often answering from the hip, so to speak. Since no two families or businesses seemed to be in the same situation, judging the condition of the community, as the following pages demonstrate, required constant attention to detail and the ability to take a step back to observe from afar what was going on around us. Individuals often made attempts to predict what was around the corner, but many people had also learned that such prognostication was mostly in vain.

Even so, important issues surfaced. We learned early on that some of the important circumstances faced by families and businesses in the offshore oil and gas industry are the same faced by families across the country in unrelated industries. Loyalty—between workers and companies—seems to have been seriously compromised in the oil and gas industry, much like it has in many sectors of the United States economy. Workers no longer get the respect and treatment they deserve from companies and companies can no longer expect workers to be company men and women. In this scenario, there seems to be no winner. Employees and their families suffer with financial and more general instability, and companies have trouble retaining employees and thus quality control. In some respects, the specifics of these circumstances in the oil industry are unique. The economic cycles present further complications. When industry activity is slow, loyalty—even for companies with more “old fashion,” people-oriented business perspectives—is put to the test. Owners and management struggle to keep their companies in the black, and doing so means getting rid of costs. This often takes the form of layoffs. To be certain, some companies give the choice little thought and resort to such practices with Wall Street as the most important factor influencing their decisions, but there are also plenty of companies whose owners hang on to their workers until it becomes of matter of laying off or closing the doors. Also, among larger companies especially, low activity was often the catalyst for restructuring. In some cases, low profits translated to the birth of aggressive money saving strategies, and in others, possible changes already on the table were streamed lined as a result of business being “off.” Because of all this, families and the community constantly gauged the price of oil, and other markers of industry activity, and often times thoughts turned to planning for the day when oil would no longer be a part of family incomes. At the community level, these ideas took the form of plans for economic diversity.

In short, this report describes a local economy, a local community, and the global context of energy production in which both are embedded. In a timeline laid out on paper, the two years stretch across the page on top of three lines representing local, national, and international events. We present this visual image to remind the reader of the connections among these different levels of activity. Our biggest concern was to document the local events and reactions: we wanted to tell the story of a community intricately connected to the offshore oil and gas industry. We also strove to juxtapose events and impacts of all three levels—local, national and global.

THE CHRONICLE

October 1998

When our team arrived in Morgan City the last week in September 1998, summer heat and humidity welcomed us to town, high school football season was well underway, and, of most interest to us, the local economy had begun to feel the impacts of cheap oil on the international market. Few businesses in the area had suffered any major casualties, but people certainly were talking about that possibility, and parish tax revenues had already begun to slide ($6.34 million for the 3rd quarter of 1998 versus $6.56 million for the same quarter of 1997). The local newspaper reported the fall in the nation's rig count every week, and, as in oil towns across Texas or Oklahoma, the idea that things could get worse before they got better circulated among locals, whether or not people were directly connected to oil.

Things certainly were not all bad; nor was everyone pessimistic. Two local shipbuilding companies had just received contracts to build vessels for the U. S. military, projects with a combined value of $72.5 million. Shrimpers reported the best harvest in over a decade, and one local transportation company had successfully fended off union organizing efforts (a victory in the eyes of many locals). Furthermore, parish and city government officials were still optimistic.


Figure 2.3. Swamp tour participants

The St. Mary Parish Tourist Commission seemed to be making strides toward the goal of beefing up tourism's role in the local economy. Their goal was to build on current success such as swamp tour businesses, some of which had been around for years (see fig. 2.3). The Commission met in early October and discussed three main issues: local hotel/motel accessibility, the work force available for tourism and marketing strategies. Commission members noted the tough road ahead with no assurance of success and explained much of the future struggle as the product of tourism's competition with oil. Talk of economic diversity flavored this meeting, much in the same way it was discussed on streets and in breakfast cafes. The need for a more broadly based economy has been debated without much resolve for decades, and we were reminded that the current round might be yet another salute to lip service as parish officials hoped and guessed that the slide in tax revenues was only temporary. Whether success in diversifying the economy was, is or ever will be possible remains in question. The parish economy has been involved in oil for so long that making the needed changes has been and remains difficult. Adding to these difficulties, in the past, when the symptoms of low industry activity subsided, concerns for economic diversity typically faded among some leaders, business owners and residents in general.

Over the years, however, some local business owners assumed a different, more proactive attitude. In early October, two of our team members met with John Mills, the owner and president of Mills Fabrication, a small, oil-related fabrication company in Morgan City. As he showed us his facility, he described the basics of offshore fabrication and explained his approach to doing business in southern Louisiana's oilpatch.

The day we met at his shop, business was still going strong at Mills Fabrication, and John gave no indication that he was concerned about things getting bad anytime soon. Five men (his usual number of employees) were busy welding and grinding—working steel of all shapes and sizes as sparks flew and the smell of hot metal filled the air. A radio in the corner played top forty tunes, and shop floor activity gave no reason to believe business was anything but good for John and his son, who helps run the company.

Mills Fabrication is an early link in the chain of companies that comprise the fabrication process, which is driven by the region's large, international fabrication companies. This process starts with sheets of metal and ends with offshore platforms, and throughout Morgan City small and large companies can handle every step along the way. An initial phase of this process involves pre-fab operations, where fabrication of small sections or parts of a structure are contracted out to small companies and later pieced together. Through its twelve-year history, Mills Fabrication has been almost entirely dependent on this type of work, mostly for one large, international fabrication company in the area.

The large "fab yards," control the prime land along the waterways of southern Louisiana and are another link in the chain up to the major oil companies. The majors set things in motion when they determine their annual exploration and production budgets. A highly competitive bidding process ensues among the large fabricators for contracts to build, transport, and install platforms, pipes, living quarters – the offshore infrastructure. The lowest bidder may not always win the job; safety records are taken into account, as is the track record of a yard for timely completion. But to cover operating expenses and yard maintenance, the large fabricators routinely incur enormous debts, so "cost control" becomes the corporate rallying cry, meant to be heard by potential institutional investors. Investors in the notoriously cyclical oil and gas industry are jittery, however. One fabricator's stock would drop 55 percent in two days in November on reports of lower than expected quarterly earnings, the result of lower than anticipated spending on large construction projects by the oil majors.

In this contest, Mills Fabrication's success over the past decade has afforded John a debt free enterprise and comfortable life. Just before our visit with him, he took an important first step toward semi-retirement: he handed partial control over to his son, David. David had been vice president of the company for about a month at that point, after working under his father's wing for a couple of years. He had tried college, but after two unsuccessful attempts at pursuing a degree, he threw in the towel and came to work with his father. While attempting college, he admits he did not prioritize his studies. He was not focused on school:

> "I had this [the family business] waiting at home for me. It was hard to concentrate on college" [I-144].

David is bright and hard working; he made the decision to quit college in part because he believed that Mills Fabrication would always be there to fall back on.

As of October 1998, it was. David was poised to take over, and John was ready to spend more time on the green practicing his short game. The company was doing well, but even so, John 's optimism was shadowed by his caution. He has never taken chances with financing; he operates in the black and feels doing anything else could leave him more vulnerable to swings in the economy. John also discussed his plan for when—not if—things got bad. He has some non-oil companies, such as those involved in highway construction, with which he keeps in contact in case of rainy days (as of this report, he had not resorted to them). John started his business during the last bust (he opened his doors in 1986) and has maintained a provident business strategy since, knowing all too well that things can change quickly and without much warning. Nonetheless, he also feels that he has what it takes to make it through those times.

> "I keep a few aces up my sleeve for when the bottom truly falls out of the oil industry. Really, I'm prepared for anything less than a complete…" [I-051].

A complete what?—David wants to know. He is neither as experienced, nor quite as optimistic about Morgan City's, and thus Mills Fabrication's, future. He has faith in his father's knowledge of the business but also fears things are changing in ways even beyond the scope of seasoned veterans. At this point in the year, John felt Mills Fabrication was ready to face just about anything, and David wondered whether his father was right. Their uncertainty mirrored that of many people in the area. The battle of wits to predict the business climate of tomorrow was common among Morgan City's industrialists.

As early as October, people were already in search of some concrete knowledge of future events. And even though the signs of bad times pointed to a return to the 1980's, there was no consensus about where things were headed this time around. The local economy had been pinched out of its dreamy two-year boom, and the low price of oil was pegged as the culprit—on this, everyone could agree. Without much room for doubt, earlier predictions of a five- to ten-year boom once again proved to be wrong, and people were lamenting ever having believed in them.

The first organized community gathering to indicate this attitude to our team's resident researcher was the monthly lunch meeting of the St. Mary Industrial Group, an organization of parish business people. The crowd was mostly middle-aged white men who gathered to discuss local business and listen to a speaker of the month. This month the presenter was a local law enforcement official and the meeting indicated that uncertainty was widely felt. Research notes from that meeting indicate the beginning of concern that Fall:

> I made my way to a table farthest from the podium and sat beside several gentlemen wearing casual dress clothing. We said the pledge, got our blessing and then everyone within my listening range broke into talk about the bad times they were experiencing with their businesses. One individual was employed in some capacity by a large fabrication company. By the way he was dressed and talked about having to "lay off" a certain number of people recently, I figured he was not a yard worker, but rather a foreman, manager or administrator.
>
> He talked about how his company had been doing a lot of layoffs lately. He speculated that his company had eliminated approximately 600 jobs so far this year and that a total by the end of the year would be near 1,000. Additionally, he commented that things would likely not change in the oil industry until next summer.
>
> The speaker was introduced. He started with praise for the parish and painted a positive picture of how things in the community were going. He mentioned the oil industry's "downturn" only in passing and cited the increase in the number of new restaurants in the area as an indicator of the success he was describing [RH Fieldnotes, 10-5-98].

The speaker appeared to be avoiding the harshness of what might be around the corner, and, given his elected position, this stance, if somewhat misleading, was not received as inappropriate. Among the crowd of listeners, people expressed more serious concern about what was taking place in the yards of local oil-related companies. Even so, the general attitude was still only vaguely fatalistic. No one seemed willing to admit to themselves that things were terrible, yet.

Numbers suggested "yet" was the key word. The official (statistically-generated) unemployment rate for St. Mary Parish was 8.6 percent in October, climbing there steadily from 5.7 percent in February 1998. Given the number of layoffs taking place in the industry during this time, mostly by fabrication companies, this trend appeared accurate. Local Job Services representatives added substance to this numbers story when describing their caseloads during early Fall 1998. Their office wrote checks to an average of 508 individuals per week during October, up from 324 in February. The office in Morgan City serves all of St. Mary Parish, and as a result of funding cuts and hiring freezes, they get bogged down sometimes even during times of "normal" case loads. But October of 1998 brought lines to their door reminiscent of the 1980's.

The woman from whom our team gleaned employment information during our year in Morgan City was a seasoned veteran of the Morgan City office of over 20 years. She has had her finger as close to the pulse of the parish labor force as anyone for these two decades. When we first met her on October 7, 1998, she and her coworkers were swamped; they had been so for several weeks, and she confirmed that layoffs by local companies had brought people to Job Services en masse in hopes of collecting unemployment or finding a new job. "Our office's caseload has skyrocketed in the past couple months," she noted [I-023].

Sensing that these changes were starting to affect large numbers of families and individuals and more local institutions and businesses, our team decided to track the flow of impacts possibly related to the "slowdown." We talked with the director of a local social service agency that aims to meet the basic needs for disadvantaged individuals and families. She stated that her agency had experienced an increase in caseloads during the previous month and that many of the families had members recently laid off from oil-related jobs. It is not uncommon for *individuals* working in oil to stop by the agency even during good times, but lately she had seen an increase in overall numbers and specifically an increase in the number of *families* that came in [I-026].

Another of our goals was to determine whether and how local non-oil businesses were being affected by slowed industry activity. We explored this question by conducting a series of short discussions with local merchants designed to elicit information about sales and earnings. We selected a range of businesses including a car dealership, a grocery store, a restaurant and several others. We asked owners and/or managers a predetermined set of questions. Our results proved informative, so we made two repeat visits during the main year of data gathering, September 1998 to July 1999, and two more during the subsequent year, 1999-2000.

The first business owner with whom we talked described an economic scenario that would prove quite common. He was a local shoe retailer and had definitely felt the impacts. Furthermore, he knew why business was so slow:

> "Tens months ago, in January and February, things were great. But, now things are real soft. I have seen at least a 20 percent drop in sales. It was an abrupt change in business and happened about two months ago. It's the price of oil. When it drops, they call off the drilling, and our economy is based 100 percent on oil" [RH Fieldnotes, 11-9-99].

A local furniture retailer who supplied many major oil and boat companies with appliances told a similar story:

> "The last two years were the best the business has experienced since it opened. January and February were very good, well above average. But the last two months brought a severe down fall. This started at the beginning of September." He estimated that there has been a 40 percent drop in sales. His market is 40 percent residential and 60 percent industrial. "Things picked up after [Hurricane] Andrew. Both of these markets (residential and industrial) were good over the past two years, and both have dropped tremendously in recent months." He gave two reasons for the recent decrease in sales: the last quarter of the year is always slower, and oil prices have dropped. He added, "When the [oil] prices drop, they ain't drilling, and they ain't building new boats" [RH Fieldnotes, 11-9-99].

Other businesses in the area claimed that only those portions of their sales directly tied to oil were being affected by the slowdown, while still others said that they had not experienced any decrease in sales by that first round of business discussions. Of the fifteen business owners and managers we talked to in late October and early November, two-thirds claimed to have been impacted by the slowdown to varying degrees. Of the five unaffected, two sold products or services directly to oil and/or oil related companies. Of the ten that claimed to feel a negative impact, five sold products or services to oil and/or oil related companies, one of which experienced a decrease in sales only in its oil-related market. Yet, as of October, managers did not report having to make adjustments to their businesses, such as layoffs or pay decreases.

November 1998

One of the first news stories to summon memories of the economic calamity of the 1980's was the announcement that Texaco executives had decided to cut approximately 1,000 jobs. These cuts, completed the first quarter of 1999, came from exploration and production operations, and were expected to save the company $200 million annually. Though Texaco had long ago pulled out of Morgan City, there were plenty of people in nearby New Orleans losing their jobs, and, for people here, these layoffs meant things were getting worse everywhere. Several other major and independent energy companies across the Gulf and across the country also announced significant reductions in their workforces.

These announcements and local layoffs came in the wake of two years of industry-wide success. In fact, various companies in the area directly related to oil still benefited from those recent, prosperous times. They boasted that third quarter earnings had been up by substantial, in some cases phenomenal, margins and that the first three quarters of 1998 had brought strong profits. However, people were predicting these lingering benefits could not last long if activity did not pick up. One event was particularly ironic in this respect—placing past prosperity only a stone's throw from future uncertainty.

In late November, two enormous jacketing sections of Petronius (the tallest bottom-founded compliant tower ever built) were barged 100 miles out to sea from a local fabrication yard to be installed in 1,750 feet of water. To be certain, this marked the successful completion of a multimillion-dollar project, but at the same time, fabrication companies in general were predicting the next fiscal year would likely bring significant drops in earnings. Yard workers, some of whom had spent months building this quarter-mile long, 36,500 ton structure from scratch, saw it towed to sea with no similar future projects on the drawing board. Reports of the project finale and its voyage to the Shelf were both impressive and positive, but the news also translated to more, perhaps larger, rounds of layoffs.

Everyone recognized that energy companies—big and small—were making decisions that were causing at least some of these changes in local economy and life. For this reason, attendees sat in silent interest at the local American Petroleum Institute meeting (Atchafalaya Chapter) when an executive from an independent energy company announced that the bad times ahead would not likely be short lived. He described his company's strategy for surviving and thriving in the Gulf of Mexico—mature fields in shallow water was the solution—but also warned of the future. He predicted harsh times ahead:

> "We will have to suffer with low oil prices at least through the third quarter (of 1999). But with sound choices, a profit can still be made at these prices. To make it today, you have to be a low-cost acquirer and a low-cost producer. We don't have corporate jets or country club memberships."

> "Now is a good time to explore and produce. The cost for drilling rigs and boats is low, and companies should jump on this opportunity. In 1997, a jack-up rig was contracting out for $55,000 per day. Now, the price is around $24,000."
>
> "Most of our growth last year was in gas reserves. Avoid expensive acquisitions [lease purchases] and debt. Our company has adopted a policy where they buy new properties only when our capital base permits" [RH Fieldnotes, 11-10-98].

The crowd listened to his points. Many people were nodding heads with agreement, and others just sat and took it in. His message was mixed at best. He put the best face possible on a bad situation for Morgan City. Sure, the time might be perfect to explore or re-explore shallow-water properties given cheap costs, but, any way you cut it, lean times in the industry are hard on small companies lacking deep pockets necessary for weathering the storm and hard on the small towns that support the industry.

Low rig and service vessel costs were not good news for the men and women that worked for drilling and boat companies. Either service prices were too low to allow companies to operate at all, especially small companies, or daily wage rates were reduced to help cover the loss. In both cases, family/household incomes suffered. The "country club" comment also hits home for Morgan City, as many stores and restaurants are heavily depended on oil money. These businesses rely on workers from oil-affiliated companies purchasing a wide range of amenities, and workers and owners at these businesses feel the losses when expense accounts are eliminated.

As time passed, the most obvious signs of the slowdown were starting to look like a trend. St. Mary's unemployment rate for November indicated that all the worrying about an unstable future was warranted. According to statistics, nine percent of St. Mary Parish was now looking for work, and consequently Job Services wrote 580 checks per week in November. As our team tried to keep track of how these changes were affecting the community, our study took its shape. We were getting to know families and individuals experiencing the downturn.

Our team started contacting families involved in the industry soon after we arrived in late September, and by early November this component of the study was in full swing. We were talking with families affiliated with all sectors of the industry and were learning how they perceived their position in light of the current slowdown and uncertain future. Some predicted the worst, while others felt insulated for one reason or another from what might come. For everyone, uncertainty was the rule.

Robert Jones and his family had been affiliated with oil for years, which meant they had seen the ups and downs. Like most other people in the area, they were keeping an eye on current industry activity levels. Robert worked in production at one of the few majors still based in Morgan City and felt a relatively sound sense of job and economic security, while not ruling out a possible negative turn in the future:

> Researcher: Job security—do you feel you will have this job as long as you want it?
> Robert: Well, we get back to my early point, I'll have it as long as the industry lasts. This place has seen it happen before, so no one down here takes anything for granted.
> Spouse: That, and every place that you work at these days, they have all the down sizing all the time.
> Robert: In our environment, we are the operator of choice. We do it cheaper and better than [competitor]. We are always turning people away, and our ingenious boss is always trying to figure out how do better. It is good business [I-170].

The real question for which we sought an answer was whether the Jones family was worried about the future, and, if so, why. But, as more of the discussion reveals, they simply did not know whether to be worried:

> Researcher: It sounds like you plan to stay in the area for awhile?
> Robert: Well, we have had some ups and downs. Rumors are common in an industry like ours. The way I found to handle it was to tell them that I am going to keep coming until the key does not fit the door. I guess that is how I will know. So that is kind of where we are now [I-170].

The Jones family knew "where" they were—in a sense they located themselves smack in the middle of uncertainty, a place that had meaning for them, but no real answer to our questions about job security and family economic stability. We stayed in touch with Robert and his family for almost two years to explore these elements of their lives, and at points throughout this essay, we report on their story as it follows yet another "down" in the industry.

December 1998

The last month of 1998 started with the announcement that more of the new four-lane highway east of Morgan City would open soon, leaving only a four-mile section to complete the road that would connect the area with New Orleans. Governor Mike Foster had been pushing the State Transportation Department to open sections as soon as possible to get things rolling, so to speak. The four-lane highway was (and still is) seen by many to be a critical link to future prosperity for the area, and the gradual opening of small sections had been a step-by-step process bringing Houma and New Orleans closer with each new mile of concrete. The most recently opened 3.5-mile section was impressive because most of it was raised on pilings several feet above sea level as it stretched over the town and east across the swamp. The long-awaited completion of the entire section of Future Corridor I-49 seemed right around the corner, and this was welcomed news for communities along it which were hoping and searching for new economic niches to provide jobs and tax revenue.

However, economic diversity does not just happen to communities. Though some local leaders were aware of this, for others, the new four-lane and future interstate represented the opportunity of which dreams were made. It alone, politicians have argued, could help Morgan City lessen its dependency on oil. Many people looked forward to that possibility, but the raised highway/interstate was also a potential problem. A few local business owners already complained that the new road actually diverted potential customers from their businesses. With expensive signage not an option for its owners, one such business closed its doors late in 1998, blaming at least some of their misfortune on the raised highway.

As the highway issue demonstrates, not *everything* in Morgan City revolved around oil, and that point crystallized during our resident researcher's first exposure to the festival culture common to southern Louisiana. Just as unemployment and local industry activity level were starting to look really bad, one event temporarily erased all that was negative. Downtown holiday lights and the Christmas Parade comes early in Morgan City (see fig. 2.4). The 1998 parade was on December 12, and as a parade volunteer, our resident researcher had a unique position from which to observe what it meant for locals:

Figure 2.4. Downtown holiday lights

> For over two hours today, nothing but the parade mattered. No one talked about oil prices, hard economic times or the possibility of more layoffs. Children and adults acted alike and normal daily worries were out the window.
>
> I had the unusual role of parade volunteer, transportation division. It took up my whole day, but was a great way to spend a day. The opportunity to take part in the parade at the level of volunteer had me driving a float before it was all over, and I considered it a privilege to view this Morgan City tradition as an "insider."
>
> To say that parades are just for kids is not accurate. The day for parade volunteers started at 9:00 AM and things were still happening when I went home around 5:00 PM. There was a certain amount of pandemonium associated with all of it, but in the end, things went smoothly. Everyone enjoyed the day, pulling together and listening to the advice of elders, who were ultimately in charge. The feeling that volunteers were doing something for the community not only motivated people to work hard and listen to directions, but also to laugh and tell stories about previous years' parade mishaps.
>
> By Macy's Parade standards, this parade was tiny, but in terms of community enjoyment and excitement, I doubt they get any better. The younger generations were the most obvious enthusiasts, but everyone had a good time. The cohesion, spirit and hometown pride that I saw today confirmed how pleasant and real life in Morgan City can be [RH Fieldnotes, 12-12-98].

From the way people talk and get excited about them, these parades have tremendous social value in and of themselves, but in 1998, the Christmas parade seemed particularly important. It undoubtedly brought welcomed distraction from the saga that was unfolding.

Early December brought word of new oil price lows. One barrel brought a dismal $8.03, the lowest price in over a decade (and in hindsight the lowest it would get before climbing back up). Independent producers in Texas were very concerned, and, like businesses involved in the industry here, they were wondering about their chances for survival. Internationally, there was talk of Gulf Arab oil ministers making attempts to shore up prices by decreasing production. Even Mexico was asked to conform to bring down supply. On December 8, 1998, the local paper printed an Associated Press article with the headline: "Gulf oil states agree to oil cuts." The article claimed that, according to officials close to the talks, Gulf Arab oil ministers decided to cut oil production to shore up depressed world prices starting in March, 1999 [*The Daily Review*, 12-8-98]. However, the next day, the AP reported that this information was false, and that the March date was only a deadline to make a decision on cutting prices. The Arab summit was coming to an end and a solution to low oil prices would likely not surface before it was over [*The Daily Review*, 12-9-98].

Meanwhile, throughout the nation, the rig count fell steadily, and energy firms continued to merge or buy one another out in what had become very volatile times in the industry. Two independents agreed to a merger that would create the tenth largest independent company, as the trend to few, larger companies continued. Locally, concern mounted as 14 Louisiana drilling rigs were stacked in just one week.

Though precisely matching macro level causes with micro levels effects was beyond the scope of our study, evidence of global/local links continued to accumulate. On December 30, our resident researcher returned to talk with the woman from Job Services. As global oil prices sank and national activity slowed, she indicated that things were indeed getting worse for people working in St. Mary Parish:

> Q: How have things been at this office?
> A: Layoffs, layoffs, layoffs, and it is all oil-related jobs. This week has not been that bad, but last week and the first two weeks of December were horrible. And, we are getting a lot of new faces, people who have never been to the office before.
> Q: How does the situation compare to the last big bust?
> A: It was starting to look like the 80's. We are hearing that it will not be as bad. But who's to know. Apparently, employers did not wait as long to start laying off as they did in the 80's [I-023].

She and her coworkers wrote unemployment checks to almost 700 individuals per week in December, and the official unemployment figures estimated that 9.4 percent of the parish—some 2,600 people—were out of work that month. In hindsight, unemployment rates never reached mid-1980's levels, but no one knew that at the time.

Though comparing the "bust" of the 1980's with the current slowdown was not a major goal in conceptualizing this report, many discussions about the late 1990's slowdown were rooted in the 1980's bust. Because of this, important similarities and differences became apparent. As our discussion with the woman from Job Services indicated, and as our ability to look past 1998 allows, economic cycles this time around were more condensed, though no less severe. At times, energy companies have been able to control day rates for rigs and supply vessels by turning on and off the tap of drilling activity. In the 1980's, after a decade of very prosperous times, there was plenty of "fat to trim." However, even during the upturns of the 1990's, the new industry structure had prevented some of the profits from reaching small businesses, and, consequently, these businesses and the communities in which they were located had not rebounded from the last bust. The upturn was shorter this time. Therefore, there was less "fat to trim" when energy companies started pulling back. Thus, even among large companies, layoffs came more quickly and, in general, impacts were felt sooner.

December was also the month that sales tax plummeted. Both the school board and city governments had to tighten belts. Local city governments adopted the same strategy they had in the 1980's to freeze all but necessary spending until the economy rebounded.

The school board announced its decision to limit spending to maintenance operations, and in the process put improvements, purchases and raises on hold indefinitely. On December 11, 1998, *The Daily Review* compared the school board's move to that taken by the parish in the 1980's when "the oil field economy went sour." The board cited parish financial figures on which they based their decision: sales tax revenues for St. Mary Parish were 28.7 percent lower for November of 1998 than they were for the same month in 1997. Over the five months prior to the article's publication, there had been an 11.4 percent decline in these revenues. Given that this trend was predicted to continue or even get worse, the school board might be operating at a level $3 to $4 million below their projected budget of $14.7 million. Furthermore, an enrollment loss of 274 students in the parish system meant less money from the state, creating a $480,000 deficit in that account. One board member pointed out, "Things don't look very good," but he followed up with optimism stating, "but this is not the time to panic." Another member predicted that the time to panic was yet to come and argued, "The local economy has not bottomed out yet. It's going to get worse" [*The Daily Review*, 12-11-98].

To make matters worse, projections for a warm winter indicated that demand for fuels would be down. With New Year's Eve just around the corner, end of the year recollecting presented a chance to look back on what had happened in 1998. On December 31, *The Daily Review* printed an article that painted 1998 as yet another year in area history with a fickle economy. "Somebody forgot to knock on wood," the article joked. The point was that robust industry activity and labor shortages during the first half of the year had local officials shining with enthusiasm, but the mid-year plummet in oil prices turned all of this—including the enthusiasm—on its head. The article went on:

> "A year which statistics showed began with booming construction and near-record sales tax revenues tapered off in September and has since taken a nose dive, driven by falling oil prices blamed partly on the Asian economic crisis. The economic downturn equally affects the private and public sectors. While industry downsizes for what is hoped to be a short dip on the bar graph, governmental bodies also are preparing for lean times" [*The Daily Review*, 12-31-98].

Finishing off the year was a dramatic event that seemed to stand as a sign of general misfortune. While our team was back in Tucson meeting about the project, a $70 million production module for Petronius was dropped by a local marine installation company in 1,600 feet of water where it was destroyed and left for salvage. Though there was only one minor injury, and insurance would cover the cost of the lost module, the accident reaffirmed that luck was not on Morgan City's side.

January 1999

As 1999 got its start, good fortune remained allusive. Morgan City's economy did not improve, and, in this respect, it had much in common with the oil industry across the state and nation. The national rig count fell another 13 rigs the first week of January, leaving the average rig count for that month at 587. (This was down from 647 the previous month and down from 993 in January 1998.) Closer to home, the State of Louisiana blamed falling oil prices for its decision to freeze spending on education. At home, the official unemployment rate for St. Mary Parish peaked at 12.1 percent that month, and the local Job Services office wrote an average of 800 checks per week to people collecting unemployment. (In January 1998, unemployment was at 7.0 percent, and Job Services wrote an average of 303 checks per week.)

A few sparks of possible good fortune came in January. A local contractor won a bid to build the new access road to the port, while the port commission announced that it was in the middle of launching an aggressive recruitment effort for port business. Since December 1998, the port had experienced success with its current exports which included shipments of rice and large numbers of used vehicles (see fig. 2.5). The commission also talked about expanding port business by increasing rice exports and looking for other commodities to ship. The port commission's news was positive, but the ability of the port to ever provide significant numbers of jobs for the area remained in question.

Figure 2.5. Vehicles at the port

More impressive was news that the State Department of Transportation and Development announced its decision to designate LA 182, the highway that runs through Morgan City, as Business 90. (Highway 90 runs around and over the town.) According to local merchants and government officials, this development was essential for getting more people to exit the raised four-lane, down to Morgan City, and into local businesses to purchase goods and services.

News about both the port and the highway signs represented steps forward for economic diversification, but despite these hopeful developments, everyday life for many people in Morgan City continued to take on a new, somewhat gloomy feel, as a result of the slowdown. The research team observed this mood throughout much of the community from many different perspectives. Our resident researcher came across evidence even when taking breaks at his favorite restaurant.

Johnny's is located on the main drag. The place serves basic diner food, always with a smile. The waitresses are a cheery, appropriately sarcastic group of ladies, most of whom are in their 20's and 30’s. The kitchen staff is comprised of slightly older women with more sass behind their fewer words. Customers came from all walks of life, but there is usually a heavy contingent of oil folks. It is a great place for scrambled eggs, crisp bacon and greasy hash browns, and on most days, a group of habitual regulars sits near the door engaged in round table discussions.

By mid-January, these conversations at Johnny’s revolved around the slowdown. Like any round of chatter, some of it was just talk. However, one did not have to go far to see their discussion topic in action. Sure, a drive out east to fabrication yards revealed low levels of activity, as did shipyards, where welders, mechanics and painters worked on what could be their last boat for months. But the slowdown could also be seen ten steps away, at the window where plates of food came from the kitchen.

Just a few months earlier, in October and November, Barb, the determined women who runs the place, was always hustling around behind the counter with her hair flying about, smoking up a storm. The restaurant provided takeout lunches for local oil companies, and every weekday during the hour before lunch she would park her van near the front door and load it with polystyrene containers full of food, as they came out of the kitchen. As soon as she had an order loaded, she would shout on her way out the door that she would be right back for the next.

Mid-January slowed Barb’s pace. Instead of hurrying to get an order ready she talked about how her lunch carryout business had been falling off lately. And she blamed the slowdown in oil activity. Specifically, she bemoaned the recent, local closing of a supply dock once utilized for marine support by one the few majors still operating out of Morgan City (see fig. 2.6). The dock had been relocated and this had affected her monthly sales. The company had been a big customer of Johnny’s until recently, but as they moved the infrastructure and staff to the new location, she had been making fewer and fewer meals for them. She estimated she had lost several thousand dollars in one month from this turn of events.

Figure 2.6. Closed supply dock

Meanwhile, state economists were boasting that Louisiana had “weaned [itself] from the oil cycle.” According to state officials, the state budget was not run by oil and gas like it was in the 1980’s, when nearly half of the state budget was financed with energy revenues. In 1999, only eight percent of the state budget relied on oil and gas [*The Daily Review,* 1-11-99]. The staff and owners at places like Johnny's apparently had not been successfully "weaned."

The Midwest was hit by significant and sustained cold weather in early January, and this sent oil prices above 13 dollars a barrel for the first time since November. The local paper ran an AP story that reported this small increase, but also quoted an analyst from the American Petroleum Institute in Washington who preached caution in interpreting the rise. This analyst cheered the increase in prices, but warned that "historically, weather has influenced short-term prices." His long-term forecast still suggested weak oil prices in the years ahead [*The Daily Review,* 1-11-99].

Regarding the near future, his predictions came true: the average price for a barrel of oil remained below nine dollars through February. In January, the governor of Oklahoma expressed his frustrations over how these sagging prices, which were apparent at gasoline pumps across the nation, were affecting his state. He pointed out, "A person can buy a gallon of gas for less than you pay for a gallon of bottled water. Not only are we losing jobs, but we're losing revenues in the state treasure" [*The Daily Review,* 1-11-99]. People in Morgan City could relate to his frustration. To be certain, the first month of the new year represented the crescendo of an old, all too familiar story: the chronicle of small town dependency on a cyclical industry.

February 1999

Our resident researcher spent two weeks back in Tucson during late January and early February for team meetings and a break from fieldwork. Having developed relationships with families living through Morgan City's version of the downturn, he hoped for, but did not expect, miracles when he returned and resumed fieldwork. He was not surprised to find things much the same, if not worse, when he went for breakfast his first morning back in town:

> I showed up at Johnny's early morning today and sat at the counter like I often do. Ella poured me a hot cup of Community™ and I ask about how things had been for the two weeks that I was gone. She replied, "Things are slower still. Box lunches have decreased even more, if you can believe it. Business in general has been slow."
>
> She also talked about her husband's work as an auto mechanic. He works for a small garage and does works for himself on the side. Ella complained that he had been making about half his normal pay the past few weeks. With Ella making less in tips each week, their household income had been noticeably affected. She guessed, "When people are laid off or not working as many hours, they do not have money to spend on eating breakfast out or fixing cars" [RH Fieldnotes, 2-9-99].

The slowdown had become the talk of the town because so many people were now feeling the it. Many people were not working or were bringing home considerably smaller paychecks, and these impacts were also felt throughout the community by people not directly connected to oil.

Two days after arriving back in Morgan City, our resident researcher met with an offshore welder:

> Researcher: What do you know about things being so slow right now? When will they pick up?
> Welder: Nobody really knows. A friend told me that maybe by April, things will be better. I have not worked since December 28th . It is very slow now [I-350].

Normally, this worker was quick to ask our resident researcher to join him for dinner and/or an evening out. He had gotten used to coming back from a long stint offshore and needing to unwind. This time it was our resident researcher arriving back in town, and the welder was concerned about saving money to make up for lost wages, not about unwinding. This meant, like Ella guessed, that he was eating out less and, in general, spending less money in the community.

On February 8, 1999, *The Daily Review* reported that a large, local fabrication company announced 40 more job cuts, on top of 80 in made between July and December of 1998. The recent cuts came from office and administrative staff. According to Department of Labor statistics, the St. Mary Parish unemployment rate dropped slightly in February. However, the Job Services office wrote 149 more checks than it had the previous month (an average of 949 per week in February). Though the federal statistics suggested otherwise, people were still losing jobs and looking for work in February.

The pool of unemployed skilled workers was growing and this was benefiting some companies. The guest speaker at the American Petroleum Institute's meeting in early February was the vice-president of production and engineering for an independent energy company. He began his speech with a reminder to the crowd that oil is a cyclical business. He went on to say that his company would likely benefit from the current slowdown in the industry:

> "We look to pick up some talent, because the majors are releasing lots of their top staff right now, and our company will take on some of these people. Right now, I have stacks of resumes on my desk, and get phone calls all the time. Right now, there are a lot of jobless people out there looking for work."
>
> "This is not the best of times in the oil industry, but we also know we are in a cyclical business. Those of us who understand that and learn to work within what is available are the ones that will survive…We opened our doors in late 1997 when things were booming, and now, just one year later, things have changed dramatically. Where there had been an excess of capital, there is now an industry-wide belt-tightening under way. What had been an empty pool of qualified labor is now overflowing with those laid off as energy prices slumped" [RH Fieldnotes, 2-9-99].

Referring to current industry trends, the speaker painted a picture of opportunism for enterprises, not for workers. "Pick[ing] up new talent" was the name of the game, not maintaining employment within communities. According to this and other speakers we heard during our stay in Morgan City, companies can benefit during both "peaks" *and* "valleys." Furthermore, when companies are doing well in these valleys, they remain concerned with maximizing competitiveness.

Word from a large shipbuilding firm echoed the claim that companies could benefit from the slowdown. On February 18, the paper reported that, according to a top executive from a major southern Louisiana shipbuilder, the labor shortage which had plagued Louisiana shipyards less than a year early had been eased:

> "In a span of a few months last summer, our company went from building dormitories to attract workers from the northern part of the state and petitioning the federal government to allow foreign workers into the state to actually having an abundance of people to hire. A year ago, we were short 700 workers and having little success with recruitment. In early 1999, with shipyards laying off workers because service vessel construction was down, there were new people looking for jobs" [*The Daily Review*, 2-18-99].

Because this company had diversified its market, it was insulated from the downturn. It had seven dry docks across southern Louisiana, with one facility in St. Mary Parish. The company needed workers to fill some of its 1,800 positions across the Gulf, and was indeed benefiting from the large pool of available laborers [*The Daily Review*, 2-18-99]. Given that there were clearly not enough jobs to go around, this situation benefited those picking from the pool more than it did the many individuals still in it. In short, the pool was still getting bigger.

News from companies feeding the pool confirmed this. Amoco eliminated 3,000 more jobs in February and reported sharp declines in company earnings for the last quarter of 1998. These recent cuts were in addition to 7,000 already announced. "It is sad and regrettable that we are having to let very good staff go, but putting together two organizations means that we need fewer people, and that situation is exacerbated by the continuing low oil price and hostile environment," reported the company's chief executive [*The Daily Review*, 2-17-99].

At the same time, Shell Oil was considering relocating its 1,050-employee New Orleans operation to Houston as it planned to make more job cuts. As New Orleans's biggest player in the oil industry and one of the city's largest employers, Shell has sustained hundreds of jobs for other area companies in service and manufacturing. The company undertook a review of the economic costs and benefits of staying in New Orleans, consolidating in Houston or moving only part of the New Orleans office [*The Daily Review*, 2-24-99].

As mentioned earlier, most majors pulled their headquarters out of Morgan City years prior to the time of our research, but some were still making changes locally that affected the economy. Additionally, as things deteriorated as close to home as New Orleans, the magnitude of the slowdown and its concomitant effects were further highlighted.

On the local non-oil front, things were not looking any better for the economy in Morgan City. The City had been hoping to retain a local manufacturing company that had been offered a deal by a town in the northern part of the state. The company decided to pull out of Morgan City because of the attractive offer to the north. A soon-to-be-former employee wrote a letter to the city voicing her concern:

> I have been a loyal, hardworking employee at [the manufacturing company] for over four years. As of last week, my co-workers and I were informed that our department was

> being relocated to [a northern town]. For most of us, this was our only means of support, now our only alternatives are unemployment and welfare lines [*The Daily Review*, 2-11-99].

To make matters worse, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development went back on its promise that Louisiana 182 through Morgan City would be re-designated as Business 90. The department made a field inventory of the businesses and their locations along the stretch to be designated and determined that, according to federal policy, the route did not fall within the definition of a business route. Locally, this news was a major disappointment.

On February 11, 1999, Energy Secretary Bill Richardson brought word of hope, though it was hard to interpret it as such locally. The Clinton administration decided to shore up petroleum reserves by taking 28 million barrels from the market. Richardson announced the move had a three-fold purpose: improve energy security, refill the reserve with cheap oil, and siphon some oil from a saturated market. At the same time, five members of the U.S. House of Representatives, including three members from Louisiana, introduced a bill to bring more offshore petroleum royalty money to coastal states like Louisiana—the Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999. According to its proponents, the bill was designed to fund conservation and recreation programs, and resolve the inequity of revenue sharing for offshore oil and gas activity by redirecting more money to the states that host the development [*The Daily Review*, 2-11-99]. These reactions at the national level to problems with local impacts were well intended, but they were unlikely to produce solutions that would benefit families during the current slowdown.

In late February, we noticed an advertisement in the local paper that looked to be a more tangible and immediate solution to employment problems. A local hazardous waste incinerating plant that planned to open soon announced it was holding a job fair for several hundred future positions. On February 27, knowing that it would likely attract a crowd of job-seekers, our resident researcher got permission from the company to talk with people waiting in line. Upon arrival, men, women and the occasional child stood single file in a line that started at the door of the administrative building and stretched a couple hundred feet toward the road and back around the company sign into the parking lot. At the time, the number of people was difficult to estimate, but numbers from the company indicate there were over 700 people in line that day.

Our resident researcher spoke individually with 312 of these job-seekers and asked them to describe their specific reason or need for coming to the job fair. He first asked participants whether they were currently employed and whether their last or current job was with an oil-affiliated company. The researcher recorded how and when people who were unemployed lost their jobs. After collecting these short, recent job histories, he got demographic data from the company for the entire group of people present that day. The vast majority of job-seekers listed themselves as residents of St. Mary Parish.

The results of these discussions revealed an interesting, albeit small, picture of what the employment situation in Morgan City was like. Of 312 people applying for work, 219 were or had been working in the oil industry or oil-related sectors. Of these 219, 122 were looking for work because they were unemployed at the time, having been laid off or quit because of a lack of work. Many others commented that they were looking for work because, although they had not lost their job yet, they feared they could be unemployed in the near future, given the slowdown. The uncertain situation in the oilpatch had many people in line nervous, and in an attempt to cover their backs, they showed up that morning to see what the job fair had to offer.

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Tallies from that day of talking with job-seekers do not meet requirements for statistical analysis. The real strength of walking among and talking with those individuals was the opportunity it provided to get to know them and their stories. Because our resident researcher expressed interest in their situation, several individuals agreed to let him further into their lives via more detailed discussions.

Aaron Dean was born and raised in the Morgan City area. He had been working for a large fabrication company for 27 years when he lost his job just a few weeks before the job fair. His subsequent job search illustrates linkages among past experiences, current events, and future prospects. In some form, his predicament was that of many who lost their jobs in 1999, and in this sense it places unemployment numbers on a human scale. His company position, sector affiliation and specific experience with being laid off are unique, but they also represent how quickly things changed for families in the area. I asked him what happened the day he got the news:

> "I was shocked. Their goal is to cut costs, and that's how they do it, they cut the high paying jobs, the guys who have been here for a lot of years, the ones with the benefits and who are close to retirement. Companies just want to make money and they do not care about anything else. I planned to be done, retired, to be out of oil, by the time I was 55" [I-380].

His retirement plans from the industry had been changed for him, and as he explained, he certainly was not alone in this:

> "…when I was laid off, they were at just over 100 workers in my yard. But my company let another 100 go yesterday, and there will be more. Right now, the yards have about 600 total. That's not just the yard I was at, but yard workers in general. There are office and administration people as well. But in terms of the yard, they only have enough contracts, enough work lined up, through September to keep about 300 guys busy. So they will being getting rid of more" [I-380]

Aaron noted that he could say this with certainty because he knew what contracts they had, and his job required him to know how many people would be needed on those jobs. Bidding for projects depends on knowing how much time and how many workers potential fabrication projects will require.

He went on to discuss how quickly business had changed:

> "Last year, we were wide open. Things were going and blowing. Everyone was saying that things were going to be busy for five to 10 years. But then the Asian market fell, and the majors started merging, and the big things on the books were canceled. Major projects were delayed, and they started laying off. I made it through all layoffs but this last one, and I thought that I'd make it through this last one" [I-380].

Given this surprise, Aaron perceived that certain changes represented a new way of doing business in Louisiana's offshore oil and gas industry:

> "Times have changed. The economy has changed. They are one of the best places to work for in this parish, but company philosophy has definitely changed. Job security is gone. People, including myself, used to think that they would start with one of these big companies and eventually retire. That is not the case today. I put my heart and soul into that job, into that company [for 27 years], but we are just going to have to look somewhere else. I've got to get over the insecure feeling that I've got now from literally being kicked out the door that morning. There was no warning."

> "I went to work that morning knowing like I had for months that things were slow, but thinking that my job was secure. At 9:00 am, my bosses walked into my office and handed me a package of information. They said that things were slow and that they were laying me off. I couldn't believe it. They gave me a letter that said that I had to be gone by 12 o'clock noon, no exceptions. A bunch of us went to a seminar at 10:00 am that morning. There were about 40 of us. I was surprised to see who I saw. The guys with functions were the guys next to me, we'd been laid off. Yet the guys without functions, the ones I thought were more likely to go, they were not in the room. They still had their jobs."

> "I went back to my office to gather up the rest of my things, like they had told me to do. I got a phone call from one of the guys in a different department. He said that he could not believe what had happened. He could not believe they had let me go. He wanted me to send him something over email, so I hung up and sat at my computer to do it. They had already locked me out. I was denied access. I had to call the guy back and tell him that I couldn't send it. I guess the company didn't want us to destroy things or mess things up. They were messing up people's lives and they knew people would be pissed. I called my boss, because it was almost noon. I told him that I was going to be walking through the yard and talking with people, and that I would not be done before noon. I didn't care at that point, and I went and shook hands with some of the guys" [I-380].

He talked briefly about having to come home and tell his family:

> "I came home around 2:30. My wife was surprised; she said that it was good that I got to come home early. I asked Tony (their son) to go outside. I told her that I'd been laid off. Sometimes, I think the reason they laid me off was because I was telling them to make changes. I was telling them that they were wasting their money on certain things they were doing in terms of production. They had hired this consultant to come in and recommend a bunch of stuff that I could have told them would not work. I could have

> told them for free. My super said not to buck the system, but nobody knows better than the workers. Why add these support guys if they are not worth it?" [I-380].

He had a surprisingly positive attitude for someone in this position. He was friendly, and though he spoke with passion, he was neither bitter, nor in need of commiseration. By the end of our first discussion, Aaron and our resident researcher had become well acquainted, and Aaron invited him to Wednesday nights at the bowling alley. In the months to come, our resident researcher showed up for league nights to say hello and catch up on how Aaron's job search was going.

Aaron's story is common throughout the United States, in companies unrelated to the oil and gas industry. It represents a trend in both substance and form: lay off expensive people before they reach retirement age and saddle the company with high costs, and do it quickly and without warning so those people cannot retaliate. The experience is often traumatic, and not all people come through it as well as Aaron. In communities like Morgan City and other towns in southern Louisiana, where lines between industry and community, work and family, were once blurred, there is stark evidence that layoffs can be very traumatic. One woman described the situation where her husband, who was once a confident, independent man, was virtually crushed by the experience of losing his job. A person who used to be able to overcome any challenge, he went into severe depression following his layoff. He did not get up from the couch for over three months, according to his wife. His former boss told him he might hire him back as a consultant, so he waited daily to hear from the company. The uncertainty left him between worlds and unable to take the necessary steps forward.

For laborers, termination can be less clear. At the same job fair, Andrew Michaels gave our researcher his neighbor's phone number and invited him into his life: "Nowadays, I've got plenty of time to talk with you. Just call and come by." (Andrew did not have a phone at his house, partly because phones are expensive and partly because he had been working offshore so much over the past year that he really did not need a phone.) In January, Andrew was sent home by the boat company for which he worked. By the time our researcher came by his house in March, he was complaining about having spent too many days sitting around and waiting. At first the wait was to see whether he was going to return to his boat; more recently he was waiting to hear about potential new jobs. He had given up on his former employer.

At the first visit with Andrew, he was living with his girlfriend in a small duplex near the railroad tracks in a lower income neighborhood. Andrew and the researcher sat out front on his porch and watched neighbors walk by as they talked about his recent, unsuccessful attempts to find work. He was nearly out of money at this point, and finding work was becoming critical.

Andrew's Louisiana story started when he moved here from St. Louis, Missouri. He recalled the events that brought him here:

> "Like all good jobs, the one I had at the Chrysler plant [in St. Louis]…I got laid off. The plant closed in early 1993, and I left St. Louis soon after" [I-379].

After leaving St. Louis, he worked in New Orleans for a few months, but didn't like living in the city. He came to Morgan City on a hunch:

> Researcher: Did you know anything about this area before you came?
> Andrew: No.
> Researcher: Did you know that you were going to be working in the oil and gas industry?
> Andrew: No. I didn't have an inkling that I'd be working offshore. I was not used to the kind of things that went on here (Morgan City), as far as work goes. I've never been out of work before, and the pay is not as good here. I've got construction and mechanic skills. I've always worked with my hands, but down here that kind of work does not pay very well. Yet, the cost of living is the same as it is where I'm from. [I-379].

Nonetheless, Andrew found a job in Morgan City. He worked as a deckhand for three smaller supply boat companies, secured his able-bodied seaman certification and was starting his life over.

The deckhand positions Andrew had since coming to Morgan City paid his rent, put food on the table, and even provided spending money, but the checks had stopped coming weeks ago. To make matters worse, just days before his last day of work, his girlfriend had lost her job. She had been cleaning guest rooms for several months at a local hotel, but the slowdown in oil had taken her job as well.

The company never officially fired or laid off Andrew, but he knew after a couple weeks of being home that he was not going back to work anytime soon. In mid-January of 1999, he had had some medical problems with his leg, and though doctors never properly diagnosed the problem, he was released from a hospital stay and told not to work for a week. Andrew informed his port captain of the date that he could work again, but he was never asked to come back:

> "I have not heard anything since I told them when I could work next. I have called every day, but they say that the port captain is out of his office. He won't return my phone calls. I'm thinking that I'm fired or laid off, and I can't wait any longer, that's why I've been looking for another job. I have the note from the doctor and everything. I even talked to a lawyer, but he said I can't do anything until they say that I'm fired. There's a lot of pressure because of this. My rent is due. A place to live in Morgan City is hard to find. This place ain't the best, but it's reasonable and it's clean" [I-379].

Andrew's fidgeting and mood indicated that sitting idle was hard on him. Each new day without a job meant more waiting, and social service options weren't much better. Andrew filed for unemployment a couple days before meeting our researcher, but Job Services told him that it would be weeks before he would get anything. He was applying for different jobs everyday, but just sitting around was driving him stir crazy:

> "I've got to work or I go nuts. I've been working since I was 10 years old, I can't get used to this sitting around" [I-379].

Our researcher asked him how many applications he sent out and where he applied. He had been to other boat companies, the new plant in town, to a local hospital, to pipe yards, and applied for rigger positions in various oil-related yards. He had heard back from no one, but was still keeping his head up:

> "I ain't going to let it get me down though. If I do, I'll start doing what I used to do, drinking. And I'm not doing to let that happen. They call me a functional alcoholic, but I'm not going to do that again" [I-379].

The prospect of falling back into habitual drinking was one of several things working against Andrew. The illness that contributed to his losing his job also set him back financially. Our researcher asked Andrew if his former employer provided him with any benefits. He got no benefits from them, other than the workman's compensation that they are required to have. The researcher asked him how he paid for the recent medical expenses for treatment to his leg.

> "I had to pay for that myself. Four days in the hospital cost me about $4000. I'm going to have to make payments when I get back to work' [I-379].

Our researcher asked Andrew what his hopes for the future were. He jokingly said that he'd like to be rich, but added that he was sure that would not happen. He also gave a more serious answer:

> "Honestly, I'd just like to have a steady, good job that had decent pay and good benefits. I'd like to work for somebody who takes care of their employees, who cares about their employees. In St. Louis, at the Chrysler plant, they took care of their factory workers. Here, all they need is a warm body, and that is all they care about" [I-379].

Aaron, Andrew and thousands of others were presented with the uncertain future of trying to find employment in an economy where unemployment was holding steady at double digits (11.5 percent in March). They were particularly offended that management had treated them like mechanisms for reducing company costs and not like employees.

To be fair, management throughout all sectors faced tough decisions. Individuals in positions to lay off people like Andrew and Aaron were as concerned about their company's future as Andrew and Aaron were about their next paycheck. Mid-March brought a "brainstorm" session that included local business managers and executives, community leaders, and state and federal officials. On March 16, a local museum hosted this meeting, aimed at finding solutions to problems faced by oil-affiliated companies in the parish.

Our resident researcher attended the meeting. The general consensus was that the situation in Morgan City had reached an alarming state. Most companies in town were experiencing great difficulty, and too many people were losing jobs as a result. Restructuring in the industry added further layoffs. Individuals present at the meeting expressed genuine concern and borderline desperation for solutions. Even so, the discussions did not seem to address the most urgent local problems. Federal representatives mostly talked about a new federal program aimed at matching workers' skills with available jobs. Our resident researcher asked why the issue of skill-matching was particularly relevant given the current layoffs of workers with skills that matched well with the local, diminishing pool of jobs. No one really replied to his question, and, in general, the meeting proved less useful than many had hoped. The main result was a suggestion by one federal representative that there might be a chance for local governing individuals to write a proposal requesting federal money normally limited to an incumbent worker program. It was further suggested by local representatives that the money could be used to subsidize business projects and allow companies to operate at lower costs, and thus retain workers.

A subsequent meeting was held, but when it was announced that the funds they sought would not be available, members of the group lost hope. One local business representative stated that the gathering was a waste of his time, then got up and left. This and the previous meeting were signs of unity among community members, and though they were encouraging, in the end, the meetings were also disappointing. It was a positive move to see people getting together to collectively address community problems, but it was also discouraging to see hope fall to the wayside simply because federal funding was no longer within reach.

Further demonstrating community leaders' concerns for local affairs and hopes for assistance from the federal level, March 15 brought news that St. Mary Parish purchased representation on the Council for Conservation and Reinvestment of OCS Revenues for $10,000. The amount represented one vote on the council and would help fund lobbying efforts in Washington to pass the OCS "fair-share" bill then before Congress. The parish was slated to gain $6.2 million a year if the bill went into effect [*The Daily Review,* 3-15-99].

Though March's average price for a barrel of oil ($10.75) remained relatively low, it was up considerably from February's average price ($8.58). Even so, the Associated Press report that prices were rallying seemed both premature and distant. By mid month the price of crude climbed to $14.33 per barrel, and the AP reported this had even made a difference on Wall Street, where oil company stocks had risen in the hopes that dwindling profits would be revived by a turnaround in oil prices [*The Daily Review,* 3-12-99]. Things were sounding better on Wall Street according to AP reports, but back in Morgan City the situation remained unfavorable for many.

On March 8, the local paper reported that a locally-based supply vessel enterprise had announced the layoff of 250 individuals working in the Gulf of Mexico. The cuts happened mostly during February as the company dismissed crews and docked supply boats. Company management blamed low oil prices and did not rule out the possibility of additional cuts in the future. The oil industry was simply using fewer boats. There were fewer crews to take offshore and less drilling pipe and mud to transport, because so many energy companies had been cutting their budgets. Nonetheless, Wall Street analysts praised the company for continuing to produce strong profits during this period, while many other service companies had not.

St. Mary Parish Job Services wrote 1,035 checks per week on average during this period of forecasted improvement—the highest number it had written since January of 1993. Sending more people that way, on March 4, a large fabrication company laid off 80 more workers from its platform fabrication yard, adding to previous rounds of layoffs.

At the St. Mary School Board meeting on March 11, 1999, the decision to close two elementary schools was blamed on lagging sales tax collections. Both closures were approved by a 9-2 vote and drew calls of disappointment and opposition from the stranding-room-only crowd [*The Daily Review,* 3-12-99].

Some potential good news did come in March about the port of Morgan City. With new facilities at the port nearly compete and a marketing plan ready to unfold, the board also got word that a research team from Louisiana State University was working to get the Atchafalaya deepened to 30 feet—a move that would increase the port's potential to accommodate larger vessels and thus produce more business. Additionally, API heard a rare upbeat forecast from a Chevron executive. With service prices so low, he stated that his company planned to drill as many wells in 1999 as they did in 1998. Furthermore, they did not plan to consolidate operations and move to Houston. Thought there might be times when elements of the company would need to be moved for better efficiency, he claimed he was unable to imagine a time when Chevron would not have a presence in southern Louisiana. But imaginations tend to run wild during uncertain times, and the question remained as to what "elements" would have to move where and for how long. Most importantly, how would they affect Morgan City?

Regardless of this and more general uncertainty, life marched on. The Shrimp and Petroleum Festival's 1999 Poster Contest got under way, and the Tourist Commission unveiled its 10-year vision plan for St. Mary Parish, kicking off the plan with the changing of its name. To attract a broader range of people, the Commission became Cajun Coast Visitors and Convention Bureau. The idea was that people not familiar with the area might recognize the term "Cajun" more readily than "St. Mary Parish." The Bureau hired marketing consultants and was working to create an image for the parish. All of this got its start, in 1992, when the two tourist commissions in the parish merged and moderate oil industry activity provided tax revenues to fund the movement. During March 1999, marketing was foremost, and the Bureau was funding studies to identify likely tourists. According to them, the parish is most suited for nature-related tourism, and such tourists spend $60 to $100 per day. With this opportunity to make money, the bureau predicted that, eventually, small businesses would begin to crop up.

We revisited business owners/managers that we first met back in October and November. Four months had passed and a few of these businesses had escaped the impacts of the recession, but two trends indicated that layoffs and changes in the oil economy in general were trickling down and affecting non-oil commerce: (1) many businesses that had earlier reported only moderate impacts, or none at all, were now complaining that business was significantly down, and (2) some owners and managers were starting to make adjustments to business operations that were affecting employees at those firms.

One of the business that reported no impacts in October was a combination women's clothing outlet/crafts store. Our resident researcher returned in March and asked the same manager about whether anything had changed since the last visit:

> "We really felt it at Christmas this year. It was really bad. Clothing sales were down also because of the weather. We still have 60 percent of our clothing in stock that we bought months ago. Oil people are not spending. We have not been buying much merchandise

from venders. We are just holding our breath and waiting to see. People are still doing some remodeling in their homes, so it is not totally dead. It is not like the 80's" [RH Fieldnotes, 3-23-99].

Another clothing retailer told a similar story. The researcher started the conversation by reminding the manager that the last time he stopped by the store, the manager said that the store had not been impacted by the slowdown in the oil industry. Since then, things had changed:

> "Now the slowdown has affected us. In terms of traffic and volume, things are slower here. This has affected overall sales, not significantly, but we are feeling it. It started in August. Christmas was slower than usual, but not significantly. I can't get specific. It is corporate policy that I can't give numbers. Oil is coming back up, so hopefully things won't get too bad" [RH Fieldnotes, 3-21-99].

The impact of the downturn tool longer to reach these business. In general, both were only making minor changes in operations—changes that did not affect workers. But this was not the case for some businesses that had been feeling the impacts for several months now.

The owner of the furniture store that had complained about poor sales in early November told us that things had gotten worse:

> "We are still feeling the slowdown. It's not the same crunch, it's even more dramatic. Boat business is down by 60 percent from last November. Our store sells appliances directly to boat companies. In-store merchandise to residential customers has been about the same since November. We have not done anything. This is not going to last long enough to make a difference" [RH Fieldnotes, 3-23-99].

A local car dealer had really felt the impacts and management had reacted by making changes. One sales representative was specific about how things were going for them:

> "Business is now off by 30 percent or 40 percent. I see a drastic change in Morgan City. Eight or 10 months ago you could not find a seat in a restaurant at lunch, now you can pick and choose. You do not see the traffic on Highway-90. Things have gotten plenty worse since the last time we talked. We have had to make some changes around here. We watch expenditures. Advertising is out the door, no more of it. No more hiring, we make do with the staff that we have. In the wash rack, we used to keep four or five guys busy. Now we are down to just two. We are paying the bills, but that is it. We are not making money, but luckily we aren't losing either" [RH Fieldntoes, 3-10-99].

The owner of a small retail store had to make slightly more dramatic changes:

> "I had to lay people off recently, one full-time person and two part-time people. Ironically, we have expanded our business here recently. We opened up some batting cages. I spent the money to try and help out during the recession, and it has. It's a real draw. People enjoy it, it's a good experience and it's affordable. But, we are preparing for the worst, buying by the month or even week instead of six months in advance. We

> survived the 80's, and we will survive this one too. It's still early. The longer it hits, the harder it hits. But our community is in better shape for this one. It is more diversified" [RH Fieldnotes, 3-27-99].

In the same month, the Associated Press announced the first exodus of people from welfare. Responding to a change in national policy (The Welfare Reform Act of 1997), state agencies started forcing more than 20,000 families in Louisiana off welfare rolls. These families had ended their two-year period of eligibility and were now expected to find work [*The Daily Review*, 3-29-99]. At a time when local individuals and families were entering periods of distress and need, federal initiatives were getting rid of the safety nets. Furthermore, the high rates of unemployed skilled workers made job seeking a disconcerting task. One individual involved in training former welfare recipients commented that some of his graduates would arrive at the Job Services office, see the long line of people, overhear that many in line had fifteen or twenty years of experience and turn around to go home without bothering to turn in a application.

On March 30, the St. Mary School Board held a special meeting to vote on further budget cuts. The vote supported the need for making substantial cuts, and board members explained this need as a result of falling sales tax collection for 1998 and no current recovery. Cuts included reducing the number of teachers through attrition, saving electricity by turning off lights, reducing the allotment for the "Success for All" reading program, eliminating the theater props expense, and putting a hold on the purchase of new buses [*The Daily Review*, 3-9-99].

On the last day of the month, protesters gathered on the steps of the Louisiana State Capital. The rally was sponsored by the Louisiana Independent Oil and Gas Association and was organized to protest low oil prices and plea for help from Congress. As March came to a close, it was evident that impacts from slowed industry activity were widespread. However, as events and conversations we recorded in April and May show, the rate at which impacts were developing was slowing. Even so, the combination of past changes and impacts had created a confusing economic landscape and set in motion a complicated set of events. Asking study participants—new and old—about change remained critical to understanding community dynamics.

April 1999

We conducted several follow-up discussions in April. According to some study participants, the local economy was holding steady: it was not getting better; it was not getting worse. This was the first such news we had received since arriving in September. People in transportation [RH Fieldnotes, 3-28-99 and 4-9-99] and shipbuilding [RH Fieldnotes, 4-11-99] said that industry activity levels were not what they had been a year ago, but they had not dropped for the past few months either. There were at least pockets of activity keeping people who knew where to look moderately busy. In short, things were not completely dead. Locally, some people's concerns and fears about the slowdown were ebbing, and though April's rise in oil prices was not dramatic, it was still encouraging.

As if to say "life must go on," city planners unveiled the newest form of local entertainment with enthusiasm. "Friday Night Live" began in April with live music and dancing, the first of three monthly evening concerts held in Morgan City's downtown Lawrence Park. Topping this off, crawfish season was predicted to be good, according to regional university experts [*The Daily Review,* 4-1-99]. In small, but nonetheless meaningful ways, things were looking up.

In national news, the tune had not changed, however. April brought an all-time low rig count. It sank below 500 to 498 rigs, and there was no way to interpret this positively. Despite this news, locally, companies were still striving to move forward.

On April 7, a local dive company announced that it won a contract to decommission a field and production facility in the Gulf, an operation that would keep a wide array of equipment and people busy over the coming months. The units to be removed include one caisson and nine platforms. A sizable job for a local company was certainly good news. More came the next day.

Shell announced that it would proceed with development of its Brutus field with a tension leg platform in 2,985 feet of water in Green Canyon Block 158, 120 miles south of Morgan City. The announcement came as evidence of Shell's continued commitment to the Gulf of Mexico and as indication of further developments in that part of the Gulf. This was the first major deepwater project since the downturn in the industry. Workers who remained at a large, local fabrication company, which had reported several separate layoffs since industry activity fell months earlier, eagerly anticipated the announcement of who would build the structure [*The Daily Review*, 4-8-99]. Their company was in a good position to be awarded the project.

Within a week of the Shell announcement, the parent company of the local company awaiting further word on the Brutus project announced its plans to buy out the remaining shares of its fabrication yard in Morgan City and transform it. "Morgan City will evolve," an executive announced. The plans included boosting the company's presence in deepwater operations, including an expansion of ultra-deepwater production units [*The Daily Review*, 4-14-99]. Given the trend to produce in deeper waters, this development would help maintain the company's role as a key player in offshore fabrication and thus its role as a major employer in the area. These hopes were just that, however.

A visit with Andrew Michaels in April brought the type of news that a person could more easily and tangibly confirm to be good. Our resident researcher stopped by Andrew's house, and he and Karen, the woman who lives with him, were sitting on the front porch. The confident, relaxed look on his face told the story. Andrew had found a job not long after our first meeting with him—but not in oil. He was working as a plumber for a small, local company. He had had experience with plumbing before moving to the area and was happy to put those skills to use. He was also glad to be doing something other than working offshore.

> "I was really getting sick of working offshore, and this guy pays me pretty well for the plumbing that I do. He keeps me busy, too. Yesterday, I mowed his lawn for him, and as long as he pays me, I'll mow his lawn" [RH Fieldnotes, 4-10-99].

He was not earning what he had as a deckhand offshore, but he was getting paid. His girlfriend, who was laid off from a local hotel months ago, had also been looking for work, unsuccessfully. She predicted things would pick up again by summer and she would have a better luck finding work. For now, Andrew was making just enough for them to get buy.

Though he had explored several options, Andrew did not find work in oil. Nor could Aaron Dean. Aaron had located what he thought were good leads at two fabrication companies—one in Baton Rouge and one in Houma. This was more than Andrew had been able to unearth, but nothing in oil had come through for Aaron either. He remained in good spirits, all things considered.

His family's situation was getting desperate, and they were seriously considering moving out of state to find work. Aaron mentioned Texas, Mississippi and California as states where he planned to look for work. This was not an attractive option. He and his wife grew up in this area and consider it home, but Aaron needed a job. They were willing to give it two more weeks here, but by then severance checks would be running out and their financial stability would be in jeopardy. Aaron had been out of work for 10 weeks actively looking for a job. He mentioned getting some AutoCAD (drafting software) training in the near future. The technical training for last job had been much different. Until now, there had been no need for him to acquire up-to-date training, but he felt going back to school would help him when applying for work in the current market. He also talked briefly about a couple of families who had already left the area in search of work and others who had recently put their houses on the market [RH Fieldnotes, 4-11-99].

Our network of oil-affiliated families indicated that others were indeed experiencing setbacks. Though cause and effect remained difficult to link, study participants told stories that continued to highlight negative aspects of economic cycles and industrial restructuring. For the foreman at a local tank and barge cleaning operation, things were still looking bad. His company had been affected by the slowdown and business was not picking up at all. He blamed this partly on the lag between oil price increases and raised industry activity, but also on the shift of this activity to other areas of the Gulf. The offshore business used to bring two or three vessels a day. Now they were lucky to get that many per week, and he was aware that many of these vessels had been utilizing facilities further down the coast [RH-073].

Another study participant took early retirement in April because of the closing of a local cryogenic gas plant owned and operated by one of the majors. He pointed out that there were multiple factors influencing the closure of the plant. The situation was similar to the tank and barge cleaning enterprise. According to him, the slowdown was a catalyst for a company decision that was likely already on the table. The plant was old and there was a newer facility in another parish, closer to the Gulf. The plant had been downsizing for years, and now closed altogether, forcing 20 people to accept some form of change in employment: layoff, transfer, or early retirement [RH-070].

Late April brought good news across the front page of a Wednesday edition of *The Daily Review*. Unemployment had not increased for the third month in a row and, in fact, fell a few welcomed points, and for the first time since the summer, the number of checks written by Job Services also stopped climbing. It sank by an average of approximately 40 checks per week. The mayor gave his annual State of the City report and announced that despite the slowdown in tax revenues, the City of Morgan City remained on sound financial footing and was providing first-class services for its citizens. The city met all its debt obligations despite the fall in tax revenues. Additionally, there was enough money despite the capital-spending freeze to go ahead with major repairs on the Municipal Auditorium. An air conditioning unit was to be replaced at a price of $58,000 under an emergency allocation. Collectively, these developments stood out, and April started to look like things might be turning around.

May 1999

Our ability to gauge whether things were actually improving in May depended more and more on who was telling the story. Nonetheless, there were indications that April had started at least some positive momentum, and that the trend was struggling to stay on track in May. Some of these positive developments had little to do with oil, but any good news was welcomed. Early that month, a local high school brought home their first-ever state baseball championship. In good economic times and bad, high school athletics play an important role in this area, and a state baseball championship was certainly capable of carrying its own share of momentum. If a change of attitude was what the doctor ordered, seeds for it could be found in cheers for the home team.

On Thursday, May 13, the school board announced its first positive news in months. Its share of sales tax revenues improved in April. Even though these tax proceeds lagged behind the previous year's by some 25 percent, it was still a positive development. Though economic diversity had not gained notable headway, the AP reported that Louisiana was ranked fourth in the nation in the growth of foreign tourism in 1998, increasing its overseas visitors by 11 percent from 1997. With St. Mary's new push for tourism, this state trend suggested that the Tourist Commission might be on the right track. National news was also on the bright side. On May 12, U.S. Energy Secretary Bill Richardson announced that the rough times in the nation's oil industry may be easing. "I think we are seeing hopeful signs," he stated [*The Daily Review*, 6-12-99]. In fact, the national rig count reversed a trend it started back in December of 1997. It had been falling steadily since then, and bounced back for the first time. Oil prices also continued to rise for the third month in a row with an average price in May of $13.84 per barrel.

There was certainly not an abundance of such signs in and around Morgan City, but one local company did have good news to report in May. A local dive company announced the successful repair of a sub-sea pipeline system using on-bottom, diverless procedures in approximately 1,000 feet of water. This was believed to be the deepest flow line repair on the sea floor ever attempted [*The Daily Review*, 5-12-99]. Like the baseball championship, this record was worth much more than ink on a page. It demonstrated that Morgan City was still a place where things got done right, and, in some cases, better than anywhere else.

At the state level, legislators approved a bill that increased the amount of money people would receive for jobless benefits, and reduced the amount of taxes businesses paid to provide these benefits. The bill passed on May 13, and it increased benefits 20 percent, pushing the average weekly benefit from $163 to $195 [*The Daily Review*, 5-13-99]. In a community like Morgan City, with sustained high unemployment, this news was clearly of interest to many people.

Outside of oil, May 12 brought yet another story about a local business in trouble. This time it, was a menhaden (fish) processing plant. The plant was temporarily shut down because of numerous violations found by the Coast Guard. There had been complaints about dead fish and an oil sheen on Bayou Boeuf, and reports that a barge for storing a plant byproduct was in serious disrepair. Additionally, two million tons of spoiled menhaden had been dumped and sprayed with lime, against regulations. The plant employed about 150 people, mostly fisherman, the majority of whom were rerouted to other area plants. The plant was working to meet compliance standards [*The Daily Review*, 5-12-99]. One of our study participants relied heavily on the plant to balance the ups and downs of the oil industry. He was particularly concerned about the progress of these events.

In late May, the AP reported that shareholders of the two largest energy companies were due to vote on merging the oil giants in a $82.2 billion deal that would create the world's biggest company. Antitrust was an issue to consider, but analysts on Wall Street predicted the deal would meet approval. They claimed the companies would not be able to exert undue influence on the retail market because most of the major oil companies do not own their own retail stations [*The Daily Review*, 5-27-99].

One of these majors was still operating a base in Morgan City. Two days prior to the release of this article in the local paper, our resident researcher stopped by their yard to talk with Robert Jones. He had heard about plans for the merger and wanted to know how Robert and other workers were perceiving this possible change:

> Researcher: How have things been lately? The last time we talked must have been back in November.
> Robert: We are just waiting to see what was going to happen. Everyone around here has the same sort of take on things. We are just waiting to see what happens [with the merger]. We have always been just a little part of the big machine. No one knows what to expect. Things are never in our control when it comes to changes in…
> Researcher: Have you been keeping busy, though?
> Robert: Things had been steady for most of the year so far. Things got a bit slow for a while early in the year, but nothing major [I-170].

Robert's future still hung in the balance, and he was very aware of who had control of what would happen next. Unfortunately, it was not him.

For others, May seemed like an appropriate time to exhale after months of holding their breath. Many people had heard or made predictions that the summer would be the time when the oil business would pick back up. Though it was not clear this was going to be the case, there were enough positive signs for people to at least feel better about that possibility.

June 1999

> "We have picked up a little bit. It has been a nice change. The last few weeks have been better, although not where we would like them. It could still get busier, that's for sure."

> "We kept everyone. We talked about layoffs, but we didn't have to. Things got bad. We were dead for several weeks, and that's when the boss was thinking about cutting, but this little up spurt saved us" [I-354].

Although industry activity certainly had not rebounded to levels seen during the most recent boom, there was a modest increase in activity that started somewhere in the spring of 1999. It was helping. The rise in activity kept at least some people employed, many of whom might otherwise have been added to the pool of jobless in St. Mary Parish. The above statement from the manager of a small oil-affiliated machine shop was echoed by other industry people in Morgan City in June. They too had been saved by the small increase in economic activity. For some company owners and managers, the increase was the difference between having to make significant changes to their business or not—cutting jobs or not cutting jobs.

Though the AP reported that weaker global demand for oil offset production cuts by oil exporters, causing the price of crude oil to temporarily drop in May by more than $2 per barrel, the average per barrel cost of oil continued to climb in June to $14.34, up from $13.84 in May. Paralleling this positive global trend, local indicators also continued to show signs of improvement. St. Mary Parish's unemployment was at 10.9 percent, down more than one percentage point from the March high of 12 percent. The Job Services office wrote 835 checks per week in June, which was still uncomfortably high, but nonetheless down from March by 200 checks per week. Presumably, fewer families were in need of assistance, and this hopefully meant family members were finding work.

June 17 brought more goods news. Shell's much anticipated decision to award the Brutus contract came with a favorable outcome. Community leaders welcomed the news:

> "Local officials see the recent awarding of the Brutus platform contract to [a large fabrication company] in Amelia as a positive sign that the oil and natural gas industry is still a major player in the local economy…This is one that we have all been keeping our fingers crossed about" [*The Daily Review*, 7-17-99].

Opinions varied, however. The reaction from another community leader about the award of the project was less emphatic:

> "Exploration in the Gulf of Mexico has moved to deep and ultra-deep waters. We can capitalize on that or we can lose it" [*The Daily Review*, 7-17-99].

Figure 2.7. Fabrication yard in Amelia

Reading between the lines, his comment contained a bit of a warning. The local company was awarded the contract to fabricate the five topside modules, a project which would utilize an estimated 550 of the skilled craftsmen currently employed in their yard east of Morgan City (see fig. 2.7). However, the contract for the rest of the structure, the part below the water, was awarded to a company located elsewhere. Though no one knew for sure, this could have been related to the depth of the Atchafalaya. If so, then it could also be cause for concern. How this contract was divided between companies might point to a possible trend to even more specialization (modules only) for an economy looking for exactly the opposite.

Economic diversity made a small stride in June. As one local leader put it, "When the local economy suffers, like it has for the past year or so, relief sometimes comes from unlikely sources" daily [*The Daily Review*, 7-23-99]. A local shipbuilding company commissioned a project to renovate a 125-foot luxury yacht owned by a New York investment banker. The project called for rebuilding the engine room, replacing the decks, and a variety of other renovations. It involved the one local shipbuilding company, as well as several local contractors, and was predicted to keep 20 to 25 people employed for the duration of the contract. Yacht repair and construction was unusual but not unprecedented, and the work and the jobs it secured were an example of what could be done to attract diverse projects to the area.

Two reminders came in June that oil is not only a cyclical industry, but a potentially dangerous one. On a Thursday in the middle of the month, a 22-year-old Morgan City resident died as the result of an offshore accident. He was crushed between two large ropes used to secure the vessel to offshore structures [*The Daily Review*, 7-18-99]. A week later, the night sky glowed for several weeks by a blow out just east of the fabrication yards in Amelia. Families were evacuated from their homes and workers struggle to get the blow out under control as it spewed flames over a hundred feet in the air that could be seen from neighboring towns.

The last week of June, our resident researcher stopped by the bowling alley hoping Aaron Dean would be there. He was there, and he had good news. Aaron was hired on April 28 by a small fabrication company in Houma, one quite different than the large company that formerly employed him. The new company built relatively small structures and employed about 125 people.

Aaron had applied for the job several months before he was hired. He saw an advertisement in the paper and sent in his resume. The company owners interviewed Aaron, and he had the requisite qualifications and skills. Aaron said the owners needed to be sure they had enough work before they hired him; that is what took them so long to offer a job. But he was working now and our resident researcher was pleased to see the newly employed Aaron:

> Aaron was relieved. The last few times I saw him, it was a slightly uncomfortable situation. He would eventually bring up that fact that he still was not working and talk about plans to leave town in search of work. He was not outwardly depressed, but there was a certain desperation in the way he carried himself. At the bowling alley today, he was full of renewed confidence that I could feel in his handshake and see in his eyes. Three months ago he was worrying about whether to uproot his family and move. Today, his biggest worry was remembering to hold his beer can in his left hand. His right hand needed to keep dry for gripping the ball when his turn came around [RH Fieldnotes, 6-23-99].

Aaron talked more specifically about how this new company was different than his former one. Although his salary was lower and the benefits were not quite as good, the new job entailed a lot less stress. Especially toward the end of his career at his previous job, things were hectic and stressful. Management had been getting rid of their experienced workers, so Aaron was increasingly having to explain basic aspects of his job to people above him, many of whom did not have enough practical experience or know-how.

Aaron said that since he had taken his new job, he had been offered other jobs, but he said that he was happy where he was, and that he was not considering other options. He said that it was not just about the money. Sure, he could have make more elsewhere. It was about being happy, and he liked his new job:

> "I will tell you this, and I mean it, if my former employer offered me a job tomorrow, I would tell them to kiss my ass. I have had enough of their..." (RH Fieldnotes; 6-23-99).

Aaron discussed why he felt this way. Most structures his new employer fabricate are 100 feet or less. He described how it is difficult for his former employer to compete for the small fabrication projects, because their large overhead kept them from bidding on these small jobs. They would need 30 or 40 such jobs at once to keep their workforce busy, and that number of contracts was not out there. In contrast, his new employer only needed three or four of these jobs to keep their entire yard busy.

Within a few days of talking with Aaron, our resident researcher also made a couple of attempts to check in on Andrew. The first time he stopped by Andrew's house, the place looked vacant and he wondered whether anyone still lived there. On his second attempt, Andrew's neighbor was on her front porch next door. She confirmed our researchers suspicions: he had moved. She did not know where or why, just that he was gone, likely for good.

July 1999

As the end of our initial research period neared, our resident researcher was tying up loose ends, planning his trip home and saying farewell to friends, study participants and the local teachers who were our research partners. He was also trying to summarize a year of change that seemed a bit overwhelming at times. He had spent June meeting with people who had been promising to talk with him and making follow-up visits to individual and families who had told their stories months earlier. He continued both of these into July, which also brought another opportunity to visit with business owners and managers whom we had been following. By now, the downturn was no longer a new thing, it was the norm. Talking about it had become commonplace, and hearing about it in discussions and follow-ups was routine. The latest news was whether and how people were being affected by the small increase in activity.

In addition to studying the impacts of industry activity, July reminded us to continue to observe other aspects of Morgan City and its economy and how they did or did not relate to oil. One big news item brought continued hope for tourism. On July 6, Mike Foster signed a bill authorizing a 15-year plan to preserve the Atchafalaya Basin. A local state representative pointed out that the area would stand to benefit greatly from the funds. The money was to be used to build an interpretive center across LA-70 from Lake End Park, stabilize the bank on the lakeshore and make a wide array of major improvements in the vicinity of the park. “These improvements will bolster the tourism industry,” the representative claimed [*The Daily Review*, 8-6-99].

A study participant closely involved in tourism and the oil industry was also enthusiastic about tourism’s potential role in the area’s economy. Towards the end of July, our resident researcher met with Carl Baker, who had a personal investment in tourism. He asked Carl how things had gone for tourism during the year:

> “On the tourism side, we had the busiest spring to date. It was mainly school groups. That is mainly a product of having been around for five years. The longer you are around the more people here about you. We put out a lot flyers too. We get a lot of educational tours from as far as 90 miles away” [I-012].

Carl’s comments suggest that there is potential for a tourist industry in the area, but that it will take time to develop. What is unclear is the extent to which tourism could be a viable source of jobs and tax revenues, how long it would take to develop, and whether it has the potential to ever consistently provide enough of both to be considered a complement to the oil and gas industry. And if it can, what sort of environment will in create within the local economy? Southern Louisiana experienced industrialization in the middle of the 20^{th} century, decades after other regions of the United States, and the area also started its transition to a post-industrial economy late, focusing on the service industry.

There are indications that the transition has begun in Morgan City and other Gulf Coast communities where offshore oil-related industries have pulled out. If these changes continue, driven by the movement of industrial activity to places with ready deepwater access, they will effect new patterns of activity and therefore of social and economic impacts on southern Louisiana. Morgan City might continue to move from the core to the periphery.

Some locals have begun to talk about Morgan City’s future as if such a change was already underway. Others recognize the driving forces behind the change and argue that Morgan City must ensure that its channel to the Gulf is deepened—a perpetual challenge due to large-scale changes in Atchafalaya River basin hydrogeologic processes that have left the basin as the repository of sediments that once deposited at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Still others view the recent upturn and decline as part of a familiar pattern for Morgan City and believe the community must wait for the rebound. As of July many people were still waiting, have been through part of that cycle.

Carl was one of many who became reflective when trying to gauge oil activity in 1997 and 1998. He runs a small business affiliated with the oil industry, and was as confused about the year as anyone. He smiled and summoned Charles Dickens to summarize the first 11 months of our study:

> “It was the best of times and the worst of times. We had some good things going on around here early last year [1998] and into the summer. Everything was looking so good.

By the time you showed up, the economy had taken a nose dive, everything was down. It has been a strange year, that's for sure. We have basically gone through the entire cycle in 10 months. Which is good, I guess. At least people are going back to work. It doesn't seem to have lasted as long as it did last time. Drilling rigs have gone back to work. The same for boats. Contractors are going back to work."

"September (1998) was the end of the best of times. Then we had the worst of times for a short while. Of course, no one knew how long it was going to last. In 1984, everyone kept saying that next year things will get better. In reality, it took 10 years for things to pick back to the levels they were in the late 70's and early 80's. And some say it never got back up to that level. It's all directly related to the price of oil, which is controlled by the Middle East. I think it's a potentially serious situation to be so reliant on foreign oil" [I-012].

As Carl's comments indicate, Morgan City residents and business people grapple with questions about not only where and how they fit into the regional economy but also how they will be affected by global events. As many have observed, from the vantage point of Morgan City, the events of 1997 through 1999 were a compressed version of the 1970's and 1980's. Remembering the huge economic losses and even bankruptcies as they tried to hold onto workers during the previous bust, many companies responded rapidly to the latest downturn by laying off employees. Workers and families, too, took lessons from the past, and many left town in search of new work before their savings ran out and they could not afford to leave. These actions reverberated through the economy, affecting everything from the revenues of local mom-and-pop grocers to the number of students enrolled in the area schools. Rapid change was facilitated by near-instant communication via television, the internet, and corporate teleconferences with local offices. Yet, despite the similarities to the past, no one could predict how the cycle would play out and where in that cycle the local economy was as of July.

Some companies did seem to be on the upside. A local dive company announced that an independent energy company had awarded them a contract to decommission and remove a field of production facilities. This assignment represented the deepest-ever decommissioning of an offshore development and the largest contract in the company's 25 years of operations in the Gulf of Mexico.

However, community-level effects looked to be long term. In response, the school approved a budget relying on a contingency fund to balance an anticipated deficit. The anticipated deficit in the General Fund for the upcoming year was $1.6 million, and the board's contingency fund had a $6 million surplus. "As we look forward to the 1999-2000 school year, we must do so with an eye on the financially turbulent 1998-1999 fiscal year."

The local non-oil business climate was equally difficult to gauge—still. The question was whether the small increases in activity report by some had produced positive changes for local non-oil businesses. To find this out, we visited our group of business owners and managers in mid-July. The shoe retailer whose business we had been following reported that things had gotten a little worse, while the woman who ran the women's clothing and craft store claimed that things had gotten a little better. A larger clothing retailer, who reported only small effects back in

March, stated that business for his store had remained at about the same level since he last spoke with us. A local grocer reported that sales to supply vessels were still down, which they had been since early 1999. Three other businesses reported increases in sales. The sales manager of a local hotel pointed out that the blowout had helped business, because the companies dealing with it had rented several rooms for the weeks the well was burning.

Specific comments from this group demonstrate that some businesses were still having a tough time making ends meet. The car dealer relayed his company's situation:

> "Things are still off, big time, really off, not good. Don't see relief in sight. Last year, in the summer, we were moving 80 to 100 or even 110 vehicles of this lot per month. Now we have trouble doing 50. It is not a pretty sight. We have all taken cuts in pay, because the business is not here. People say that by late summer things will pick up. Fortunately, we have not cut any employees" [RH Fieldnotes, 7-19-99].

Meanwhile another local retailer had been virtually saved by, of all things, the parish school board's decision to implement a parish dress code:

> "Things are on the down side, really bad. It has to do with the oil economy. People out there do not have the money to spend right now. We don't have the people coming through the door."
>
> "The new parish-wide dress code has helped business quite a bit. Forty-five percent of our business recently has come from the sale of school uniforms. Without that, we would be in trouble. We are already running a skeleton crew. I would have to say that things have not gotten worse since March, but they certainly have not gotten any better. The economy is bad; it is not stable. We are just try to maintain here" [RH Fieldnotes, 7-22-99].

John Mills, one of the first industry people our team met, continued to provide valuable insights. Since the discussion in October, our resident researcher saw John on a couple of occasions at the Petroleum Club. In March, he commented that business at Mills Fabrication had changed, but did not say specifically how. On July 20, he described these changes in detail:

> "We should not be so dependent on foreign oil. When the price falls, the impacts are immediate. Oil is low now and…We've been scraping by, things have been slow for us, but no layoffs. I have had to cut everyone to eight hours per week, but I have kept all my full-time guys on. Now, there are a few guys from the body shops [labor camps] that I don't use these days, but my full-time workers are all still with me."
>
> "I have seen a 40 percent decrease in business from mid 1998 to now [July 1999]. Since the first of July, things have picked up a bit. Our business has increased some. But I don't know what will happen the rest of the year. The fourth quarter is supposed to be more active, so we are looking forward to that. This business is not for the faint of heart, I tell you that. We need to stop importing 65 percent of our oil."

> "Things started getting bad late last year. Things went to the crapper in November, October and December. January, February and March were all terrible. In fact, February was the worst month that I have had since 1987. Now, we've got some small jobs keeping us fairly busy. There is nothing real big right now. Overall, the year was a money-juggling year. We had no overhead; we could not. We had to keep costs down as much as possible. We were able to pay the bills, and in times like this, that's all you really hope for. Lots of companies cannot even do that."
>
> "Most people I know have experienced a year similar to us. Some had big contracts that got them through, but there were plenty just getting by."
>
> "I am just trying to keep myself out of debt, and I've been doing a good job of that. This business can turn around overnight. I been through it before, but this is David 's first time. He has seen how dependent our business is on the activity of the industry, the drilling" [I-051].

The past ten months (October 1998-July 1999), as John put it, were about "just getting by" for many people. Whether that meant hanging onto a job, taking a cut in pay or hours, barely keeping a business in the black, or making ends meet while unemployed, times were hard. The new life that had been breathed into the industry was moderate at best, but it had come perhaps just in the nick of time, which enabled some to make it through. But it seemed like very few individuals or families affiliated with oil were not still affected by the slowdown. Furthermore, there were indicators that the effects rippled well outside the oil economy as local businesses felt the tightening of belts.

Our resident researcher spend his last day in town meeting with study participants, some of whom had become friends, all of whom had played an important role in defining his stay in Morgan City and shaping the nature and content of the study. With these multiple voices now recorded in one form or another and a whole host of his own observations also documented, he loaded his car, said goodbye to the people in his neighborhood, and drove over the Atchafalaya, heading north past the current round of construction on future I-49, en route to Arizona.

Epilogue (Fall 1999 to Spring 2000)

Back in Tucson we continued to receive complimentary issues of *The Daily Review*, which brought equal amounts of good, ambiguous and bad news to our doorstep as we started the process of analyzing the information we had gathered while "on the bayou" from September 1998, to the end of July 1999. But late July certainly was not the end of the story: we kept our eyes and ears toward Morgan City from afar, hoping the local economy and family situations were improving or at least stabilizing.

In January of 2000, our resident researcher and another team member returned to the field to find our hopes had come true only in part. The two researchers were charged with documenting experiences of area adolescents to gain an understanding of what it was like to be entering current and future job markets.[2] They also conducted several follow-ups with study participants. We had lost track of Andrew Michaels several months earlier, and January presented no opportunity to catch up with him. Nonetheless, Aaron Dean, Robert Jones and John Mills took the time to let us know how life had been going for them.

For Aaron Dean, things were going well. Being laid off and unemployed for over ten weeks back in 1998 had been an unpleasant, challenging episode in his family's history, but now, several months later, things were looking good—perhaps even better than before the layoff:

> "It's the same type of business as my previous employer, and it has been a good change for me. I feel very fortunate to be working for these guys. We have been busy lately. We just started getting busy the last couple weeks. You are starting to see activity. Companies are hiring people. I mean, I've been really satisfied with my new employer, but I was even asked to go back to my old employer. I told them, 'no.' They're so big. There, you are just number. There are too many bosses and too much management. My new employer is not a public company. There are no shareholders. You get rewarded for dedication. I guess you had that at my previous employer, but it's different. I mean that company made some choices, and I don't think they benefited anyone. On the other hand, my new employer never laid off anyone. They did have to cut pay, but they did what they had to do to keep workers" [I-380].

Business for John and David Mills had remained strong; it had taken a turn for the better. I talked with David over the phone because he did not have time to meet in person; things were too busy:

> "We've been busier than normal. I mean we're busier than we've been in the last eight months. We have a backlog, and have for a month or so. Last year, we did not operate with a backlog the entire year, not at all. We've been getting most of our business from a variety of smaller engineering firms" [I-144].

Aaron was happy to be with a new company, and John and David were keeping their workers busy with multiple small projects.

However, an update with Robert Jones brought less fortunate news. If you remember, back in November of 1998, when we first met Robert, he made an interesting comment about job security:

> "The way I found to handle it was to tell them that I am going to keep coming until the key does not fit the door. I guess that is how I will know" [I-170].

By late December of 1999, the key literally no longer fit the door. The locks and much more had changed, and, with little room for doubt, Robert knew what this meant for him.

The company for which he had been working pulled up its stakes and moved out of Morgan City. The decision came in December, and, broadly speaking, it represented the final chapter to one of the most dramatic and telling stories in the area's history regarding the oil and gas industry. The company was one of the first majors to come to town in the late 1940's. They got this whole thing started. Their decision to leave represented the end of a long-standing relationship between

Morgan City as a community and major energy companies. The first to come and the last to leave, their decision to pull out of Morgan City came as a shock of disappointment for workers and the community in general. A co-worker of Robert's had trouble putting it in words at first:

> "But I think this company leaving the area is…well…it's not a good thing. They had a big role in this community. Pulling out like this is going to have its effects. They've made contributions of all sorts here. The SMIG (St. Mary Industrial Group) board is full of people from this company. The API. The community felt something similar in 90 and 91 when they moved the engineers to New Orleans. There use to be people working in the hallway in this building, which has 72 offices. Hell, drilling was here too, until it left in 1986. This company was a big presence here. Now they have withdrawn, almost from the Gulf all together, really. We used to have 400 people going on- and offshore. Now, there are 30 or so. Do you know how many hamburgers that means for local restaurants?" [I-869].

Robert Jones was not in the frame of mind to worry about local restaurants. He was fed up with his former employer and with the industry in general:

> "I expected the closure, to be honest. To a lot of people, it was a shock, I know, but I was pretty sure what would happen. It did not make business sense, but there was a lot of politics behind the closure. With the merger…well, actually another energy company bought out our company. Let's call it what it is. They have the upper hand in all this, and I didn't figure they would let us maintain this location. Guys told me that I was paranoid and pessimistic, but I was right. The thing about this industry is that things never really change. With these companies, there are cycles. I mean the same thing happens every so many years, but they are not capable of learning. I am leaving. I am trying to get out—for good. As soon as I get a job somewhere else, we'll move. I want something that is not the oil industry" [I-170].

It is difficult to express the magnitude of what it meant for the last major, which had such a long-standing relationship with the community, to leave town. Community and industry had once been linked with the common thread of local, human participation in the planning of both, which once shared at least some common goals. Decisions now seemed wholly devoid of concern for community, with a priority for the bottom line taking absolute precedence. The company had been removing portions of their operations over the past two decades, and the total loss of jobs from the most recent (compete) withdrawal did not leave anyone unemployed or without compensation, but it meant as much as any round of layoffs that occurred during the slowdown.

The community had lost a long-time partner, and in January, though knowledge of accompanying effects from this was only conjecture, it did leave people in the community contemplating the issue of loyalty. While seated next to one of our researchers at a School-to-Work conference, an area educator spoke at length about loyalty, and her words captured a widely shared sentiment. She commented that the companies tell educators they need them to teach their students to be loyal. She then went on to say how companies once had very loyal employees. Her father was once the quintessential "company man." He always wore hats with the company logo, and he would never think of buying gas for his car from another oil company.

Then he was laid off before he could collect retirement benefits. He learned about loyalty. The families of her students had had similar experiences, and they had learned similar lessons. She ended by saying, “You can not stand up in front of a classroom of students and teach them to be loyal. Loyalty is something they need to earn” [DA Fieldnotes]

Though revisiting Aaron, John, and Robert proved critical to the project, they were not the only people we were interested in visiting. In January, we visited 21 individuals to check up on their specific situations and how they perceived the larger processes and economies of the Morgan City area. All of these individuals had previously participated in the study. A few were community leaders, but most were industry-affiliated families and individuals.

The reports we got from this group were mixed. People from production described the current situation as stable, and the transportation sector reported a modest rise in activity. The manager of a small machine shop and a sales representative from an oil-affiliated electrical company complained that things were still very slow—in fact, slower than they had been the summer of 1999. The manager of a local employment agency that finds jobs for people on supply vessels claimed that he was looking for people, not jobs. He was putting nearly everyone who came by his office to work. He was placing individuals with local dive companies and small supply boat companies. At the same time, a captain for a large supply boat company had recently made the choice to work off the coast of Mexico because things around Louisiana were slow. His wife bemoaned this recent change because it switched his schedule from 28-and-14 to 56-and-28. She had this to say about the new routine:

> “Bad, bad, bad! We both hate it. The 56 days drag on and on, and the 28 days when he is home fly by” [I-285].

Families affiliated with diving were also experiencing change, but in their case, it was more by choice. As diving families that our resident researcher got to know early in the study gained seniority at work, some were leaving town. With regular schedules and more permanent positions within their company, divers and ROV technicians were making decisions to move from the area and commute to work. In one instance, the family had gotten out of the industry altogether in favor of moving north to work in the commercial airline industry.

For our team, moving out of Morgan City meant that we were unable to pay as close attention to the details of community change, but the same was less true with regard to our relationships with and knowledge of families. Eleven months had produced valued ties between the team and a wide network of local families. Phone calls, emails and returns to the community kept these ties strong. They enabled us to keep tracking change. In short, January field research provided an important opportunity to update the local situation.

Figure 2.8. University and teacher-researchers in a focus group with families

March of 2000 marked our final returned to Morgan City for this project. Our main purpose was to provide people with some of our preliminary results and get feedback on them. Plenty of people showed up to hear what we had to say, and nearly everyone took interest in our presentation and provided us feedback (see fig. 2.8). Most responses were geared toward people's specific roles in the community or industry, and the results of these group discussions provided further insight for our project goals. Rather than attempt to summarize the discussions of all eight groups here, we focus on John Mills's response and subsequent discussion about current and future fabrication in Morgan City.

> "The fabricators in Texas are laughing at us in Louisiana. We are underbidding each other. That's not to say there isn't a certain level of stupidity running rampant here. Companies add yards, and that starts the cycle of people bidding against each other. Those with deeper pockets are more able to sustain a loss on a job just to keep their good hands working. The oil companies want you to buy new equipment to do more things. They have put fabricators out of business. I used to do a lot of work with one of the majors. They beat you down to nothing. They get you to build something for too low. You then go bankrupt, and they get it for nothing. They will hold up buying a rig for six months and then make the fabricator file Chapter 11. The other thing that's doing this is Wall Street. People want more profits."
>
> "In my business, we work for pipeline companies. Now we have foreign countries coming in. They are all coming in here and taking that kind of work. It's making everybody get down and dirty. My great concern is that we are prostituting our companies just to get the work."
>
> "I don't see anything coming out of the large fabricators. The independents have saved our butts for the last 10 years. The independents hire outside engineering firms to do all the legwork. The big boys need to start spending money building platforms and laying pipe. We have to be ballsy enough to raise prices" [I-051].

John's description of the circumstances small fabricators faced during our stay in Morgan City explained why he was glad to soon be retiring from the industry. He had had enough of dealing with what had become business as usual. His new concern was that his son, in taking over the business, would have to make his own decisions about staying or getting out of the industry. Like others in Morgan City, he wondered what his son would do if he did leave oil-related fabrication, and what would happen if he stayed:

> "We are working on a bigger port, with a deeper channel. We can get bigger ships in and send rice out. They are trying to make the Atchafalaya Basin one of the biggest tourist attractions in Louisiana. Some funding is already there to do more of this stuff. We need look at getting our kids to stay in this town. The oilfield will be good for maybe fifteen years. There are pressures from Washington to develop alternative sources of energy… They'll convert everything to gas, and it will be good for 25 years. They are pushing all fuels…" [I-051].

By March, oil prices had been above $20 for several months, yet many of the people we talked to in Morgan City complained that things were still not "back to normal." Prices were up and some of the majors, having reorganized into even larger corporate units, were starting projects and resuming some drilling. Though things had picked up a little locally, companies in Morgan City were not reaping the benefits owners expected when things went back up. The time period we had given ourselves for recording Morgan City stories about family, industry and community had come to a close, and yet, we were all hesitant to secure the lid. Things were no more certain than they were 18 months ago when we first came to town, and though we had a story to tell, we all knew the Morgan City story would continue to evolve.

CHANGES, IMPACTS AND REACTIONS: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Our project was not—and was never intended to be—a study of economic development. We simply did not employ methods for collecting or analyzing quantitative data, and we have not produced conclusions aimed at predicting future economic cycles. Rather, we strove to get beyond numbers and spreadsheets to examine and describe the myriad of social and economic impacts of offshore oil and gas activity on individuals, families and communities. With this intent in mind, we collected a wide range of qualitative data through recording discussions, reading local newspapers, participating in the daily life of communities, and utilizing a variety of other methods. Yet, living in Morgan City and constantly watching life on the ground has afforded us knowledge of not only the local social arena, but also of the economic system—two entities as intrinsically linked in Morgan City as they are anywhere. We gained much of our understanding of both by listening to local people. Thus, the results we present here are necessarily a synthesis of our outsider observations and their insider perspective.

When we considered how to communicate what we had learned back to the community, as a team, we were faced with difficult decisions about which issues would get the most attention, and whose voices should get the most airtime. In the process of making these choices, we looked closely at the different forms of information at our disposal, and, when we collectively analyzed them, certain aspects of the Morgan City story stood out.

Topping the list were a set of issues related to the fact that Morgan City is a community tied to an economy dominated by a single industry. To be certain, the global context of that industry is increasingly an important consideration for anyone trying to understand local situations. However, we focused mostly on how local people were impacted. We were only partially successful at exploring the linkages of the macro to the micro. On the local level, we found and describe here three broad categories in which most observations and issues concerning individual, family and community change can be located: the nature of change; the consequences of change; and reactions to this change.

The Nature of Change

Over its history, Morgan City has gone through major changes in the way the community is structured around and dependent on natural resources. And like communities everywhere, only some changes and definitions of community have been determined by relationships with the dominant industry of the time. Smaller economic sectors play their roles as do a multitude of cultural, social and political factors. As our team has come to know Morgan City, all of this stands true for the period of the study reported here. This said, there is, without doubt, a dominant industry in this part of southern Louisiana.

During 1998 and 1999, the oil and gas industry was going through a phase of accelerated change. The industry itself is very complex, and this particular transformation of it was certainly complicated. Even so, much of the change we documented regarding Morgan City's role in the industry can be generally explained by: (1) corporate restructuring throughout the industry which was similar in many ways to the same processes going on outside of oil; (2) the increasingly dominant trend to deep- and ultra-deepwater exploration and production; and (3) the ebb and flow of industry activity that takes place during economic cycles resulting from various global and national factors.

As study participants pointed out, the restructuring caused a myriad of changes locally, many of which we describe in this report. From the point of view of people working and living in Morgan City in 1998 and 1999, many of these problems revolve around issues of power—who had it; who did not—and about loyalty. When referring to power, we mean the ability and freedom to make decisions and control a family's future, an enterprise's strategy, a community's trajectory. The move to larger companies that rely increasingly on contract labor has partially removed decision-making and control from the hands of local participants in the industry. As we have seen, these types of changes rearranged the relationship that companies have with communities, families and individuals. This often resulted in damage to or complete destruction of long-standing partnerships at all three levels. Loyalty suffered as a result. On both sides of the employer/employee relationship, for many, commitment and loyalty became values of the past. It is hard to interpret this change positively. In the most recent downturn, it produced widespread vulnerability and uncertainty

The trend to deepwater and ultra-deepwater was and continues to be an important development in the industry with positive and negative effects for communities like Morgan City. In some ways, it has facilitated stability. Some deepwater fabrication and installation projects are so expensive that short-term industry changes do not affect progress. On the other hand, transportation of and for deepwater and ultra-deepwater structures requires adequate channel depth, which is not guaranteed in Morgan City. Though no clear pattern emerged in Morgan City during our study, several oil-related companies were already complaining that other ports were competing and often winning business that once came to Morgan City.

Concomitant with both of these sources of change was what people locally referred to as the "downturn." Compared to the bust in the 1980's, this cycle came more quickly, and according to statistics and most study participants, activity levels did not remain as low for as long. Even so, major and independent produces called off drilling and put their plans for many new production projects on hold. Toward the end of our study, the economic cycle appeared complete for some people, while many others had not experienced the benefits of increased oil industry activity.

Consequences of Change

We collected stories about families and business that specifically revealed how people were affected by changes of all three types mentioned above. In some cases, it was obvious which type of change was affecting a business, family or individual. For example, it was clear that, when Roger Jones lost his job, it was the result of corporate restructuring. More than likely, the consequence of change he experienced had very little to do with the downturn or the trend to deepwater activity. On the other hand, it was hard for some people, and thus us, to know what was causing the changes they were experiencing. John Mills and his son David, experienced a significant decrease and, later, an increase in activity for their fabrication company. Though they speculated the downturn and subsequent upturn were the respective causes, there was really no way to tell whether corporate restructuring or the trend to deep water were also involved. Any or all of these factors might explain their situation.

Even when we could track changes and their consequences to a particular factor, answers were still difficult to come by. The majority of people participating in the study were somehow affected by the downturn, and in this report and others, we have described in detail the stories of oil-affiliated businesses and families being impacted by this change. Perhaps our most salient conclusion from our research is that a downturn (or bust) is difficult to track; to understand its impacts requires that researchers get to know the lives of those intimately involved. Only details of the consequences of change can produce a meaningful understanding of those impacts. We believe that the chronicles provided here include enough depth to allow the reader to engage in these lives and learn from them what its like to experience change when oil activity slows. It seemed like no two businesses or families were affected the same way or at the same time by either the slowdown or the subsequent increase in activity. As we documented each specific story it was difficult to paint a broad picture of what was happening in Morgan City.

The earliest and most obvious consequences of change were that day rates for boats and rigs fell, and projects in fabrication yards decreased in number. Companies big and small, in all oil-affiliated sectors cut hours, reduced pay and laid off large numbers of people. During this time, the relationship between energy companies and services companies is best described as a struggle where all parties involved were interested in getting the best deal. Decisions from these different levels nonetheless spread throughout the community in a wide range of impacts, as company executives attempted to maintain profit levels or keep their company in the black. At the community level, workers, workers' families and eventually even businesses and individuals not involved in oil were affected.

The most widespread consequences for families affiliated with oil were decreases in household income and/or loss of jobs. People were faced with the consequences of their companies trying to maintain a sound bottom line during difficult times. A common way to do this was reduce pay, cut hours or layoff workers. Families had difficulties paying bills, a few people lost their homes, and some families left the area. Businesses not affiliated with the oil industry were impacted as a result of the slowdown, because some did business directly with oil-affiliated companies, and also because they relied on individuals in the community to buy their good and services. Cuts in pay and layoffs affected how workers and their families spend money. Family and individual budgets were tight and this affected the general business climate in Morgan City.

Reactions to Change

Large-scale change produced reactions of many types among individuals, families and communities. In all of these categories, reactions seemed to come in three forms. People reacted in an attempt to ensure that negative consequences did not reach them or their business this time around; they reacted in ways that were meant to ensure that it did not happen to them again in the future; or, because they were in the middle of being affected by change, they reacted with grasps for stability and to maintain their livelihood, both of which were likely in jeopardy.

Many reactions we documented took place on individual and family levels. For many people, the first activity after being laid off involved looking for work, filing for unemployment or both. Cuts in pay or hours meant rearranging household budgets and in general spending less. Reactions at this level involved indifference, anger, frustrations, or even fear and sorrow. Some people left town, others got out of the oil industry, and many had plans to do one or the other in mind. Individuals went back to trade schools, hoping that new training might land them a job. In general, people reacted the best they knew how to situations where figuring out the right course of action was difficult.

Recognizing there are other reasons behind its impetus, we have described economic diversity, in part, as a community level reaction to changes in the oil industry. It has been a common, yet punctuated, slogan for the area over that past two decades. However, this observation means very little with regard to applying social science observations to local problems. The question remains: how does a community like Morgan City effect economic diversity?

Along these lines, the economic planning meetings attended by our resident researcher were the most obvious community level reaction. Attendees had been watching their businesses suffer for several months and they were looking for ways to turn the situation around. Things had been going well in 1997, and then, suddenly, things got bad. Though many had been through it before, most had not predicted this change. None had wanted it.

Planned Change

Many residents and certain community leaders felt that the community actually needed more change—but the kind that originates and is orchestrated from within the community. When asked what direction the parish should be headed, one community leader had a significant change of direction in mind:

> "We need some knowledge-based planning for the parish. We need to change our approach. With some people, economic development is about industrial recruitment. But that is not going to solve all of our problems. That might bring new jobs, but as many a third of those jobs are going to employ people outside the parish…and generating industry and more jobs for people who live outside the parish is not the way to solve that problem. And we have serious leadership problems in the parish. With business, we have absentee management and ownership. That means that many of those people are not committed to the

community. We lost a whole generation of leadership in the 1980's, when a lot of people left town. The goal cannot be to generate more of certain types of jobs. We do not need more fabrication jobs. By this summer, we'll have another huge demand for labor in fabrication that won't be met, because people got burned this time around" [I-176].

This community leader recurrently brought up the issue of having useful information on which to base community decisions. He complained that "numbers" that he gets are often misleading. For instance, unemployment rates are difficult to interpret, yet much attention is given to these numbers. Residents' opinions of how well community leaders are leading often depend on these unemployment rates, but given their questionable nature, its difficult to use these statistics for planning.

Planning change is difficult enough when a community is being bombarded with deleterious impacts that originate outside the community. Add to this leaders' inability to accurately gauge what is happening to their community during these cycles, and it is not hard to imagine why Morgan City has had a tough time adjusting to change and diversifying its economy. The politics of organizing planned change further augment this difficulty. The economic cycles produce massive change that often impacts people in negative ways. But to solve some of the problems associated with this, some say there actually needs to be more change. As people have pointed out, business as usual in Morgan City is not likely to solve the community's economic problems.

During our stay in Morgan City we saw small businesses leave town or close. Some were offered better deals in other communities, others simply could not make a go of it here and decided to close their doors (see fig. 2.9). Still others seemed to be on the verge of doing one or the other. The new raised four-lane, while representing potential progress, is also potential cause for concern, especially if something is not done to let drivers know there are towns below the concrete slabs that comprise the road (see fig. 2.10). Though we did not follow the story of the plant whose job fair introduced us to so many unemployed people, the most recent chapter of the story reveals the plant has not opened, nor made plans to do so, as of the writing of this report. The politics around why it did not open are not the focus of this report, and there remains a complicated set of issues and questions associated with it. The plant was a hazardous waste disposal facility; it suffices here to say that the community has been and remains split over whether jobs it

Figure 2.9. Restaurant that closed during our study

Figure 2.10. Driving over Morgan City on Highway 90

would create are worth the possible negative impacts the plant's debatable environmental soundness might bring to the area ecology and human population. Regardless of which side is right, the fact remains that the plant is not open and may never be.

With signs that offshore oil and gas industry will not always maintain local levels of activity capable of sustaining regular employment in Morgan City, the time is right to look for solutions or strategies that place the community's proverbial eggs in as many baskets as possible. By this we mean looking at but also beyond attracting other large industries, and focusing energy and money on locally-owned and operated enterprises. As the newest attempt to bring big business (the hazardous waste plant) demonstrates, oil is not the only industry that presents barriers to community stability and progress. Gone are the days when major oil companies are setting up shop and maintaining a steady flow of new jobs into the area. Gone are the days when "hub of the oil industry' means Morgan City was top dog in the game of oil and gas extraction. At best, Morgan City will compete with new industrial hubs with heavily invested infrastructure closer to the Gulf. We feel the residents of Morgan City are up to the challenge, but as things stand now, the power to make important decisions regarding the future remains only partially in the hands of locals. The time is ripe for change.

ENDNOTES

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[1] In this report, the term "Morgan City," is used to refer to a group of communities including Berwick, Bayou Vista, Patterson, and Amelia.
[2] For more on this topic, see Part 3 in this report, "Parents and Children: Changing Roles, Changing Expectations."

PART 3
PARENTS AND CHILDREN:
CHANGING ROLES, CHANGING EXPECTATIONS

Leah Stauber, Jennifer Schrag-James, and Shannon Sparks

INTRODUCTION

Social change, including changes in the roles and expectations of individuals, is perhaps most evident in the values, norms, and lessons that are generated and passed on from one generation to the next. In this report, we examine how parents and adolescents talk about family, parenting, education and career goals. Fathers talk about both their fathers and their children, and how the oil industry and its associated work schedules have influenced the way they father; adolescents talk about their parents, their own goals, and how they hope to raise their children in the future. The parents spoken of here are therefore not only parents of school-age children but also grandparents and teens, who are the parents of the next generation.

Talk of fatherhood emerged from discussions focusing on the broader impacts of the Gulf of Mexico oilpatch on families. Fundamental to southern Louisiana are both a strong belief in family and involvement in the oilfield. Many fathers hold industry-affiliated jobs with concentrated work schedules. These work schedules present both unique opportunities and challenges to men trying to negotiate involved fathering roles. The roles these fathers strive for within their families influence their perceptions of concentrated work scheduling and oilfield work in general. Fathers' varying reactions to oil-industry scheduling impact the way their children are raised, and the resulting personal and career choices that these children make, *and* the way these children raise *their* children. Personal and professional legacies are formed that are inextricably linked to the oil industry.

The teens' words and views were taken from a series of focus-group discussions that took place in two Morgan City high schools. These focus groups were arranged and conducted at a point in the project when the research team realized that parents who had been contacted had frequently spoken about hopes for their children, but these young people themselves had not had the chance to express their *own* hopes and plans. The possible intersections and/or contradictions between parent and teen thinking seemed to be a useful place to start in considering current changes in social and work-related roles and expectations.

Adolescents, for their part, represent in all communities the next generation of workers, parents, and community members. Older teens, in particular, are drawing closer to the world of adult social and work roles, and are therefore at a point at which they must begin to make important decisions regarding both family and career. These choices will help shape the future of the community and its industry(ies). In southern Louisiana, family and career choices are often bound up in teens' various impressions of the oil industry and life within an industry family. From this set of perceptions arise teens' lifestyle decisions; most notably, those regarding education and career goals. These decisions – in favor of college and generally in opposition to oilfield work – promise to be significant for the future character of the local oil industry and the greater economies of towns such as Morgan City and New Iberia.

FATHERING IN THE GULF OF MEXICO OILPATCH

Changing Fathering Roles and the Work/Family Conflict

Fathering is a multifaceted role that involves men, their wives, their children, and their extended families, and is negotiated in the context of a broader community. Fathering is "a product of the meanings, beliefs, motivations, attitudes, and behaviors of all these stakeholders in the lives of children."[1] Within this role, modern fathers are expected to be more involved with their families than were their fathers or grandfathers. Today, the ideal American father is one who is highly involved in the lives of his children and shares parenting and caregiving responsibilities with his wife.[2] This egalitarian perspective differs significantly from the more "traditional" 19th and 20th century parenting roles where the wife/mother took responsibility for the home and children, even if engaged in paid labor, while the father's primary function was as economic provider.[3]

The dual assumptions that fathers have historically been solely breadwinners and that value placed on involvement with children is a new phenomenon are misleading. In the 17th and 18th centuries, fathers were centrally involved in their children's lives, assuming some of the responsibility for children's nurture and most of the responsibility for their education. Most fathers worked in or near the home and could therefore participate in family activities.

In some parts of the United States, fathers' roles in their children's lives began to change as work began shifting away from the home during the early decades of the 19th century. This period marked the onset of wage-earning work for fathers while the home became the realm of the wife/mother. Childrearing became the primary responsibility of mothers as interactive fathering necessarily became a part-time activity. By the early 1900's, fathers had generally come to be defined almost exclusively in terms of their income-producing activities, and were depicted in popular portrayals as almost incompetent with regard to childcare.[4]

The entrance of mothers into the paid workforce in the 20th century challenged this father-provider/mother-caregiver dichotomy. In the late 1940's, approximately 20 percent of mothers of children 6 to 18 were in the workforce. By 1960 this participation had increased to 36 percent, and by the mid-1980's had climbed to almost 70 percent. During this same period, the percentage of mothers of preschoolers in the workforce lagged behind by only about ten percent. Data from a 1997 survey indicate that both partners in three quarters of United States couples work full-time.[5]

This increase in working mothers has led to revisions in the roles of both mothers and fathers. Working mothers obviously cannot serve as full-time caregivers for their children; fathers or other alternative caregivers must be utilized during working hours. While many working mothers continue to do a "second shift" of housework and child care after the paid workday, significant numbers of women have pushed for increased involvement and assistance from their husbands.

One of the major consequences of these dual caregiver-provider roles is work/family role conflict. Time spent at work is time away from family, while time taken off from work to attend to family responsibilities is often interpreted by employers as a lack of dedication to the job. As more men assume dual roles, they also report increasing conflict between their family and work lives. This conflict grew in prevalence, from 12 percent of fathers reporting difficulties in 1977 to 72 percent reporting in 1989.[6] Resulting tension led in recent years to demands for more family-friendly workplaces for both mothers and fathers. Nationally, employee benefits such as maternity and paternity leave, sick-child leave, and flextime programs have become more common; however, benefit provision still lags far behind demand.[7] Also, these benefits are in many cases available only to women, or their use by fathers is stigmatized.

While work/family conflict is an issue for employees in many industries, there are certain aspects of offshore oil work that make this a particularly poignant and common problem for oil workers. For example, the concentrated work schedules typical of the industry commonly take fathers away from their families for blocks of 7, 14, or 28 days, or, in the case of on-call schedules, for unpredictable periods of time. Many families find that these absences (especially the longer ones) can make fathers' participation in the family difficult, thus increasing the tension between family and work that workers and their spouses feel. Oilpatch fathers with employed wives cannot help with the children while offshore, and this contributes to increased workloads and role conflicts for mothers. Companies within the oil and gas industry are particularly constrained when it comes to allowing offshore workers benefits such as paternity leave, sick-child leave, and flextime, all programs designed to lessen work/family conflict: transportation between platforms, rigs, and vessels and shore is expensive and not readily available between crew changes.[8] In general, companies do make every effort to get workers home in the case of an emergency. However, allowing workers flexibility in determining days or hours worked reduces the efficiency that concentrated work schedules were designed to provide, and is therefore impractical to employers of offshore workers.

The blocks of free time characteristic of offshore scheduling, however, can also present a unique opportunity for families. Some families find that offshore work schedules allow for increased father involvement with children. Similar feelings have been noted among families in the North Sea area, where 75 percent of mothers contacted felt that offshore work allowed fathers to spend more time with children.[9] As the researchers noted, instead of limiting a father's chances to spend time with his children, "the pattern of offshore work might seem to present an opportunity for innovation ... in the form of greater involvement with the children on the part of the father."[10]

Fathering and Family in Southern Louisiana

Historical Foundations of the Contemporary Southern Louisiana Family

Industrialization brought with it a profound separation of work from family and recreational activity. Pre-industrial economic pursuits took place in a context where family, occupation, community, and education were tightly integrated. In southern Louisiana, industrialization and the associated separation of the spheres of work and home took place following World War II, much later than in most of the rest of the country. Local residents continued with subsistence activities such as hunting, fishing, and gardening well into the 20th century.[11] These seasonal pursuits, along with lumbering and farming, still comprised the major economic activities present when exploration and drilling began in Louisiana in the early 1900's.[12]

As late as the 1930’s and 1940’s, the Cajuns, who comprise a large part of the area’s population, were still considered to be “isolated” and “unacculturated” to middle-class norms, and largely unchanged culturally and economically from earlier times.[13] In the southernmost parishes, many families still lived along the bayous, continuing the settlement patterns that had been established after their arrival in the area in the mid- to late-18th century. Those Cajuns with historic ties to the community owned long, narrow strips of land with small bayou frontages and extending back into the forest and swamp.[14] Each successive generation built its homes on the same land, thus keeping families tied close together.

In addition to geographic proximity, common economic pursuits also served to keep family ties close. Most families engaged in the seasonal activities of shrimping and trapping, trawling in the Gulf during the spring and early summer and then following their trap lines in the fall and winter. These were family enterprises, and children were involved as early as possible. Fathers took their young sons to sea with them to learn the knowledge and skills necessary for operating boats. Success in trapping also came from experience and knowing where to place trap lines. These economic pursuits occurred in the context of the family and thus did not have the effect of removing the father from his children; child caregiving was simply an integral part of the father’s routine activities. A boat captain in his mid-70’s recalled his life as a child and young adult on and off the bayous:

> “I was born on Four Mile Bayou in bayou country, in a two room camp boat on the bayou. I'm the oldest in the family. I have three sisters. We were all born in the camp boat and lived there. … We used to pull the camp boat from one place to another. Then we got rid of the camp boat and lived on Avoca Island in a house. We raised tobacco there, for our own use. ... [When I was a teenager], we had a 52 foot houseboat. I stayed in it till I got married. My daddy was a trapper and a fisher. He also went hunting alligators and killing a lot. … When we got married I bought a 40 foot camp boat. … I used to shrimp, trap, and run the boat at the same time. Me and my wife would fish. We would leave in the morning, put the baby in the front of the boat, stay out all day, and come back at night. You won't find a woman like that. She would breastfeed the baby while running the lines” [I-413].

Farther north, such as around New Iberia, families were dependent on farming rather than fishing and trapping. For the Cajun families, this primarily took the form of subsistence farms, while the Spanish and French who settled in the area developed a thriving plantation economy. Cajun children assisted with subsistence farming from a young age, and thus, much like their fishing and trapping kin to the south, remained in close proximity to their fathers. Plantations, although larger in scale and more dependent upon non-familial labor sources, still kept a relatively close tie between occupation and family life.

Offshore oil activity came to southern Louisiana after World War II. Most of the early workforce came from Texas because the locals had no experience in the oil industry. Some enterprising Cajuns put their maritime expertise to use, though, converting their shrimp boats and using them to service the platforms up and down the bayous. Still, most locals did not initially give up their other occupations in favor of work in oil. Instead, they gradually added working in the oilpatch to their seasonal occupational cycle, thus supplementing their regular economic activities with oil-related employment.

By the 1970's, oil was thriving in southern Louisiana, and many locals had abandoned their traditional economic pursuits and moved into oil-related employment full-time. Activities such as trawling, trapping, crawfishing, and farming became secondary interests pursued in time off from jobs in the oilpatch, and served as back-up occupations during downturns (see fig. 3.1). As one long time Morgan City resident commented during the 1998 downturn,

> "You know, people over here depended too much on the oil field. … It's a good thing they've got crawfish. They are all out crawfishing now. … Crabs and crawfish, that's the only thing Morgan City people are going to survive on" [I-413].

Figure 3.1. Crawfishing in 1998

The industrialization that accompanied the arrival and growth of OCS activity resulted in a gradual transition to a highly segregated order where work and education were separate from family. As work moved out of the context of the family, fathering by necessity became part-time. Even those fathers who continued to work on boats, for safety and insurance reasons, were not able to take their children out on the offshore service vessels the way they had on their shrimp boats. Because children could no longer accompany and assist their fathers while they worked, interaction between fathers working in oil and their children was restricted to time off from work.

"Old School" and the "New Outlook" – The Meaning of Oilfield Work

Two distinct attitudes towards oilfield work characterize oil workers. Respondents termed one attitude "Old School," and, because a specific name was never given to the second attitude, it is referred to here as "New Outlook." Old School workers tend to be in their late 40's, or older, and New Outlook workers are generally those in their mid-40's, or younger, although Old School attitudes toward work do persist among some younger workers. A 30 year-old oilfield salesman who worked in offshore drilling for eight years described the difference between Old School and New Outlook:

> "My boss, when I worked offshore, was Old School. He was the type who yelled and would tell you, 'Move it!' You might work 70 hours without any sleep and didn't even have time to take a shower. You get a nap for 30 minutes and you wake up sleeping on the mud pits … That was the Old School. He was educated by experience, coming up with other people like him, and he was the head of his household, you know, 'That's my woman' type of thing. Us younger people came in, and we didn't fit into those roles. [We were] people with college educations who had been exposed more to technology. So, whereas that old guy might not let me go in [from offshore] when my wife's having her first or second child, the young guy understands: 'Well I've got a wife and baby and I'm damn sure not going to miss that'" [I-397].

One longtime wireline hand—now a salesman for the same company in which he "came up"—exemplified the diehard work ethic of the Old School. For him, the oilfield was not just a job—it was a way of life. He commented, "I put my heart and soul into it. My job came before my family." His identity was tightly bound to his company and he consequently threw himself wholeheartedly into the work. This worker believed that success for the company translated into financial and personal success for himself:

> "When a person calls a company and says 'I'd like to have Marcus on the job,' that means a lot. Not only to yourself, but to your company. And when these people call and say 'I'd like to recommend Marcus, he was very good on the job. He cleaned up the well for us, he saved us one and a half million dollars', that means a lot to you. I was always conscientious of what I did. I had a feeling that one day, I'd be just where I am right now. I worked hard for it, I went through a lot of pain, and a lot of heartache. But today, all I do is work at a computer, make my few little sales calls … Let's put it this way: I've been in it 43 years, and I loved every damn minute of it" [I-016].

The pain and heartache to which Marcus refers are the three wives lost due to heavy drinking and placing work before family. As his fourth wife related,

> "My husband was a man who had five children, but never [was] close to any of them because he was divorced so many times. I'm his fourth wife, so that kind of shows you the [oilfield] lifestyle. And he's a heavy drinker, so none of the marriages worked … When he'd come onshore, he'd just drink all the time, hang out with the men, cook at the bars, and he never saw the children. Never bothered with them" [I-019].

Like other Old School workers, Marcus enjoyed doing the work as much as he enjoyed the financial rewards and prestige it afforded him. When asked why he had stayed in the oilfield for so long, he emphasized that it was

> "[b]ecause of the love of the oil patch. And money, yeah. What I did, it was a challenge to me. When you run slickline down, you never run two runs that are alike. And what I used to like to do was, if somebody lost tools in the hole, I used to like to go fish them out. Because they tell you you can't fish them out. That was a challenge to me. And I did it, and you can ask her [points to his wife] my name is known along the Gulf Coast of Louisiana. I was one of the damn best there was. I liked it. I enjoyed it. I worked on wells that had 17,000 pounds on them. It was just a challenge to me that I just wanted to be the best … You ever heard that saying, 'Show me a horse that never been rode, I'll show you a rider never been throwed'? Well that's how I fell about the oil patch. What somebody else couldn't do, I'd damn well try. It was always a challenge" [I-016].

The challenge, the prestige, and the sense of importance that work provided were some of the primary elements that Old Schoolers mentioned when talking about their years in the oilpatch. They felt that—though they did not have the benefit of advanced education—their innovation, sense of hard work, and bravery had made the industry what it was. "We were pioneers the world over," one Old School Cajun exclaimed [I-587].

The New Outlook viewpoint is comprised of and expressed through a different set of values and expectations regarding involvement in the oil industry. Regarding this change, the experiences and views of those workers in their early 50's are of particular interest because their work experience is positioned between Old School expectations and New Outlook economic realities. This cohort was raised with their parents' belief in the durability of the work place contract, defined roughly as a worker's loyalty to his company, given in exchange for job security and upward mobility. This contract was broken after the 1980's bust, which was marked by massive layoffs and followed by subsequent mini-busts. Layoffs were not uncommon prior to the 1980's; what made them unique in the 1980's, however, were the severity and the manner in which layoffs were undertaken. One worker, for example, related the dehumanizing layoffs instituted by his company, an oilfield major: all offshore workers were brought onshore and ushered into a room where, in front of co-workers and a television crew, each was named individually and given a colored folder that indicated whether or not he was laid off.

Figure 3.2. Contract laborer cleans mud tank

Industry restructuring led to further changes for many oilfield workers. Job insecurity was increasingly exacerbated by the full-scale integration of contract labor into the oilfield during the 1990s (see fig. 3.2). Many companies laid off workers and replaced them with contract laborers for whom they did not have to pay fringe benefits such as health insurance and retirement. These companies also thereby avoided the emotional discomfort associated with laying off long-term employees.

Although some companies have re-evaluated those decisions and are again favoring permanent employees, insecurity and uncertainty pervade the oilfield, and both companies and workers lament the loss of loyalty on both sides. A retired toolpusher, for example, considered the present character of the oilfield and commented,

> "I wouldn't recommend to anyone in this day to go into the oil field. Well, it's just not as stable as it used to be. If you go to work for a company and give 'em half or three-quarters of the best of your life, they should take care of you. But they don't do that anymore. The oil companies won't. And most of the people who are working in the oilfield are looking for another job in which they can make just a little more money a month than they're doing. And they'll change just overnight if they can get a little money. And it wasn't that way when I was working. The company took care of you" [I-199].

No longer gaining their primary identity from the work place—an identity whose foundation might be lost with the next layoff—many workers began to define their identities around elements of their lives other than work. A former oilfield worker, for example, said,

> "…when I was with [a service company], I *was* my career. That was my career. That's who I was. You ask me who I was, I was [the company]. Now you ask me who I am, I can tell you, 'Oh, I'm a horseshoer. I'm a part time blacksmith. I'm fixing to be somebody you see at the rodeos throwing ropes'. You know? 'I'm a family person. I'm a hunter'. And they might say, 'What do you do for a living?', or they'll say, 'I'm talking about work': 'Oh, that's just something I do. It's not who I am, like I'm [the company]' ... They basically take over your life. They take over your family life" [I-307].

For all of these reasons, New Outlook workers do not share the Old School's love affair with the oil industry. Notions from the Old School that workers should be proud of manual work and participation in the oil industry, and loyal to their companies and the industry, are waning. Significant numbers of younger, New Outlook workers described themselves as "only a number" or a "pawn." As one worker noted,

> "I have no respect for the oil company because they're not worried [that] this guy has a family. The only thing they're worried about is as long as they have 45 million cubic feet of gas going to that pipeline and from that pipeline into the cells, and once it goes into the cells, that's the dollar bills. They're thinking about the dollar, the dollar, the dollar" [I-009].

The New Outlook shift in attitude parallels a larger societal change occurring within the United States workforce. Demands for a more meaningful work environment, more family time, and more recreational time indicate that notions of "success" are being increasingly based as much on non-monetary as financial elements. In Louisiana, workers have watched their career-oriented fathers and uncles struggle in the oilfield, in some cases sacrificing relationships with their wives and children in the process. In many cases, New Outlook oriented workers have either consciously or otherwise reduced the importance placed on work, learning from or reacting to the experiences of their Old School fathers. Part of this reaction stems from reconstituting the importance of family. One New Outlook father immediately followed the comment, "My dad still works in the oil field," with, "I don't want to miss out on my daughter growing up" [I-010]. This father regretted the fact that his father had missed out on his own childhood and was determined to not let the same happen with his own child.

Some New Outlook workers in the oilfield feel the need to prioritize differently than their parents did. From their perspective, the fact that Old School fathers often had to spent their time away from the oilfield fishing, trapping, or working odd jobs to earn extra income is considered undesirable. Like many New Outlook workers do now, Old Timers also devoted time to recreation and friends, which took (and takes) additional time away from the family. Some New Outlook oilfield workers are making attempts to spend more time at home with their wives and children when they are not at work. In this process, they are realizing the being a good father requires not only negotiating between work and family time, but also between personal and family time. The wife of a drilling rig manager commented,

> "The majority of what [my husband] wants is to be home with his children and I think he learned that because his daddy wasn't. I don't think that he has any resentment towards that, but I think probably his lack of loyalty to the industry is because he feels cheated.

> He was cheated out of a life with his father growing up. When he was growing up with his father, his father is one of those people that we are talking about, he worked seven days, he was gone and then he had a gun shop and still he would go with his other buddies or he would go and have breakfast, lunch, and supper with his other buddies. So when he was home, he really wasn't home" [I-515].

For some fathers, however, this reprioritization of family, work and personal space has prompted decisions to move from offshore work to onshore work, or to get out of the oil industry completely. In some cases, Old School fathers actively discouraged their children from seeking work in the oilfield but still felt that the oilfield had provided them with a good life. One father commented, "I don't think I would change anything. I would probably do it all over again. But I wouldn't want my kids to do it" [I-554]. In other cases, fathers advised their children against oilfield work because they regretted their own involvement in the industry. One father now working onshore as a project manager described his reasons for getting out of offshore work:

> Researcher: You mentioned you got out of offshore because of your kids?
> Eddie: Right, I didn't want to put my kids through the same thing I had gone through.
> Researcher: Can you tell me about that?
> Eddie: Dad always regrets now – and he tells us now – that he regrets not being there more for us. The 21 days offshore, 7 days on – theoretically you don't see your kids a real lot. You're only half a parent, that's really rough … It's very tough on the family life, as far as trying to raise kids and only be there half the time [I-526].

Several individuals recognized that their decisions to raise children differently than they had been raised were tied to the ways parenting styles and values have changed over the generations. In the time when many Old School fathers were raising their children, breadwinning was the primary role of men. Many of these fathers had wives who were able to stay home full-time and take responsibility for the house and children. Such is not the case today. Many wives, either by choice or necessity, are employed, and gender roles are no longer clearly delineated. New Outlook men and their wives in many cases share both breadwinning and caregiving roles. One father, in his early 40's and working as a roustabout, discussed the difference in parenting roles between his generation and his parents':

> "The male was expected to go out and earn the money and everything, and the female was expected to stay home and raise the kids and take care of the house and all the good stuff like June Cleaver. And that's part of the problem they had. Nowadays it's not like that. You know, unfortunately two parents have to work most of the time" [I-337].

Young New Outlook fathers today want to be present at the births of their children, for games and other special events, and for simple, everyday interactions. This move toward increased involvement on the part of the fathers was described by a mother during a discussion with her husband, a disabled welder fitter in his late 30's. Referring to her father's generation, she points out,

> Janice: … at that time dads didn't really relate to families anyway, not in my experience. It would have been nice to have a little extra money. But I find that dads are more of a

vital part of families now. They handle more than dads did when I was little. Dads are more of caregivers.
Roger: My dad worked in the oilfield so he was gone a lot. I guess it was pretty much the same thing for my kids because I was gone a lot because of the oilfield.
Janice: Yeah but when you were home you actively participated in their lives. Your dad was just like, ‘Get out of my way. I'm on my days off’. I think it was more a sign of the times then where they worked.
Roger: Our generation didn't feel like we had to be the John Wayne types [I-194; I-195].

Locals use "Old School," and we added “New Outlook,” to refer to attitudes about work in the oilfield. As described above, attitudes about work and lifestyle are interconnected, and there is some overlap between the way people think about their work and their roles as fathers. The relationship is complex, however, because there has been tremendous change in southern Louisiana in the past fifty years, only some of it related to social and cultural expectations about parenting. First, young workers at the start of the 21st century possess financial and material wealth many of their parents and grandparents could only imagine. In relative terms, many oilfield workers are the working poor. However, in absolute wealth, they rank far ahead of their predecessors. Some fathers are therefore in a position to work fewer hours or forego higher wages in exchange for a more stable work schedule or time with their families.

Another important difference is that many younger workers are making decisions about marrying and staying married that their parents would not even have considered. Some young men are choosing to marry or enter long-term relationships and are trying to put their families above their work. Yet others are having children to whom they offer little, if any, financial or emotional support. This study has focused on families and therefore is likely to over-represent men who are involved with their families. It is not meant to indicate that fewer men of earlier generations were committed to their families than young fathers are today.

Fathers’ Roles Today

Figure 3.3. Offshore family discusses parenting with researchers

Overall, New Outlook fathers are making attempts to be more involved with their children than those we refer to here as Old School, although this characterization certainly does not apply to every oil worker. In discussions with workers and their families, four levels of father involvement emerged (see fig. 3.3). Two of these levels involve a greater degree of responsibility for child caregiving on the part of the father and two a lesser. Amongst the fathers who are more involved with their children, the role of breadwinner is still fundamental, but caregiving roles are also assumed, and men participate in domestic responsibilities when home. In the “shared caregiving” role, men share caregiving and domestic responsibilities with their spouses; those we will refer to as “highly involved caregivers” completely take over the responsibility for these tasks. For the fathers who are less involved with their children, the function of breadwinner is primary – they do not share caregiving or other domestic responsibilities when home. Some of these men do function as "playmates" for their children, taking the children hunting or fishing on their days off work. In other cases, however, fathers' interaction with their children is limited. We refer to these fathers simply as "breadwinners."

In most offshore-worker families today, there is some degree of role sharing in the care of children. The mother serves as the primary caregiver for the period that the father is offshore, and then the father takes on, or at least shares, the caregiver role when home. One mother explained, "My husband is away a lot so most of the responsibility falls on me. But when he's home we share the responsibility of raising and disciplining the children equally" [I-771].

In other families, especially those in which the mother is also employed full-time, the father takes on an even greater responsibility for the children when he is home. Instead of sharing the child care responsibilities with his wife, the father takes over completely. As one man, a production operator in his mid-30's, commented, "so that [my wife] has her days off, I do my part. Daddy's home now, you take your vacation [I-009]." Many of these men recognize that their wives are overworked when they are gone, struggling to balance jobs, children, and responsibility for the home.

Because these fathers' work schedules allow them extended periods of time at home, many take on more of a primary caregiver role than can other men who work the more traditional 5-and-2 schedule. These fathers get their children ready in the mornings, cook for them, and chauffeur them around to appointments and activities during the day. They take over full-time responsibility for their children for days or weeks at a time, becoming "Mr. Mom." The wife of a boat captain in his 50's described how her husband took over caring for the kids on his days onshore after she went back to work:

> "When I did go back to work, PJ was two and Denise was four and [my husband] would come home for seven days and he'd haul those kids all over with him. Diapers in the back of the truck, you know, he did it all. It was cool" [I-221].

The choices this father made demonstrate that workers cannot be categorized as Old School or New Outlook solely on the basis of age. Some of the older generation have always held New Outlook attitudes and, in other cases, these ideas are filtering into the practices and values of the older workers. Likewise, some younger workers have ideas about work and family roles that are better characterized as Old School.

The shifting of roles and responsibilities that takes place every time these men leave for offshore and return home can be difficult for some families.[15] However, many employed wives find the break from at least some of their domestic and caregiving responsibilities when their husbands are home to be a relief. One such wife in her 30's described her husband's time at home:

> "When he's home I get to sleep later. The kids get to sleep later because I get up at 5:00 now and the kids get up at 5:30. When he's home I don't have to do anything with the kids at all. Just myself. Get myself dressed and leave. He combs hair. He braids my little one's hair. He curls with the curling iron. He does it all" [I-298].

In families in which both parents are employed, some form of alternative caregiving for the children is often a necessity. Family members, especially grandparents, often assist with child care, but daycare is also a common option. Every daycare provider that we spoke with in these communities could point out a few children in their facility whose fathers worked offshore. Some of these children attended daycare or preschool full-time, but others went only during those days or weeks that their fathers were working. When their fathers were home, the men kept the children home with them. One mother described the arrangement:

> "We're on a 7-and-7 schedule for [our son's] daycare too. When my husband is in he doesn't go to nursery at all. He and his dad are like [puts her hands together] … very close, very close. He has a hard time when his dad goes to work" [I-189].

Such an arrangement allows for child care on weeks when both mother and the father are working (most mothers work a more traditional 5-and-2 schedule), but gives fathers more time with their children on the days when they are home. In some cases, fathers pull even older children out of school on their days home, hoping to have some quality time together. Not all fathers take the same approach, however. One grandfather lamented to us that his son, a roustabout in his mid-20's, sends his daughter to daycare even on the days that he is onshore [I-508].

Certainly not all contemporary fathers in southern Louisiana fit into the role of highly involved family man. A number of offshore workers still consider themselves to be a breadwinner, above all else, and regard child caregiving to be primarily the responsibility of their wives. While this role is more common among Old School workers, a number of younger workers identified primarily with the role of breadwinner as well. While these fathers often do spend some time with their children, they function as playmates rather than caregivers, and do not want to spend their time off work engaged in domestic or caregiving tasks. Such is the situation described by the wife of a platform worker in her mid-30's:

> Researcher: How do you and Jack share household responsibilities?
> Linda: [laughs] We don't share. I do everything. He might baby-sit some. And when he goes down the bayous he takes the boys and acts like he's doing something great. But mostly he wants his seven days home to be OFF [I-256].

In almost all of these families, the wife is not employed outside of the home, but rather stays home full-time with the children. Many of these women accept or even prefer such an arrangement, letting their husbands assume financial responsibility for the family while they take care of the household and children. One woman in her mid-50's described how, even when her husband was home, she would take all five of her children to the grocery store with her to do the shopping for the family. For her, such roles were expected and desired [I-477].

As in any period of societal change, there is the potential for conflict. Workers, spouses, and their family members are adopting new roles at different rates. Some mothers expressed frustration in describing their husbands' lack of involvement when they were home. As one mother in her early-20's observed,

> “We do not divide anything, I do everything. Because he is here, then goes, then here, and goes. So, I do everything. I take care of everything. When he is home, he is ... on vacation” [I-202].

Such dissatisfaction stems from a lack of agreement regarding the roles mother and father should play.[16] Frustrated wives feel that they shoulder too much of the domestic and caregiving work, and want their husbands to share the responsibility and work when home.

In other cases, however, fathers feel trapped in the provider role and unable to play the more involved roles that they would like. Here the problem is not a lack of agreement regarding appropriate roles but an inability to *fulfill* the desired roles because of the realities of available work. One father, a platform worker in his mid-40’s, noted that he does take some responsibility for raising his children, but that his wife “does most of it. I think my job more or less is to provide. I wish I had more time to spend with [my children], but I don't” [I-134]. Another father felt similarly trapped; he regretted missing so much with his children. But, his wife commented, he wanted to be the breadwinner, and the only jobs available were ones that took him away from home [I-063].

Other fathers, in looking back over their lives, expressed regret that they had not spent more time with their children when the children were young. One father in his mid-30’s, discussing his relationship with his first-born, commented, “I guess I became a workaholic … when a father figure needed to be there, he was out being the bread money…” [I-554]. While “workaholics” are certainly not unique to the offshore oil industry, men working offshore are more likely to lose touch with their children, as they might not see them for weeks at a time. The above father had this revelation at an early age and could therefore change his role in the family to become a highly involved father. His wife emphasized that “[h]e adores his kids and he has always given 100 percent when he got home to them. He is just amazing” [I-560].

Another father, a driller in his 40’s, was not so fortunate. He felt that a lack of involvement with his children when they were growing up had cost him his relationship with them, something he had only realized after it was too late:

> “I can say for the big events, I made sure I was home. I missed Christmases, but for graduations I was there. But what's important about that is I sort of ennobled myself. In my mind I was doing the right thing. I was the provider. But when I look back now, I'm alienated from my two oldest daughters. I don't see my grandkids. My son sees me but I don't see [my daughters]. We're separated. Part of it is not having that bond by being home. Not building that bond and relationship with my children that I could have built over those years … And the thing about that is it sneaks up on you. I learned that I had immersed myself in work. I had ennobled myself because of it saying, ‘You have to do this because you're the provider’. So I denied my children the emotional side of me, the emotional caretaker side of me ... just my presence, you know. Just being there, and I wasn't. And it took a catastrophe for me to wake up and realize what had happened” [I-761].

Challenges and Opportunities of Concentrated Work Scheduling

For workers and their families, one of the most distinguishing and, for some most challenging, features of oilfield employment is the scheduling. The concentrated work schedules associated with various positions within this industry are often what makes this work either desirable or undesirable in the minds of workers with families. This is not to say that work schedules are the only variable that is taken into account in decisions about whether to pursue work in (or stay in) the oilfield. Issues surrounding income potential, industry stability, and safety are also central. However, discussions about preferred and disliked schedules, especially in terms of their impacts on families, were very common in conversations with workers and their spouses.

Changes in family roles and available work schedules are currently making scheduling a focal issue. Increases in rates of working mothers and a move toward greater father involvement has led to increased attention on fathers' schedules and benefits. As more and more parents jointly fill caregiver and provider roles, increasing consideration is being given to how fathers' (as well as mothers') jobs affect their ability to play these roles within their families. At the same time, restructuring and downturns in the oil industry are resulting in adjustments in both available and standard schedules in various industry sectors, and are forcing scheduling changes for workers at the individual level. These changes create stress for workers and their families and make those schedules that provide the best option for balancing oilfield employment and family involvement the most desirable.

Concentrated work schedules are being simultaneously blamed for creating work/family conflict and praised for providing fathers with more quality time to spend with their families. Those opposed to these schedules complain that they do not allow daily interaction with the family and thus cause fathers to miss watching their children grow up. At the same time, however, some (but not all) schedules are seen as presenting special opportunities to spend concentrated, quality time with children that otherwise would not be available. It is these two opposing characteristics that has led some researchers to note the two-edged quality of marriage and family life where the father is intermittently absent.[17]

Previous research from southern Louisiana on concentrated work scheduling contends that working offshore is generally problematic for families.[18] Many families do adapt to this lifestyle quite well, however, and note the perceived benefits (as well as drawbacks) of these schedules. Instead of talking about concentrated work schedules as a uniform experience, oil families discuss schedules separately, analyzing each based on how they impact the worker's ability to play the roles within the family that are desired, and expressing a wide diversity of opinions.

Workers and their families who participated in this project expressed a three to one preference for 7-and-7 schedules over either 5-and-2 or 14-and-14 schedules, the second two most popular schedules. In contrast, on-calls schedules are almost universally disliked. A number of families also pointed out that preferred work schedules often vary over one's lifetime and are likely to depend on the individual's lifestage. To some extent workers prefer the schedules they are used to and have learned to cope with successfully, but many who dislike their current schedules expressed strong desires to shift to other schedules (and other positions if necessary).

This section will discuss workers' perceptions, both positive and negative, of the various schedules common in the southern Louisiana oilpatch, and the implications of these schedules for fathers in terms of playing the roles within their families they desire. The perspective of the oil companies and their justification in using various schedules will also be considered.

5-and-2: The Middle-Class Norm

What workers in Louisiana refer to as the 5-and-2 schedule – a five day workweek, with evenings and weekends off and at home – has been constructed as the middle-class norm in the United States, and it is the standard against which all other work schedules are judged. Implicit in this social construction is that workers (namely, fathers) need to have daily, face-to-face contact with their spouses and children for these families to function properly. Daily interaction is elevated in importance above quality or quantity of time spent together, and work schedules that do not permit this type of daily interaction are considered more likely to be problematic.

In these southern Louisiana communities, however, 5-and-2 has never been the norm. As mentioned previously, the economic pursuits common in the area prior to the arrival of oil, such as fishing, shrimping, trapping, and farming, were seasonal occupations that could require extended absences from the home. Because these were family enterprises, however, there was usually not a separation of the male "provider" from the rest of the family as occurs with concentrated work schedules today.

There are 5-and-2 schedules available in these communities today. In the oil industry, 5-and-2 is only found among some onshore positions; all offshore positions entail extended absences. Given the distance of platforms from land and the cost of transportation to and from the platforms, schedules permitting workers to come home every night are simply not feasible. Housing workers on the platforms for a week or more at a time not only lowers transportation costs, but it also allows for around-the-clock operation. Extended offshore stints also allow workers a greater choice in place of residence: since they do not have to commute to work daily, workers can live farther away from their place of employment.[19]

Because there are no 5-and-2 offshore positions, workers who want these schedules must either transition into an onshore position or seek work outside of the oil industry. Families cite a number of reasons for wanting 5-and-2 schedules, including wanting both parents to be there for their family, wanting to have daily interaction among spouses and children, and not wanting either spouse to be just "half" a parent. As one worker noted, by working 5-and-2, a father can be home every night to see his children. He can watch them grow and be a daily a part of their lives. As this worker pointed out, fathers on concentrated work schedules do not have the same opportunity for daily involvement [I-508].

Some men feel that offshore work is simply incompatible with having a family. One such young father cited his desire for a family as the reason for his recent move out of the oil industry:

> "The reason I went to [the new company] is that I'm tired of working offshore, to be honest. You can't really have a life and work offshore. I want a family, kids. But working out there – I can't do it if I'm working out there. Call me old fashioned, but I'm going to be there for my family" [I-379].

Another father recounted a similar story. Working 7-and-7 and about to be married, this man decided that he wanted to be able to stay home more often. He therefore switched to an onshore job with 5-and-2 scheduling, even though it meant taking a cut in pay. The man drove to Intracoastal City (approximately an hour away) every day and returned home every night. Despite the drive, he said that he loved this schedule, since it allowed him to be home every night with his wife and two kids [I-164].

While this worker was financially stable enough to take a cut in pay to get the schedule he preferred, this option is not available to all families. In general, offshore oil positions pay much better than other employment options in the two research communities. Some families thus feel financially trapped in the industry. Others are simply unwilling to make the financial sacrifice of a job switch because they have become used to the standard of living provided by offshore oil work. The wife of a production operator cited such financial concerns as the reason for her husband's continued involvement in offshore work:

> "He doesn't like being away from his family. He hates it. He despises it. And every now and then I say, 'Why don't you go get a job at Lowe's lumber company or something?', and he says, 'Because our costs of living. I cannot go to Lowe's and get a minimum wage job and support my family'" [I-015].

One of the drawbacks of 5-and-2 that is not always taken into consideration is that many individuals do not only work a 40 hour workweek. Many jobs require long hours on weekdays and occasional weekends. Thus, what appears to be family time may actually be spent on the job. As the grown son of an onshore manager recounted, simply having a father who technically worked 5-and-2 did not mean that they had time to spend together:

> "My dad has been with [the same service company] for 24 years and is one of the highest men in this area. And he still works 6:00 in the morning 'till 9:00 at night. Saturday he was at work. My dad was always gone. I can probably count the games my dad made to the high school on both my hands. And I started playing basketball in the seventh grade and played varsity basketball and golf and baseball. He just wasn't around" [I-307].

Such complaints were not isolated. The wife of a former inspector commented that her husband used to work seven days a week, and that it was not unusual for him to get home late at night. She observed, "We actually spend more time together now [with a 28-and-14 offshore schedule]." "But," she noted, "he did come home every night [with the previous schedule], and that was good for the boys. If something needed addressing, then he was there. It didn't have to wait a week" [I-285]. This tradeoff was frequently mentioned in comparisons of 5-and-2 and concentrated work schedules – 5-and-2 does provide everyday contact, but less family time overall.

Workers who are unhappy with concentrated work scheduling often idealize the 5-and-2 schedule, assuming that such a schedule would allow them the family interactions they currently miss. Because a 5-and-2 schedule is less common in these communities than it is in most others, few understand the potential downsides. Some men who make the switch to 5-and-2 are very happy with their new schedules. However, as recounted by the wife of a shorebase manager, some discover the benefits of 7-and-7 only after experiencing 5-and-2 firsthand:

> "[My husband] used to always gripe, 'Those people who work 5-and-2, they've got it made'. So, he went to work 5-and-2. He hated it. He had no time off to do anything. When he went back to 7-and-7, he never said a word. He loves it. I tried to get him to go back 5-and-2 and he said, 'No!'" [I-179].

7-and-7: The "Gravy Job"

Of all the possible offshore schedules, 7-and-7 is the most popular, and, historically, has been the most common. It is likely that one reason for the popularity of 7-and-7 today is contemporary workers' upbringing in families that were governed by the same schedule. Workers and their spouses are comfortable with the schedule because of its longtime familiarity.

Some families simply like the 7-and-7 schedule; in other cases, it is just perceived as the best of the available options for offshore work since it involves the fewest consecutive days away from home. A great deal of debate exists among workers and researchers as to the ultimate effect of concentrated work scheduling on families. Many workers feel that schedules such as 7-and-7 provide them with more quality time with their spouses and children than do traditional schedules. Because of this, some workers actively seek out positions with 7-and-7 schedules once they have children:

> "I was fortunate enough to be home for all my kids' births. Growing up ... it got to the point one time that I was working so much that I told them I needed a 7-and-7 to be home more. I said my family's growing and I want to enjoy my kids ... I want to see my kids grow. And at that time I started working my first 7-and-7 ... Anyway, I feel a person working five days a week – 5-and-2, 8:00 to 5:00 and home every weekend – I felt I was still able to be with my kids more. I mean, I was home seven days at a time ... It has its pros and cons" [I-303].

With seven consecutive days off, workers have a considerable amount of free, unstructured time. A father noted that, with 7-and-7, "I have more quality time with the kids, especially during the summer. We party all day long. We go swimming and everything else" [I-208]. Many fathers highlighted the activities – such as hunting and fishing – that blocks of free time allowed them to enjoy with their children. Many also recognized that there were disadvantages to offshore work as well, but felt that the benefits outweighed the drawbacks:

> "I don't remember [offshore] work being a problem ... When you're home, it's great. You're not tired. You can devote your whole time to them when you're home. I think there are naturally advantages and disadvantages. But if you play the advantages, like we really did... And in the summertime, seven days and the kids are off, you can go fishing for seven days" [I-190].

Several fathers were also able to be more involved with their children's schools and school activities as a result of their schedules. One father volunteered to be a school "mom." This man spent time in his son's kindergarten classroom reading to the children and helping the teachers, something that made his son very proud [I-184]. Other fathers commented that their schedules allowed them to be volunteers for their children's fieldtrips, something that other fathers working 5-and-2 were unable to do.

A number of children also commented that they preferred schedules such as 7-and-7 because of the blocks of uninterrupted time they were able to spend with their fathers. When asked what family life was like with his dad being gone so much, the son of a former driller replied, "It was cool, because when he wasn't working, he had seven days off to spend with us. We could go do things. We could take fishing trips and spend all day together" [I-365].

Other activities, however, were often complicated or prevented by offshore schedules. A number of fathers expressed regret over missing school events, plays, concerts, and sporting events when they were offshore. As one mud engineer noted, "I have never coached a little league team because I'm never here and I don't know when I'm going to be gone" [I-305].

The downside of all concentrated work schedules, including 7-and-7, is that workers must spend half of their time away from family. While this sounds like an excessive amount of time to invest in work, however, it must be considered that most individuals working an average 5-and-2 week usually spend almost half of their waking hours at work as well. The difference between the two types of schedule is that offshore workers are absent for blocks of time and therefore miss out on daily interaction. Some researchers have argued that it is difficult to make up for participation missed during these extended periods of absence.[20] Other members of the family usually operate on more traditional time schedules. Whether it is school, for a child, or work, for a spouse, these family members have other, competing obligations that prevent the worker from being able to spend all of his free time with them.

Many fathers' complaints about concentrated work scheduling centered around concerns regarding missed time with children. While this issue came up more frequently in discussions about 14-and-14 or 28-and-28, many workers feel that even 7-and-7 makes them miss out on too much of their children's lives. They noted that young children, especially infants, change very fast, so that although they are gone only seven days at a time, they still miss a lot. One such father in his 50's lamented having missed many of his children's developmental milestones:

> "John was like two when I started … any time you come back home he'd be doing something different … In a seven day period...babies do a lot in seven days. And you know you don't notice it if you're gone one day or two days, and you come back it's the same. But when you leave like six or seven days and come back, there's always something different, something you missed. I missed both our daughters when they started crawling, and I missed when John started walking" [I-325].

Even more distressing for fathers is having their infants or toddlers not recognize them when they return from offshore. One mother, the wife of a boat captain, recounted that her husband has to reacquaint himself with their one-year old daughter every time he comes home [I-623]. The wife of a former crew boat captain related how such an experience led her husband to leave the industry while their daughter was still young. Even though he was only gone for seven days at a time, their young daughter was perplexed every time he returned home. By the time she got used to him being home, he had to leave again. He quit the oil industry when she was two and went into construction [I-735].

While some families criticize 7-and-7 for keeping men away from their families for too long, others complain that seven days is too short a period for time off. Because of travel time, seven days off work does not translate into seven days at home with the family. The wife of a drilling rig manager out it this way:

> "Seven-and-seven was okay because it was just us, but for my kids that is a joke. It takes a day to get home and a day to leave, so you are talking five days. [The company] have nine of those days, I get five. Our family gets five. I call that cheating. I do. With him working 28-and-28 he has more time at home, more quality time" [I-515].

Seven-and-seven is also occasionally criticized for creating too many periods of onshore/offshore transition and for being too short a period to get settled into a pattern between transitions.[21] With longer schedules, families lose fewer days to travel, endure fewer transitions, and have more time to settle into a pattern.

14-and-14: The New Standard?

Discussions and debates about the relative advantages and disadvantages of 7-and-7 and 14-and-14 center around two competing concerns: (1) How much time is too much time away from home; and, (2) What constitutes too little time at home between offshore stints? The balance between these two issues is struck differently by different families, and provides the basis for differing opinions regarding the relative merits of these schedules.

Those who find seven days at home to be too rushed often prefer 14-and-14:

> "Some people find it hard to be away from home for more than seven days. That used to be the standard, 7-and-7. And now people are going to 14-and-14 to cut down on the transportation. Fourteen days away from home is really hard, but you are really at home more because ... [t]he day you come home, it is shot, and the day you go out is shot, and for me the day before I go out is shot too because my mind is on going out so if you are working 7-and-7 you are really home only four days" [I-304].

Like this barge engineer, many men do not like being away from their families for 14 days at a time. Workers became used to separations of seven days when that was the standard, but they find longer absences hard to cope with. However, while the absence is hard, many appreciate the fact that "you can plan more things and spend more time with the family when you are off for 14 days" [I-772].

Maintaining contact with children was a central reason many workers did not want their absences to extend past seven days. These fathers had found that news and events in their children's lives were still fresh after seven days, and that they were thus in a sense able to become involved after-the-fact. After 14 days, however, too much time had passed, and too many events had occurred that could not be recaptured. A father working in production gave an example:

> "... [W]hen they come home, you want to hear about ... my boy made the baseball team. He tried out and out of 30 people, he made the varsity team. Twelve of them were picked and he made it. I was offshore when they told him that. But I was home a few days after, so the excitement was still there. Fourteen days, you would have lost all of that. Fourteen days is too long. I don't want to do it" [I-319].

Many workers actively resist switching to 14-and-14 schedules due to concerns such as these. As one worker pointed out, many companies with operations in the Gulf are moving away from 7-and-7 and making 14-and-14 the new standard. This move to longer schedules appears to be part of a global trend in the oil and gas industry. In Newfoundland, for example, the new standard is 21-and-21 for platform workers, and 28-and-28 for boats serving the oil sector.[22]

Figure 3.4 Landing offshore

The reasons for the change in the Gulf are tied to issues of distance and, ultimately, money. Helicopter transportation has become very common and is a particularly expensive company cost (see fig 3.4). Seven-and-seven was an efficient schedule for offshore operations when exploration and development were centered in the OCS. As Gulf activity shifts to include deepwater operations, the increased distance to the platforms means both increased time and transportation costs. In an effort to both reduce both, many companies are slowly moving from 7-and-7 to 14-and-14. For the companies, 7-and-7 is just no longer cost-effective. As one worker related,

"Now there is going to be a big change in 1999 in that [my] company is going to go 14-and-14, not 7-and-7 ... That will be my schedule and it's not liked by any of us, but it's because times are hard and they can save money if we go 14-and-14" [I-190].

Some men feel so strongly about being gone from home *no longer* than seven days at a time that they would be willing to change companies or even leave the oil industry if 7-and-7 work were no longer available.

Such resistance is related to genuine concerns on the part of the workers and their families regarding the impact of these more lengthy separations on family members, particularly the children. Workers fear that longer separations will negatively impact their relationships with their children and prevent them from playing the roles in their children's lives that they desire. Families also are frustrated by what they perceive to be a continuing shift on the part of the companies away from a concern about their employees and their families to a consideration of only the bottom-line. The imposition of 14-and-14 as the new schedule, without a sincere attempt on the part of the companies to consider worker's opinions on this matter, is seen simply as further evidence of this erosion of the importance of the worker as an individual.

28-and-28: Overseas Employment

While most workers in southern Louisiana employed in the oil and gas sector work in the Gulf, a number of residents are also involved in overseas projects. Because of the distance they must travel, these men work longer schedules, typically 28-and-28 at a minimum. While there are a few positions within the Gulf where 28-and-28 schedules are used, such as on some of the boats servicing platforms, most men on these schedules are working in foreign waters.

Southern Louisiana workers have been involved in overseas projects since the 1970's. At the height of the oil boom in the 1970's, some local Cajun workers were asked to go to the North Sea because of their experience and expertise. Cajuns were elevated from uneducated manual laborers to experts and leaders in the oilpatch. Being in demand for their skills instilled a sense of pride in these workers and the region in general; the longer schedules were an accepted tradeoff for this honor. During the bust in the 1980's, many workers unable to find local positions accepted 28-and-28 schedules and went overseas as well. For these workers and their families, however, this was less of a choice and a source of pride than an economic necessity.

The processes of globalization and industry restructuring have changed the meaning of overseas work. As the oil majors and service companies have expanded into the global market and now have operations in such distant locales as China, Africa, Scotland, Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, and Trinidad, workers living in southern Louisiana are no longer guaranteed positions close to home. Companies place workers with the skills they need in the locations that need those skills, whether that is the Gulf of Mexico or the China Sea. Lost for workers is the pride and the personal choice in where they work; workers take the assignment the company offers, and, if they refuse, there are many other willing replacements.

Families' opinions of 28-and-28 largely depend on what stage in life they were in while working this schedule. A maintenance supervisor working in the China Sea commented that being away from home for 28 days was really not that bad, but his wife was quick to note that it would be different if they had children [I-446]. Families generally agree that 28 days is simply too long for a father to be away from his children. The concerns expressed above about 14-and-14 schedules are only compounded when the time away from home is doubled. As the wife of one service consultant who had pulled three hitches of 28 days commented, "We chose not to do it [again] because it was really hard on me with the kids, and it was hard on the kids" [I-388].

Other families recounted stories about moving to shorter schedules because of the negative impact the lengthy absences were having on the children and their relationship with their father. The wife of a driller related how, when their youngest son turned two, she told her husband that it was time for him to be home more often. Both she and her husband realized that he was missing a lot of their sons' development. At that time the father was working 28-and-28; he managed to find a position that was in the States and thus switched to working 14-and-14 [I-497]. Another couple explicitly noted that they currently prefer 7-and-7 because they have small children. They both agreed, however, that for older couples, 14-and-14 or 28-and-28 is not so bad [I-505].

Although families with small children and teenagers tried to avoid schedules that result in these long separations, couples with grown children occasionally seek out 28-and-28 schedules. The wife of an offshore maintenance supervisor related how her husband never took jobs that required absences longer than ten days while their children were young. Once their last child graduated from high school, however, her husband took a 28-and-28 position in the China Sea with higher pay in hopes of retiring sooner [I-447]. Other couples with grown children commented that they liked 28-and-28 because they could take off on long vacations for the month they had off. Because many workers on concentrated scheduling do not earn vacation, these schedules offer the only way to get off work for long periods time.

Longer schedules also allow families to get settled into a routine, both during the father's time offshore and his time home, which is not always possible with shorter schedules. Families are also forced to endure fewer stressful transitions. As one wife commented, "to me [it] is harder to adjust to every other week than it is a month at a time. Because a month, you get into a routine. You have a longer time to adjust" [I-515]. However, adjustments in the family's routine to accommodate the father when he is back are also more difficult once routines without the father have become well established in his absence; because of this, longer schedules were almost universally believed be too disruptive for families with children.[23]

On-Call Schedules: Living with Unpredictability

On-call schedules, particularly those that take workers offshore, are almost universally disliked. These schedules are prevalent for divers and those in contract positions. Workers can be called out with as little as a few hours notice, and often they do not have a good idea of the amount of time they will spend offshore once gone. These families' lives are completely unpredictable and they often feel they are at the mercy of their companies.

Because there is no predictability to the schedules, families find it virtually impossible to make any set plans that include the worker. Even last minute plans to go out for dinner can be interrupted by a call to go in to work. Community involvement is also unrealistic since the worker never knows when he will be available. The coping mechanisms that families develop to manage life with set offshore schedules are also not useful in this context; routines involving division of household labor or caregiving are impossible without having predictable periods of time at home. For one young mother trying to start college, her husband's on-call schedule meant that she could not even depend on him to be able to watch their child one afternoon while she attended orientation. Four days in advance, it looked like he would be home and available, but he ended up being called out the night before, and she was left to frantically attempt to make other arrangements. As her husband commented, diving "would be the perfect job for a single man," but with no set schedule it is just too hard on the family [I-705; I-706].

Children find this unpredictability especially difficult. Young children learn to deal with father absence relatively well when they know when their father is leaving and how long he will be gone. However, when they do not know when their father will leave or be back, insecurities can develop. One mother blames this for her toddler's separation anxiety; both the child's father and step-father have somewhat unpredictable schedules, and the child has a tendency to get very anxious when either of them leaves the house [I-701]. Another young mother whose husband works as a diver complained, "I'm going to hate it when [my son] is a little older, going, ‘When’s daddy coming home?’ And I’m going, ‘I have no earthly idea’” [I-706]. These fathers also cannot guarantee they will be home for Christmas, birthdays, or other events important to their children. While fathers on set schedules also regularly miss these special occasions, they know well in advance whether they will be able to attend.

This unpredictability also leads to a lack of financial stability. Since workers do not have a set schedule, there is no guarantee of a certain amount of work in any given period. When oil is up, these workers are gone all of the time; work and pay are plentiful. However, when oil is down, workers are home for extended periods between jobs. These men are caught between wanting to spend time at home with their families, but knowing that when they are home they are not working and thus not earning the money their family needs. After only a few days off, these men begin to get worried about when they will get their next job. One diver related how, after a few days home, he would go into the company shop to let himself “be seen” and thus remind his supervisors that he was available for upcoming jobs [I-705]. Unlike workers on set schedules, time at home is not really time away from work; the threat of being called out, or the worry about *not* being called out, constantly hangs over the heads of these men and their families.

For the companies, on-call scheduling is an economic decision. Companies want to have workers available when they need them, but they don’t want to pay for these workers to sit around between projects. In response to this, companies are increasingly employing contract workers who are on-call and thus available to respond immediately when a new project comes in. Companies are therefore able to utilize their workers and their talents, but only pay them for the time needed to complete the task. For workers, however, this means they can never afford to turn down a job; if they do, the next time the company might call someone else who won’t say “no.” And, since work is unpredictable, they never know how long it might be until the next call will come.

This unpredictability that characterizes the on-call lifestyle led one worker to emphasize that no job is good enough to make it worth working on-call [I-446]. The attrition rates experienced by the diving companies seem to tell a similar story. A diver we spoke with estimated that for every 20 workers hired as tenders, only five stick it out to become divers, a process that takes two years; because of this, his company never had to resort to layoffs during the 1999 downturn. This same young diver promised to soon be part of this attrition statistic:

> “I’m trying to get in with a production company, working on the platforms, seven on, seven off. Money will be better, and I’ll be able to plan things, you know, I’ll be able to say well I’ll be home this date and I’ll be leaving this date. But I’m just kind of waiting for the industry to pick back up, hoping it will pick back up a little more before the end, the beginning of the year, and then I’ll probably be getting on with them” [I-705].

Adaptation, Change, and Coping

The fact that every schedule discussed above has its group of supporters demonstrates that workers and their families can adapt to just about any of work schedule; amazingly, some even manage to adapt to on-call schedules. However, while families can become accustomed to any of these schedules, the ways they effectively cope varies based on the length of the worker's absence.

When gone for a relatively short period of time such as seven days, things that the wife cannot take care of herself (and are not emergencies) can wait until her husband returns. As one wife of a 7-and-7 worker commented, when the husband is offshore, "You're the daddy, you're the mama, you're the maid, you're the mechanic, you're the gardener. You do everything. When he comes back you have some 'honey do' lists ..." [I-220]. Part of the husband's duty while home is to take care of these items that his wife has designated as his responsibility. In the case of things requiring more urgent attention, wives tend to turn to members of their informal support networks in their husband's absence.[24] Relatives, as well as close friends and neighbors and members of the family's congregation, can be called upon for help with emergency repairs, child care, health emergencies and other crises.

Women whose husbands were available by phone while offshore would sometimes call upon them for advice or assistance. An assistant field foreman working 7-and-7 discussed how he would try to help with disciplinary problems with his children while gone:

> "Often times, when some incident would happen when I was gone, and it was fairly significant, with the children, I would talk to them about it over the phone. And when I would get home, I'd have a heart to heart, face to face talk with the children" [I-626].

Women whose husbands are absent for a month at a time by necessity developed very different ways of coping. Things that can be put off for seven days often cannot be delayed a month; as a result, wives of workers on 28-and-28 schedules tended to rely on their informal networks even more than women with husbands on 7-and-7.

> Researcher: So, if anything came up, say if there was a problem or something, did you just handle that on your own or did you ... Or did you wait for him to call?
> Tina: No. I would tell him about it when he called. A lot if times, if it was something I couldn't handle, well, you know, I have family close by in Morgan City. David or Daddy or one of them would give me a hand with stuff. But I mean, there was not a lot he could do while he was over there. ... He couldn't tell me why the lawn mower doesn't work! [I-769].

She went on to add that the minute her husband leaves something always goes wrong, but at least she has her family, "I would hate to be somewhere without them. I have never been without them before."

Another wife of a boat captain working 28-and-28 described the unique way she has come to cope with her husband's long absences. About once every two weeks, when the boat is in port and her husband needs to do the grocery shopping for the boat, she and their young son drive down and meet him at the market. They spend the three or four hours it takes to complete the shopping wandering through the aisles together and catching up [I-386].

Coping strategies used by wives of workers on 14-and-14 schedules fall somewhere between these two. These women can leave more tasks until their husband's return than those working 28-and-28, but they call upon their informal networks for assistance more than women whose husbands work 7-and-7. On-call schedules are the most difficult to cope with successfully. Because there is no set schedule to adapt to, these families must learn to be extremely flexible. These spouses do best when they have extremely strong informal networks; since they cannot predict when their husbands will be home, they must learn to depend instead on friends and relatives for assistance or handle everything themselves.

Once families have adapted successfully to any given schedule, they usually function relatively well. The problem comes when the schedule to which they have adapted changes. The strategies families used to cope with their old schedule may not work effectively with their new schedule; as a result, new strategies of coping must be developed. This often includes a reorganization of the lives of all the family members to accommodate the worker's new schedule. This transition can be extremely stressful for families, especially if the change was not desired.

An analysis of the occupational timelines of workers we spoke with indicates that scheduling changes are not uncommon. Almost a third of these workers indicated that they had experienced multiple scheduling changes throughout their careers. Some of these changes are self-initiated; however, many are imposed on workers by the companies. As discussed earlier, industry restructuring and concerns about transportation costs have resulted in many scheduling changes for workers. In addition, companies tend to cut hours or adjust schedules during downturns. These involuntary schedule changes during already stressful economic periods can negatively impact the family's ability to cope.

Even scheduling changes that are desired and initiated by the worker can be stressful initially due to the shifts such changes necessitate in the lives of other family members. Workers often try to move into new positions with schedules they prefer. However, they often have to wait until appropriate positions are available. In the meantime, families manage to adapt to schedules that they dislike or are less preferred. Ultimately, these families are happier once working schedules they prefer, but even these changes require a period of adjustment.

Families may initiate scheduling changes at several points during their lives in an effort to accommodate their needs at different stages in their lives. Fathers wishing to be highly involved fathers need to be present in their children's lives; however, families define "involved" in different ways. For some, this means daily involvement; for others, it necessitates blocks of free time. In terms of family well-being, it is less critical though how these roles are defined than whether the work schedule permits the father to fulfill the role *as he and his spouse define it*.

As a general rule, families with young children prefer shorter schedules, but longer schedules may be acceptable for families with no children or grown children. Some families find that all forms of concentrated work scheduling prove too disruptive when they have young children; others find this to be true with teens. This diversity of opinions is why workers and their families need at least some degree of flexibility and control in their work schedules. Those able to work the schedules that permit them to play the roles they desire as fathers will be happier with their lives and jobs. In contrast, those unable to fulfill desired fathering roles because their work schedules interfere suffer from increased work/family role conflict, which ultimately leads to increased family dysfunction and, in some cases, workers leaving the oil industry.

Workplace Policies Affecting Fathering

Modern workers no longer choose between jobs on the basis of salary alone. As discussed above, the schedules associated with various positions are important considerations for oilfield workers. Workers also consider the fringe benefits offered by companies an important part of the package they consider in decisions about jobs. Following World War II, southern Louisiana's transition from a subsistence to a wage economy marked a significant change in the ability of most families to meet their needs. High costs of medical care and longer life expectancies have forced another shift in how families cope; in this shift, wages are becoming secondary to benefit packages. Benefits offered fall into two basic categories – those that translate into surrogate money, such as insurance benefits and retirement/401K plans, and those that give workers room to fulfill their family roles by offering work-time flexibility.

As the fathering role has shifted to include caregiving responsibilities alongside the traditional breadwinning role, there has been a push to restructure corporate America to incorporate more "father-friendly" policies. In the past, the work/family issue has been conceptualized as a working mother's issue, and most company policies designed to reduce work/family conflict have focused on women. Today, however, both mothers and fathers report a great deal of work/family conflict and stress. Research has shown that, to reduce this feeling of work/family conflict, men want more connection with their children. To accomplish this, fathers emphasize they need more control over their work time.[25]

Internal research by a number of companies in the 1980's found work/family issues were very important for men. DuPont found that the number one expressed need of its male employees was flexible scheduling; employees felt this would help them better balance work and family life. Many companies have found that paying attention to father's needs makes good business sense and may actually help the bottom line. For example, First Tennessee Bank reduced turnover by fifty percent when they heeded their employees' request for more flexible hours. In addition, such policy shifts often result in an improvement in the overall perception of the company by employees because it is perceived that the company cares about its employees and their families.[26] In general, however, demand for such family-friendly policies still exceeds their availability. Such policy revisions to accommodate fathers desiring more involved roles with their children have not yet occurred within the majority of the companies serving the oil and gas industry, at least at the level of the offshore worker.

For workers with family roles and responsibilities, the ability to take time off is another important issue. Fathers need and want to be able to take time off to be with their wives for their children's births and for family emergencies. Unfortunately, formal paternity leave policies are generally absent, and not many workers are able to effectively use personal days (paid or unpaid) to take time off after the birth of a child. Workers also want to have days they can use to be home for birthdays, to attend school events, and to take care of family needs. This is complicated, however, by the fact that taking days off while already offshore results in increased transportation expenses on the part of the company.

In general, oilfield companies are good about getting workers in for births and emergencies within the immediate family. As one worker indicated,

> “With deaths in the family or pregnancies, there has always been kind of an understanding in the oilfield. Those are priorities that need to be taken care of at all costs. Now there are some that just do not make it in due to logistics of transportation, but for the most part, if you went up to someone offshore and said ‘Man, I've got to get in. My wife just went in to labor’, they went to scrambling” [I-554].

However, judging by the number of fathers who reported not making it in for all of their children’s births, there is still considerable room for improvement here. One father commented that while he was home for two of his children's births, he missed two others. He said that these two were born when he was on a new job offshore and was afraid to ask off for their births because it might reflect on him poorly. He commented that he knows some guys who go home for every birth, funeral, etc., but their jobs suffer because they are not seen as being dedicated [I-473].

In addition, while companies go to heroic efforts to get their workers in for births, these new fathers are often required to report back to work after a relatively short period of time. The wife of a former production worker recounted how difficult it was for her when her husband had to leave to return offshore before she was out of the hospital after giving birth to her second daughter via Cesarean section [I-863]. Another wife reported a similar experience; one of her children had to have surgery right after he was born. Her husband was able to stay with her through the birth but had to go offshore during the surgery. She felt fortunate that she had her family there to support her, but she still felt very alone in having to deal with her fear and sadness in her husband’s absence [I-436].

While many workers seem to accept such events as part of the oilfield life, others find such callousness of the part of the companies entirely unacceptable. This is intensified by their perception that many companies in the past used to be more accommodating of the workers’ family needs, and that other companies exist that still are. For example, one boat captain we spoke with related how his employer worked with him to give him office work so that he would be onshore when his wife was due:

> Researcher: So when Michael was actually born were you able to come in?
> Peter: Yeah, I ... six months earlier, we set it up. I wrote a letter, I asked in the office, ‘What do I have to do, my wife's going to be due in November. I need to be put on a boat behind the office or in the shipyard where I'm not stuck out on a boat when she's in labor’ ... So, they put me behind the office for a week ... If I went to the office right now, well it's kind of tight, I don't know what they would say. But in good times I could go, I could say I need to spend a little time at the house, they'd give me six months shore duty. Whatever, moving papers in the office, washing cars, and I'd probably be able to come home every night [I-383].

The flexibility this one boat captain experienced is, unfortunately, not characteristic of all contemporary oil-related employers in southern Louisiana. Workers complain that as companies have merged, many have become more corporate minded rather than family oriented, dropping “family days” and limiting unscheduled trips onshore to immediate family emergencies. Whereas employers used to care about their workers, today the workers feel, “You’re not people anymore ... You’re an employee number” [I-304]. One worker described how in the past he was able to come in from offshore to deal with situations where his wife needed assistance:

> Ray: “I've had to come in, sneak in on a late flight, and then take care of some issue that Joanie couldn't handle with the kids. Yeah, minor stuff, I've never had any major situations, but I felt it was important for support that I was there and at that time, the company allowed this kind of thing. Today, I don't know.”
> Researcher: So you'd come in early?
> Ray: No, I'd come in for an evening.
> Researcher: And was this when you were working in inland waters?
> Ray: No, this was when I was working offshore, out of Intercoastal City. Transportation was a bit more available, and it could usually be arranged. Today, transportation is so tight, you have to declare an emergency. Maybe I did this when my children were young, six or eight times in say 15 or 17 years so I didn't abuse it [I-626].

Oilfield companies also appear to have been better in the past about getting fathers home for holidays, Christmas in particular.

> Scott: One thing they did make sure, that made sure some way, some how, you got home for Christmas, even if you were scheduled to work.
> Researcher: Who made sure?
> Scott: The company. Not all the time, but at least some time during the day I was home. They would even shut rigs down for Christmas [I-345].

Both workers and spouses commented frequently about how often fathers were stuck offshore for holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, children’s plays, and other special occasions or events, and how little control they had over such absences. For families with children, being stuck offshore for Christmas, or other special occasions such as birthdays, is often a large disappointment for both the father and the children. Today, most families adapt by celebrating the holiday either before the father leaves to go offshore or once he returns. As one father commented, “if we see that I am going to be offshore for Christmas we celebrate early. We tell the kids that Santa's passing early because Dad is not going to be home for the real Christmas” [I-175].

Rescheduling is a common family adaptation for family-focused holidays, but it is not possible for community-oriented events such as parades and graduations. Missing out on those events remains a significant source of stress for many workers and their families. Mothers talked about how their graduating seniors told themselves, up until the night of graduation, that their fathers would not be present for their graduation in order to lessen the disappointment they would face if their fathers were not able to attend.

Increased emphasis on cost-containment by many companies has resulted in a destruction of the employee loyalty that used to exist, a point recognized by these employers. As an operations manager for one of the large area employers told us in a focus group in March, 2000,

> "This time last year, maybe February or March, we reacted to the downturn and laid off one third of our workforce. That was almost 400 employees. Three months later we were trying to find workers. They'd disappeared on us already. In the latest downturn, what I've seen is that people have become a commodity. Companies are not loyal to people, and people are not loyal to companies" [Focus Group 12, Morgan City].

As this individual went on to explain, loyalty has become "too much of a financial burden." Alienation of workers may soon become even a worse problem, however. This problem has been discussed for several years in oil and gas publications, but a recent article in *Business Week* provides evidence that it is now recognized in the wider business community as well. This article noted that many exploration and service companies are facing a shortage of skilled workers, and this lack of workers is functioning currently as a major constraint on the industry.[27] To get the workers they need, companies may need to make themselves more attractive employers by working harder to accommodate the family needs of their workers and making their workers once again a priority.

As companies in other industries have discovered, implementing policies that help their employees make family a priority can drastically reduce turnover. Workers will stay at companies that they believe take their best interests into consideration.

> "They care about their people. They take care of their people – not just me. I have had a bad accident with them but I have seen other people who have been hurt or had a death in the family. You don't lose your paycheck. You go to the funeral. Family is first with them, family always comes first with them … I could not see leaving them. I enjoy working with them, like I say you got people that really care about you. You don't want to lose that" [I-304].

Some companies are making an effort. While they may not be making it easier to get home, some are trying to make communication easier and more affordable while their workers are offshore. Some of the newer boats and platforms have e-mail and wireless communication technology available to their workers; others use pagers. Men working overseas sometimes communicate home by fax. As the human resources director for one of the large boating companies commented, "We've closed the gap. We've made home a lot closer. ... We've used technology to close that gap to help them be a parent even if they're physically not there" [Focus Group 12, Morgan City].

There is, however, still significant room for improvement. While communication has improved in some cases, many spouses still complain that contacting spouses while offshore is difficult and/or prohibitively expensive. For others, scheduling and time-off are the critical issues. Flexible scheduling for offshore workers obviously cannot take the forms it does in corporate America, but neither can workers' family needs be ignored. If this persists, work/family conflict will continue to worse, and those workers who can will leave the industry. For companies, the cost of lost loyalty will only continue to rise.

The Future Generation of Oil Workers?

The experiences of today’s oilfield workers and their spouses are heavily influencing parents’ views of whether their children should become involved in the oil industry. Children's own ideas about future careers and possible involvement in oil are also being shaped by their first-hand experience with the oil lifestyle. Because of the current shortage of experienced workers and the dominance of the oil industry within these communities, these are important issues. These parents have the power to determine the face of the future generation of workers through the guidance and advice they give their children.

Even though many families like some form of concentrated work scheduling and feel that oil has given them a good life, many explained that they would prefer that their children take different career paths than they themselves did. Of those who discussed their preferences on whether they did (or did not) want their children to work in oil, approximately fifty percent noted that they have either “discouraged” or “dissuaded” their children from going into oil, or that they “wouldn’t advise” that choice of jobs for their children. A few parents even expressed stronger negative opinions about oil as a potential career:

> “I said whatever you do in life, don't go to work for a blankity blank, blankity blank, blankity blank oil company. Whatever you do! Do something else with your life, boy. I'll send you to college, I'll send you to tech schools, I'll spend money on your butt, do something with your life. Don't do like I did” [I-626].

Figure 3.7. Work in offshore drilling

This father represents one extreme. A few parents expressed equally strong desires for their children to seek employment in oil or follow them into oil; however, they were definitely in the minority.

Most other parents were opposed to but nevertheless somewhat ambivalent about their children seeking work in oil. As one mother commented, “…so whether he (her son) goes into the oilfield, it wouldn’t be my choice for him, but if that is what he would like to do…” [I-560]. These parents recognize that oil has provided them with a good life, but having experienced the industry firsthand, they also recognize its downsides. A few parents brought up issues surrounding family time and absence from the family as reasons to avoid the oil industry generally, and offshore work specifically, but more cited concerns about the instability of the industry and the fact that there is no security in oil, as well as the dangers inherent in the work (see fig. 3.7).

Almost all parents stressed education for their children. As one father commented, his own career options were limited because he only finished high school; with college, his children can do anything they want, whether or not it is related to the oilfield [I-632]. As everywhere, parents in southern Louisiana want better lives and opportunities for their kids, and many see higher education as the avenue. The following mother, the wife of an electrical technician working in production, summed up quite eloquently the feelings of many of these parents:

> "... we both tell the kids ... we talk to them and tell them that they need to go to college. We do not want them to work offshore. [My husband's] job has provided us with this home and a good family income, but I want so much more for my boys" [I-843].

At the same time, though, parents recognize that the options for employment in their communities are limited, and that their children may have little choice about whether to work in the oil industry if they stay in the area. One father, who became involved in oil against the advice of his own father, preached to his 18-year old, "It is a cycle. Stay in this area and you will be drawn in. Money draws you like a magnet … Get an education and get out of this humbug" [I-328].

These parents' dissatisfaction with employment opportunities is tied at least partially to the unrealistic expectations many New Outlook workers have about work. This younger generation of workers, and now their children who represent the pool of future workers, expect to have the same, if not higher, income that their parents did, and yet they expect to work less. They view their parents' economic and social position as a starting point, rather than as a final goal. As a result, they, like their cohort across the nation, may hold unrealistic expectations regarding the perfect job and the perfect family, and may expect to have both of these as well as abundant recreational and travel opportunities. When these expectations are not realized, the New Outlook workers may become disillusioned, and even displace their overall employment dissatisfaction onto the workplace. This disillusionment prompts many parents to strongly advise their children to avoid the oilfield as a source of long-term employment.

The experiences and struggles of today's parents will affect the career decisions of the next generation, although those decisions will be limited to the opportunities available. The industry as a whole is not currently moving in a more "family-friendly" direction, and this generation of workers is unlikely to encourage its children to pursue oilfield employment. However, while they are discouraging their own children's involvement in oil, these New Outlook workers do not have a good answer as to who will be available fill oil-related positions. Immigrants increasingly fill many of the positions that local laborers do not want, but shortages of workers are becoming more common. The potential thus exists for worker shortages to intensify unless significant changes occur to make the industry more accommodating to its workers and their families.

Summary

Over the past few decades, fathers have become more involved in family caregiving, and this involvement is now considered by many experts to be essential to optimal child development. Mothers are entering the workforce in greater numbers and increasingly taking on the dual roles of wage-earner and caregiver. At the same time, oil companies are becoming more corporate minded and concerned with cutting costs and less concerned with making allowances for families and accommodating their workers with families. The result for families has been (and continues to be) increasing levels of work/family conflict and stress.

Old School workers did not typically speak of conflict between work and family roles. These men defined themselves in terms of their provider roles, and their roles within the family were less central to their identity than their work. “New Outlook” workers, however, spoke of themselves as caregivers as well as providers, and strived towards greater participation within their families than their own fathers had. For these men, “the value of the job is seen not to lie in the work itself, but rather in the release from it.”[28] In this context, work and family are set up in an oppositional fashion: time at work detracts from time at home, and work is blamed when fathers cannot play the roles within the family that they would like.

In some families, the concentrated work schedules characteristic of the oil industry are blamed for the conflict between work and family. The common offshore schedules keep fathers away from their families for a minimum of seven days at a time and thereby prevent these fathers from having the daily interaction with their wives and children that they would like. Other families, however, do not agree with this complaint, and instead find that the corresponding blocks of time at home provide them with greater opportunities to interact with their families than is possible with more “traditional” 5-and-2 scheduling. These families have redefined “active” and “involved” in the context of fathering to accommodate the reality of their lives where daily interaction in not necessarily a possibility.

Despite the assertions of past research to the contrary, oil workers and their families do not find oilfield schedules to be universally problematic. Some schedules, such as 7-and-7, are preferred over others, and schedules such as on-call are almost universally disliked. However, families can point to positive and negative aspects of almost any schedule. In addition, opinions about particular schedules vary widely, based on factors such as the lifestage of the family, the roles that the worker would like to play within his family, and the responsibilities and expectations tied to these roles.

Workers and their families have demonstrated that they can adapt to any of the various concentrated work schedules, regardless of their opinion of that schedule. However, those working schedules that fit well with their family roles and life circumstances will be more likely to stay in those positions than others who find their schedules conflict with their family life. Those experiencing conflict may learn to cope, but they also are often waiting for an opportunity to transition into another position, either within or outside of the oil industry, with a schedule more compatible with their family life.

Because of escalating dissatisfaction on the part of workers with the oil industry, companies are increasingly finding it difficult to find enough workers to fill openings. The industry provides the incentive of money, but stability and factors important to decreasing work/family conflict such as flexibility and time-off are not as readily available. In order for companies to attract and keep their workers, concessions to workers’ needs and the implementation of some family-friendly policies may be necessary. For companies, finding the balance between keeping their workers and getting the work done in a timely and cost-effective fashion promises to be a persistent area of conflict.

The experiences of the current generation of workers are influencing the career decisions of their children, just as the current workers were influenced by the experiences of their parents. Many of today's workers are discouraging their children from pursuing work in the oilfield because of these issues surrounding work/family conflict and industry instability. Their children, having grown up in a period of changing roles and expectations surrounding work and family and a period of instability in the industry, are also making decisions that are different from those their own parents and grandparents made. The perspectives of these children, currently high school students in southern Louisiana who are poised to be potential future oil workers, are the focus of the next section.

WORK, EDUCATION, AND THE NEXT GENERATION OF SOUTHERN LOUISIANA WORKERS

As we have seen, the oilpatch is viewed by parents as both an opportunity and a challenge with respect to family function and other concerns. Some fathers, in particular, believe that concentrated work scheduling limits interaction with their children, while others feel that they are allowed more time and a closer relationship with their families, thanks to the extended periods of time spent at home. We have seen, too, that many fathers today stress the importance of interacting closely with their children, often noting that they felt shortchanged by their own oilfield dads who worked constantly to provide for the family but were thus always absent. These fathers accepted jobs in the oilpatch but often vowed to be more available to their children than their fathers were to them.

If this is the way in which today's parents interpreted their parents' lifestyle, and the oilfield's place in it, how are today's *children* – and specifically teenagers – interpreting their parents' lifestyle and advice, and forming lifestyle and career decisions of their own? How are messages regarding work, family, and lifestyle being maintained or transformed across generations? It is these questions that we hope to address in this section. We will examine how teens discuss their lifestyle and career goals, what role they say their parents have had in determining these goals, and what parents themselves say they want for their children. We will focus specifically on two major issues, the role of education and the role of money (two themes that emerge in any discussion of careers), and from these proceed to examine the reasons why teens are or are not considering work in the oil industry. It is important and timely to explore these issues now, as local communities and oil companies alike face an increasing labor shortage in oilfield positions. Because the oil industry has been a major employer in southern Louisiana for decades, a decrease in involvement by local young adults holds significance for the future of the community. At a time when communities are struggling with economic diversification and finding their place in a rapidly changing global economy, these are important pieces of the larger picture.

Teens

In focus groups with Morgan City high-schoolers, the first question we asked was, "So what do you think of Morgan City?" Invariably, the exclamation we received in response was, "Boring!" As one might expect of any group of teenagers eagerly anticipating freedom from high school and entry into legal adulthood, the teens expressed a general restlessness and exasperation with their community. When asked what, exactly, made life in Morgan City "boring," students mentioned the smallness of the city and the lack of "things to do." It was not surprising, then, that – when asked what their plans were upon graduation from high school – the students responded that they wanted to "get away."

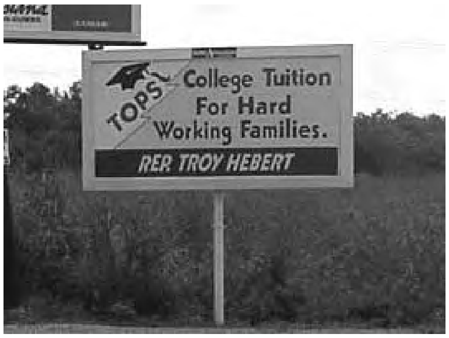

Figure 3.6. Billboard advertising state college tuition program

What *was* somewhat surprising, however, was the fact that every single student said that she or he was going to "get away" by going to college (see fig. 3.6). While pursuing a college education is certainly the norm for many high school graduates nationwide, these teens tend to have college-educated parents. A majority of the college-bound teens we spoke to, however, had parents who had not completed college themselves. Instead, these parents had, in their late teens and early adult years, found lucrative work in the oilfield, and were later able to provide for families and achieve job satisfaction without a college degree.

So why might so many Morgan City teens today be headed to college? Again, it is true that college attendance is becoming more and more common nationwide. However, southern Louisiana is a somewhat unique area in two respects: (1) the oil industry has been a pervasive presence and attractive source of employment since the 1950's, and (2) there has historically been little emphasis on higher education in the region. It is only fairly recently that college has become an expected goal and viable option for local young people. To address the phenomenon of teens' orientation towards college, therefore, we looked both at what teens said about their career goals, based on their upbringing in oilpatch families, and what parents said about their hopes for their children's' lifestyles and careers. Interestingly (and perhaps not surprisingly), we found a high level of cohesion between parents' hopes for their children and teenagers' goals for the immediate and more distant futures.

Education

As mentioned, every one of the approximately 50 students who took part in the focus-group discussions said that she or he was planning to go to college after graduating from high school. Some had an idea of which college they would like to attend, and a few knew what type of academic degree they would like to work towards. Two boys had chosen colleges based on sport scholarships that had been offered to them. The majority, however, viewed going to college – or "trying college," as several teens put it – as just what one did, in much the same way that going to work offshore was what young men did years ago to gain entry into the workforce. When asked why they had chosen to go on to college, one boy simply explained, "I just want to go," and another agreed, "Yeah, just to go" [I-808]. Similar sentiments were heard in other focus groups. One boy said, "It's not really a choice!" and a girl replied, "I know! I never really thought about not going to college" [I-813]. In another group, a girl simply said, "My mom told me I had to go to college" [I-818], echoing what many of the teens reported. It seems that going to college after finishing high school is simply a natural progression for these teens; what to study and what type of degree to work on is a decision that can be made later. That is, whether or not to *go* to college is not so much the issue as what to do once there.

Morgan City teens' expectations for college do not preclude work in the oilfield, nor are their decisions to go to college necessarily based on a desire to flee the oil industry. As we have seen, the overwhelming majority of high schoolers said that they were going to college "just because," and did not seem to feel that their choice was black-and white: go to college or work in the oilfield. Some, however, did mention that a college degree was necessary in today's workplace. One boy commented, "You can't get anything in today's society without a college education, other than working at McDonalds or a grocery store" [I-798].

In general, teens rarely referred to college attendance as a sort of escape from oilpatch work. Rather, what did come up several times was the idea that if college did not "work out" for them, the oilpatch would provide an employment fallback (see fig. 3.7). In other words, the need to at least "try out" college was a given, but finishing was not. Oilfield work presents a somewhat unique opportunity for local high school graduates who decide against finishing college or are forced to quit for some reason. As mentioned earlier, relatively high-paying work is usually available, and many positions require little or no specific education or previous training. One boy describes an older brother who did poorly in his first semester of college and decided to return home and work in the oilpatch while reevaluating his goals: "My brother didn't make it his first semester, so that's where he ended up at [in the oilpatch]. That's where he's at right now" [I-798]. Another boy quit college after his girlfriend became pregnant and returned home to work in his father's oilfield service shop in order to make money to support the child [I-417].

Figure 3.7. Drilling rig workers

Paradoxically, perhaps, the oilfield also was recognized by teens as a place where one could earn money for college. For instance, when one boy was asked what his post high-school plans were, he answered, "College – try to go to college," and then explained, "Well, first work a little bit, so I get some money, and then go to college, so I don't have to work in college" [I-808]. The boy went on to explain that he would work with his father at an oilfield fabrication yard.

Another belief the teens expressed was that a college degree was necessary for securing a good job even *within* the oilpatch. One boy pointed out, "If you're going to college, in the oil industry you can get a better job, instead of manual labor – I mean, like engineer" [I-798]. Another boy agreed: "You could graduate valedictorian of your high school, and somebody that was … low in the class go to college and get the degree and they're still going to make more money than you. You have to do it – it's just required" [I-798].

To these teens, then, a college education was essential, whether to gain access to employment options outside the oil industry or to secure better, higher paying jobs within the oil industry.

Preferred Careers

Brief mention should be given here to the careers in which students expressed an interest. The most commonly mentioned occupations by far were all health-related**.** Of the 43 responses spanning 14 different types of careers, 16 fell into this category (typical responses included "nursing," "physical therapy," and "speech therapy"). The remainder of responses included business/accounting, engineering, teaching/counseling, the media, computers, sports, fine and performing arts, architecture, physical sciences, social sciences, and culinary and other service occupations. It is perhaps not surprising that most of the careers that students said they would like to pursue were ones that are highly visible to them – many of the teens have parents or other family members who own their own businesses or are otherwise involved in this type of occupation. Similarly, many students know people who are oilfield engineers. All are exposed to teachers, medical professionals, and of course the media on a regular basis, and computers are nationally touted as "the wave of the future" in terms of employment. What is interesting, however, is the overwhelming attractiveness of medical professions to Morgan City teens. While it might be that these professions are believed to be the most lucrative, we will see in later sections that money was not one of local students' primary concerns when choosing a career. Instead, it seems that the availability of internships and vocational training in these fields might be a better explanation for the familiarity with – and hence popularity of – health-related careers. Southern Louisiana schools are among the state's leaders in the implementation of School-to-Work programs, and all eighth grade students in area schools are taught about careers and taken to local worksites. Health-related careers constitute a major focus in all of these programs.

Money

The discussion of money became particularly interesting when students were giving reasons for and against working in oil. As we saw earlier, earning a significant amount of money quickly was one reason given for doing short-term oilfield work. This money might be for college, an emergency, or simply for extra cash to spend.

Despite this widespread view of oilfield employment as a source of quick cash, the teens who participated in the focus groups also seemed to recognize its unreliability and constant flux. They demonstrated a shrewd comprehension of the local economy and the role that the oil industry plays in it. For instance, one boy pointed out that whenever oil was booming, his mother's elementary school class was full; when oil prices began to drop, she began losing children from her class as families moved out of the area in search of employment. Another girl noted that her physician father's patient list expanded greatly when oil was doing well and people could afford necessary procedures and surgeries; when the industry plunged, the patient list shrank. It is therefore interesting that, when discussing the reasons they would *not* get involved in oil work, the students rarely mentioned financial insecurity due to industry flux. Instead, the most commonly expressed sentiment was that, despite it being lucrative work, the oil lifestyle wasn't "worth it." In other words, the financial rewards are good, but even a good income cannot make up for job boredom or loss of time with family. One focus group addressed this issue directly, and the students agreed that oilfield money was good but still not worth missing a child's daily development or special events. One of the boys, the son of an onshore supervisor, put it this way [I-808]: "I want to spend time with my kids because my dad doesn't spend that much time with me."

These sentiments about money and the oilfield corresponded with what the students had to say about the role of money in employment overall. That is, when asked what was important to them in a job, the most common response by far, rather than that it should provide a high level of income, was that the work should be interesting. The following discussion illustrates this:

> Researcher: So do you think that's the big aspiration [for those who get into oil work] – the money? Or is it doing something you're interested in, or …?
> Students: [In unison] Making money!
> Researcher: For you guys, too, is that the biggest goal in a career? Making money?
> Student 1: Not really.
> Student 2: You have to be interested in [your job] …
> Student 3: … Or it would just be boring and you wouldn't want to do it [I-780].

When the question of money versus interest in a job was put more directly to one all-male group, the following discussion ensued:

> Researcher: What if you could make a lot of money working offshore, but you found a career you really liked but you couldn't make much money – which one would you choose?
> Student 1: It depends on the money difference, though – how much of a drop or how much of a gain.
> Student 2: Nah, that's not really important.
> Student 1: I mean, if I liked it and it wasn't much of a drop.
> Student 3: If I could still afford everything with less pay.
> Student 1: If it wasn't much of a drop.
> Student 2: Yeah, BUT … offshore is not that fun.
> Student 4: You have to be happy [I-808].

The majority of students said that money was only somewhat important when deciding on a job or career. In an all-female group, for instance, the following conversation commenced:

> Researcher: What about money – is that important in a job?
> Student 1: It's a little important, but it's not …
> Student 2: It's a little important.
> Student 3: Yeah, to a certain extent. But it's not the major …
> […]
> Researcher: So it's kind of one issue?
> Student 4: Yeah, but …
> Student 3: It's an important issue, just …
> Student 4: I think the most important one is, you have to like what you're doing [I-788].

Another group of students expressed the same type of sentiment about the importance of money: money is of course necessary and nice, but should not be the primary consideration when choosing a job or career:

> Student 1: " I think I want a job where I can help people, that it not just be for me and my own getting money or whatever. And I want somewhere where I can be happy with the people I work with, also …"
> Researcher: Is money important at all?
> Student 2: No. Me and my mom had an argument the other day about that: 'You're going to do church work? You're not going to make any money!' That's not really important at all, really, to me. It's just nice to have, but it's not so important.
> Student 3: It's not a major factor. I mean, sure you're going to have to have it if you want to raise a family and provide for your kids and stuff like that, but it's not my main focus. Anything you do, you can [get by on] as little as possible if you have to [1-803].

Money is perceived by the teens as necessary but not all-important; what's more important is that one enjoys one's work. No amount of financial reward can make up for boredom or unhappiness in one's job and loss of time with one's spouse and children. This shift in expectations of work has been observed across the United States and other societies that have been characterized as post-industrial. Though it is not new to the country, it is a visible and dramatic shift from just one generation ago in southern Louisiana and is the source of considerable tension between employers and employees. This issue and others pertaining to it will be examined in more depth in this study's final report.

Family and Parenting

As we began to see in the dialogue on money and tradeoffs, students who participated in the focus groups were aware of many challenges, including financial and parenting issues that their parents had faced. Many of them were already thinking about how these issues might influence their *own* future families. The family-related reasons students gave for not entering the oil industry are particularly significant considering that every single student participant said that she/he planned to get married, and virtually all felt that they definitely wanted to have children.

Family-related reasons for not working in the oilfield were frequently reinforced when students spoke about growing up in an oil-affiliated family. As mentioned before, many of the teens said they watched their parents work long, hard hours, and they felt that the oilfield was therefore just too hectic and demanding. Others said that they did not want to miss time with their children and families due to this type of chaotic schedule. One interesting point here is that many of these teens' parents had had the same view of *their* parents' lifestyle in the oil industry, feeling that it was too hectic and time-consuming, and vowed that they would be more available to and involved with their children than their own parents were. Many of these parents did continue working in the oil industry, but some modified their schedules from long periods of presence and absence (such as 14-and-14 or 28-and-28) to shorter ones (such as 7-and-7).

Despite the teenagers' views that concentrated work scheduling poses severe challenges to family life, when the students spoke of life within an industry family it was rarely in very negative terms. Rather, phrases such as "awkward" and "tough sometimes" were more common. One girl, however, described how normal and routine the offshore family lifestyle had become: "I guess it's one thing [that it's] always been like this. It's just like, 'You're going offshore today?', 'Yeah,' 'OK.' I mean, it's a nonchalant thing" [I-803]. This girl's father had worked offshore for most of her life, and, upon considering his three-year stint onshore the student actually pointed out a positive aspect of her father's return to offshore work: "Whenever I'd get in trouble, I couldn't get punished because [he was offshore], so that was good!"

We are therefore left with the question of why the large majority of teens say that they will not even consider a long-term career in oil despite the fact that many grew up in oil families and had few negative things to say about their upbringing. Because so many values and ideas are derived from parents and other family members, and because family networks are particularly strong and important in southern Louisiana, it might be assumed that many of the anti-oilfield messages that teens have received have come from their parents or other family members. As we will see more clearly later, in the section entitled "Why Not Oil," this proves to be true. At the same time, however, it is often these same parents who convey messages *in favor of* oilfield work. Many students noted that their parents had described oil as a "good but hard" life. Thus, even the negative messages teens receive are tempered by positives (see section entitled "Why Oil"). In both cases, the oilfield's relation to family life and childrearing plays a critical role in the dialogue.

Community

A question that has emerged here is whether the oilfield attracts teens back to southern Louisiana or prompts them to leave for good after college (see fig. 3.8). We have seen that the large majority of focus-group participants felt that they would definitely not work in the offshore oil industry, or at least not for long. But, does the decision to come back to the community or move elsewhere revolve around career options? Employment options are typically a significant consideration when deciding where to settle. Yet, few of the students specifically mentioned a lack of local job opportunities when discussing why they wanted to go away to college and why they might eventually want to move away from Morgan City. Exceptions to this trend were visible in the words of one boy who wanted to work with computers and dryly pointed out, "Oh there's nothing wrong with it, around here, just … kinda not too many ... big computer engineering places around here" [I-813]. Another student echoed this boy's thoughts about the community's lack of technological sophistication; for this student, however, the possibility of returning to the area some time after college was *not* precluded. In his words: "It's not a technological type community. It's not like if you want your kid to be the smartest you come here. This is just a raw

Figure 3.8. The bridge leaving Morgan City

type fun place. This is a good place to raise kids" [I-798]. One girl responded to the question, "Do you think you could have a career here?" with, "You could be a doctor anywhere, or teach … you could probably find a job, but most people don't want to – they want to get away" [I-780].

If not to work in the offshore oil industry, why *would* young adults return to Morgan City? Again, the responses were predominantly centered around family concerns. Quite a few of the students – both male and female – specifically said that they would like to return to Morgan City for reasons involving family. One girl volunteered, "I think it's a good place to raise kids. I always wanted to move away just while I was young, and didn't have kids, but to raise a family here" [I-803]. Several students discussed how important being able to at least visit family regularly would be to them when choosing where to live, whether or not they would like to actually live *in* Morgan City. One boy explained, "I'd definitely want to come back here a lot, because I enjoy the environment. It's got plenty of tradition and everything. And also, my family's down here" [I-813]. Some students brought up family issues even *before* being asked whether they would consider returning to the area for any reason. One boy volunteered, "Maybe, I'm going to say, I'm living, probably, where I go to college, then come back here and I'm going to start a family, probably" [I-808]. As we have seen, however, these same students felt that offshore oil work (or in fact any type of oil work involving concentrated scheduling) would be incompatible with family life. Given that the vast majority of teens articulated definite plans to have families of their own, and that most seemed to consider Morgan City a good place to raise families, due to comfort, security, etc., it seems likely that some young adults may return. For those who return, the oilfield is a powerful draw.

Why Oil

If going to college does not necessarily mean that one will or will not get involved in oilfield work, what *does* determine whether or not students are interested in working in the oil industry? The answers to this question are complex, and involve the issues we've addressed: education, money, preferred careers, and community.

To begin with, some students said that they *would* consider oil-industry employment. However, the proportion of students who said that they'd consider *long-term* employment in the oil industry was much smaller. These students also had very specific criteria for the nature of any oilfield work that they would accept. The primary criterion was that the job be a white-collar job. The only two students who acknowledged having considered a long-term career in the industry, for example, had both planned to become engineers. When the question was put to her focus group, "Do any of you want to work in oil?", one girl replied, "You never know – I was thinking some kind of engineering … it might take a turn that way," though she quickly went on to say that she would probably pursue a different, more interesting, and non-oil related career instead [I-788]. The other student, a boy, explained, "Eventually I want to get into [the oil industry] because I want to get a chemical engineering degree" [I-798]. So, a white-collar job within the oil industry might be an acceptable option for long-term employment. A blue-collar job, however, is not.

The majority of students who said they might consider working in the oilfield either implied or stated specifically that it would be short-term, goal-oriented work, specifically to make quick money or gain work experience. We have already pointed out that one boy was planning to work with his father at an oilfield fabrication plant for a year in order to make money for college. In addition, several other boys explained that, if college did not work out, they could return to Morgan City and work in the oilfield while deciding what to do next. Students also expressed the view that this type of work would only be appropriate at a particular point in one's life. Many students, for example, felt that oilfield work was single people's work. In addition, with or without a family, oilfield work was only appropriate for younger people. When asked whether he would consider offshore oil work, one boy replied: "Maybe ... when I'm younger, I wouldn't mind doing that," and another boy agreed, "It wouldn't be bad" [I-808].

As we can see, there are several practical reasons that students might consider short-term oilfield employment. At the same time, these reasons, and the restrictions placed upon the *types* of work students would accept, also hint at the reasons they would *not* consider oilfield work. We will examine these reasons against oilfield work in the next section.

Why Not Oil

In each five-member focus group, for every one or two people who said that they would consider oil work, three to four said that they would absolutely *not* consider working in the oilpatch. Perhaps not surprisingly, the reasons given for avoiding oilfield work paralleled the reservations expressed by those who said they *would* consider the work. In one all-female focus group, offshore oil work seemed to be shunned due to its association with manual labor, or blue-collar work, and oilfield work in general seemed to be stigmatized:

> Researcher: So [working in the oilfield] is a possibility?
> Student 1: The oilfield seems really … dirty. You want to stay away from it.
> Student 2: That's what I think of!
> Student 1: But see, I know half of them don't work on rigs – half of them are white-collar workers. But still, when you hear 'oil,' you're like … no [I-788].

Phrases such as "dirty" and "dangerous" – words that clearly referred only to the manual labor or blue-collar portion of offshore work – were common. This aversion to blue-collar work was also voiced during one all-male focus group. Two excerpts from that discussion follow:

> Researcher 1: "So that's not something you would want to do – work out there [on an offshore platform]?"
> Student 1: "I want to be in an office."
> Student 2: "I want to be in an office with air conditioning and a computer."
> Student 3: "Yeah, like, I worked out there in the summer … it wasn't even fun."
> Student 2: "I don't even like going there now."
> Student 1: "I spent a summer at [a service company] – hot!"
> Student 2: "Yeah, I spent a summer with my dad, working … all we did was wash off these lift bags."
> Researcher 1: "So you don't like it because it's boring and hot?"

> Student 3: “Yeah.”
> Student 2: “Yeah.”
> Student 1: “It’s hot.”
> Researcher 1: “Any other reasons?”
> Student 2: “I want to be bossing people around too much!”
> ***
> Researcher 2: “So what do you guys know about offshore?”
> Student 1: “It’s dangerous.”
> Student 3: “Dangerous.”
> Student 1: “Dirty” [I-798].

Perhaps the most common reason for avoiding the oil industry altogether is the concentrated work scheduling characteristic of oil-related jobs. Many of the students had grown up in families where a father was absent for extended periods of time, and those who did not were nevertheless familiar with the lifestyle because they had grown up around relatives or other children whose families were involved in the oilfield. Work scheduling was seen as problematic for two main reasons. The first was that it was perceived as placing excessive time demands on the worker. During one focus group in which many of the students had parents in oil-related work, several girls pointed out that their fathers were shackled to work:

> Researcher: So, what if the industry wasn’t an up and down one … what if it did stay consistent over the years? Would you want to get into it?
> Student 1: No. Because I see how my dad…it’s so hectic, and it’s like he’s not home. He lives at home so he has to drive 35, 40 minutes. I don’t get to see him as often as I’d like. So, you know, it’s real hectic. He brings work home, constantly on the cell phone …
> Student 2: So is my dad! … My dad is always on call. His pager’s always going off [I-803].

Similar observations were made in one of the boys’ groups: One boy’s remarks follow:

> Researcher: What about the schedules – what do you hear about having to work offshore?
> Student: When my dad used to work a lot – before he got a good job – he used to work a hundred and something hours a week. A hundred and four … seven … every week. Sometimes he’d go to work in the morning at 6:00 and not get off until the next day. He used to work a lot [I-808].

The second and perhaps most frequently discussed aspect of concentrated work scheduling that was considered problematic was the schedule’s effect on families and parenting. Some students discussed the difficulties of having a father who was only periodically at home, but more frequently work scheduling was presented as problematic when the students were talking about their *own* future children and families. One boy, in explaining why he saw the offshore lifestyle as unsuitable for men with families, related this anecdote: “We met a few guys during the Christmas holidays at our store that came in to shop, and they had to be offshore while they were – you know, during Christmas-time – and you notice more guys who come in don’t have families. They might just have a wife – not kids" [I-803]. Students in another focus group clarified their feelings about work, family, and the oil industry when answering the question, "If your dream job wasn't in the oil industry but you would still have to be away from your family for 7 to 14 days at a time, would you do that job?" All five students said either "no" or "probably not," and one student added, "If you could take your family with you, yeah, but if you can't … find something else" [I-793].

Parents

Parents' messages are frequently the most pervasive and memorable ones to which a child or young adult is exposed to. In a place like southern Louisiana, where many children grow up near extended family and are situated within that family's local history, it might be assumed that parents' messages will carry even greater weight. As we will see, the parents of southern Louisiana echo the thoughts of many parents nationwide when they say they want "better" for their children than they have had. What "better" means, however, and how these meanings are formed and communicated, are specific to the local context. We will see in the following sections that there is a high degree of consistency between what southern Louisiana parents say they want for their children and what Morgan City teens envision for themselves. However, perhaps inevitably, there *are* discrepancies between teens' and parents' positions, and these tend to revolve around whether or not students will consider working in the oil industry, and the reasons they give for or against doing so. By examining the inconsistencies between students' and parents' ideas and values relating to work and lifestyle, a more comprehensive picture of the local community, and perhaps the future of the local oil industry, emerges.

Education

One of the most common topics of discussion with oilfield workers was education. These discussions often included individuals' thoughts on their own level of education and their views on the role of education in employment and life in general, whether inside or outside the oil industry. Hopes regarding children's education therefore emerged frequently, and the type and level of education parents envisioned in their children's lives often stemmed directly from the role they believed it had played in their own lives.

The overwhelming majority of parents stressed that they wanted their children to go to college. One platform-worker father was so adamant that his children go to college that he put it this way: "They will have to go to college for something – even if it's to be a dog-catcher!" [I-148]. The feeling among many oilfield parents was that they themselves would have enjoyed greater job security, flexibility, and financial freedom with a higher level of education. In most cases these parents did not have any college experience, and some had not completed high school. Stories or reflections on their own careers and education experiences often led parents directly into a discussion of the decisions their children should make regarding education, and college attendance specifically often came up. One platform worker had this to say:

> Worker: "If you look around at the whole thing, it's like my family – it was more or less Old School when I was growing up. Everybody was just trying to make a dollar and feed

> your family, which was usually five to eight kids. My parents didn't really have the time to sit down and talk to us about going to school."
> ***
> Researcher: … What do you see for yourself in five to ten years? … Do you see anything changing maybe?
> Worker: I hope. I want [my son] to be in college and [my daughter] to start planning for college [I-134].

Another platform worker explained: "I tell my kids, 'You don't want to be where I am', and tell them they have to get their college degree and become a professional" [I-553]. This father quickly followed his words, however, with the recognition that his father had told *him* to do the same – to choose a new path rather than the oilfield one he had followed. Though the father recognized that he had ignored *his* father's advice, he stressed that it was no less important to pass on to his own children.

Two main themes emerged when parents spoke of the reasons they encouraged their children to go to college. The first was that a college education was a critical fallback whether one was planning on becoming involved in the oil industry or not. The college degree would secure one a higher-paying job within the industry if one chose to get involved. At the same time, the degree would serve as an emergency net if one voluntarily or involuntarily lost the oilfield job and needed another. One father pointed out the necessity of a college degree:

> Researcher: ... You did not go to college – do you feel that there is an importance for your children to?
> Father: Oh yes, I do. We live in a time now that if you do not have the experience in the job force, without a college education it will be hard to get a decent job [I-175].

A second reason for encouraging children to go to college was that a college degree could provide an escape from the oil industry altogether. With a degree, these young adults could find work outside the local oil industry, and, presumably, attain the financial security and freedom their parents had not attained. One mother, in discussing her offshore worker husband's views on education, felt, "... I believe education is so important to him ... I think he does not want to see his kids stumbled in the same path" [I-015]. A college education, in other words, was seen as a necessity in today's workplace, whether or not that workplace was the oilfield. The degree can provide a measure of security in terms of greater employment options outside of the oilfield *and* higher paying, more comfortable positions available within the oil industry.

Money

Issues relating to money, in terms of financial stability, security, and prosperity, have already emerged in the discussion of education. Indeed, when parents spoke specifically about money, and hopes for their children regarding money, they frequently discussed the role money should play in career choice and direction overall. The two most consistent perspectives that emerged in parents' discussions were, one, that a person just needed enough money to "get by," or live comfortably – and, presumably, be able to provide or help provide for one's family – and, two, that more important than money, in a job, was whether a person enjoyed the work.

The first theme – that one needed only as much money as was necessary to maintain a comfortable, stable life – emerged frequently when parents spoke of the reasons they were for or against their children's involvement in the oil industry. One mother, for instance, discussed her oil-worker husband's views:

> Researcher: How would [your husband] feel if his kids went into the oil industry?
> Mother: Well, I think as long as they can survive and take care of themselves, he wouldn't have a problem with it. But he just wants them to finish school. He wants them to go to college [I-015].

This father was somewhat ambivalent about whether his children should or should not work in the oilfield; he stressed neither the economic potential nor the financial instability of the oil industry. Rather, he perceived the ability to simply support oneself as the most important consideration. College, and the role of education overall, again comes up here. Higher education was seen as critical, but getting a degree did not mean that one cannot or should not go to work in the oil industry; rather, whether young adults go to work within the industry or elsewhere, they should pursue a career that will ensure them some degree of financial security, and the college degree will allow this.

The second theme – that one should choose employment based on how much one will enjoy the work, and that money is only second in importance – came up most frequently when parents discussed advice they had given their children with regard to education and career. Again, this advice was often neither for nor against oil industry work, but provided a guideline for evaluating one's work options both inside and outside of the oil industry. When asked whether she would encourage or discourage her children from entering the oil industry, for instance, the wife of an offshore professional was typically ambivalent; however, she *did* highlight positive aspects of the work that few students had mentioned:

> "I would not discourage them because however many shortcomings they may feel we may have had, I feel like they can pinpoint as many benefits as they could shortcomings. I would always be mindful to make them aware that depending on the area, you know, if you're going to live in this area … and it's the most lucrative thing you could do monetary-wise, that you will enjoy … I never encourage my children to just say, 'I'm going to do this because money's connected to it.' I tell them, 'You have to be happy with what you're doing.' But I wouldn't discourage them, because, you know, it's a living" [I-330].

The mixed sentiment here is a common one: Oilfield work provides a "good living," and therefore might provide a good employment option for some young adults; at the same time, however, these young adults should make their career decisions based on what they will enjoy in a job – the money associated with the job should be of only secondary importance. Unlike many of the teens, however, this parent felt that some jobs in the industry were ones that were lucrative *and* enjoyable.

Why Oil

Parents rarely said that they would like their children to become involved in oilfield work, but some teens were considering such work. Why might this be the case, and where might teens be getting messages about the benefits of oilfield work? Though parents did not specifically enumerate reasons for entering the oil industry, they *did* frequently discuss the benefits the industry had provided *them* with. Some noted that they had attained a level of financial prosperity they would not have been able to attain otherwise without more education. Another benefit for some was the concentrated scheduling. One discussion with an offshore worker father provided an interesting illustration of this:

> Researcher: I know your family worked in the salt mines ... is there a real difference from when you were growing up with your family today?
> Father: Oh yeah. When I am gone for a week and I come back, my children are happy to see me.
> Researcher: Yeah, they miss you ...
> Father: I have a lot more quality time when I am home. When I leave work, it's gone. I don't bring it home with me [I-335].

Messages about the positive aspects of the oilfield are not necessarily inconsistent with parents' advice to their children to go to college. For instance, when asked how he discussed oilfield work with his children, one father explained the following:

> Researcher: So you are actually telling them [not to get involved in the oilfield]?
> Father: No I don't want to tell them because you know how that goes with parents …
> Researcher: So you encourage them to be in something else.
> Father: Yeah, right. I don't say don't do what I'm doing. The oilfield is not bad, but it is not that dependable, you can see that now. I don't want them to go through that [I-319].

For this father, a college degree is a necessary and useful tool for one's personal economic stability, but does *not* necessarily mean that one cannot or should not work in the oilfield. The oilfield has been good to him; he just wants to make sure that his children will not face any of the pitfalls he has, and he feels that a college education will provide them with a sort of safety net. The same attitude was expressed by a mother:

> "You know … for my children, they look to 12th grade and it is not over in 12th grade – you will get an education and if you want to do two years and get an associates' [degree], that is fine. But you are going to have something to fall back on. Like my boys – I know probably a question is, would I encourage my boys – I have three boys and one girl – would I encourage them to go into the industry. I would not – I would not encourage them, but I would support them. I would absolutely support their decision if they felt like that was what they wanted to do" [I-515].

These parents do not describe the specific reasons their children should get involved in oilfield work; however, they do point out ways in which the oilfield was good to them. Because some of the benefits their parents found in the oilfield are the same ones available to them (e.g. money, concentrated scheduling), hearing the positives of oilfield work, even if only implicit, might help steer teens into the industry.

Why Not Oil

Unlike the discussion on why teens *should* go into the oil industry, parents' discussion of why teens should *not* go into the industry was explicit and specific. Again, parents' advice to their children revolved around their own experiences with the local oil industry. Criticisms of the oil industry and the offshore lifestyle centered around two main themes: (1) the difficulty of balancing concentrated work scheduling (such as 7-and-7 or 14-and-14) with family life, and (2) the overall instability characteristic of the oil industry. Not surprisingly, both criticisms are echoes of the reasons teens gave for not getting involved in the industry.

We have seen in previous sections both parents' complaints about the work schedules characteristic of offshore oil work and teen's negative views of these same schedules. In both cases, a primary complaint was that the long periods of absence robbed parents (specifically, fathers) of time with their children, and placed heavy burdens upon mothers who frequently were not even sure when their husbands would be home. Further, we noted that teens' negative perceptions of the offshore work schedule and its effect on families was particularly significant considering that virtually all were planning to have children when they grew older. For their part, when parents were asked how they felt about their children working offshore, those who did not mind the idea still specifically mentioned that their children should have at least a white-collar job so that they could return home to their children every night. Many of the teens appeared to have taken this advice to heart and said that they would not want to be involved in the offshore lifestyle because it would rob them of time with family. One girl expressed many of the teens' hesitations, and echoed the words of many workers and spouses, in this way: "If you were working 7-and-7, while you were gone you might miss an emergency, or a family event, or ... your child's in a school play or something. I mean, it's only a once-in-a-lifetime ... I don't think I'd want to miss it" [I-803].

As we have also noted, however, many parents like concentrated work scheduling and feel that the offshore schedule was a benefit to their families, allowing them to spend longer periods of "quality time" with their spouses and children. In other words, they were able to take part in the daily activities during their extended periods of time off work that more traditional schedule (e.g., 5-and-2) would have prohibited. We might therefore conclude that today's teens might recognize these same benefits of offshore work in the future. However, this will largely depend on another factor – the overall stability of the oil industry itself. This stability factor is the second theme that emerged in parents' discussions of why their children should not go into the oil industry. Many parents expressed a concern that the oil industry as a whole is changing, including the types of jobs available, the schedules associated with them, and oil companies' attitudes and policies regarding workers. These parents often felt that there was little job security left, and also mentioned that the future of the oil industry itself was uncertain. In addition, parents recognized that the schedules they had typically associated with the oilfield (such as 7-and-7 and 14-and-14) were shifting towards longer periods of presence and absence (such as 28-and-28; see "Fathering in the Gulf of Mexico Oilpatch").

All of these factors combined indicate that today's parents recognize that the oil industry of tomorrow – the one that their children might be involved in – will be significantly different than the one they have known. This is significant because we have suggested that teens, though they may not currently anticipate it, might later consider involvement in the oil industry for the same reasons that their parents did: money, extended periods of time with family, and availability of work. We have also pointed out that many parents do not specifically criticize oilfield work, and instead express the feeling that – though they want their children to go on to "bigger and better" things, so to speak – the oilfield has provided them with a good living and has allowed them to raise their families in a safe and comfortable environment. The message that teens are getting, therefore, might be that higher education is necessary and respectable, but does not necessarily make oilfield work unworthy or unattractive. A critical point emerges here, however: If parents are saying at the same time that the oilfield provided them with a good life *but* that the nature of oilfield work is changing, the true message that teens might be receiving is that the type of work they would have considered – the type their parents or family members were engaged in – will no longer be available to them. This might be a major factor in driving teens *away* from, rather than towards, oilfield work.

Summary

Teens in all communities represent the future of their communities. In an industry-dominated area like southern Louisiana, teens have historically reproduced not only the culture of the community but also the workforce of one particular industry – the offshore oil industry. Teens in southern Louisiana, like teens nationwide, have an abundance of issues to grapple with when considering choices that will help determine the future of the area. Like their counterparts in other regions and states, southern Louisiana teens must make decisions regarding where to live, education, training, and eventually careers, and must also determine the role they believe things like money, family, and parenting will play in their lives. What is somewhat unique to southern Louisiana teens, however, is the presence in their lives of one powerful and ubiquitous economic and social force – the offshore oil industry.

As we have seen, teens' ideas and values regarding issues like education, money, and family play a large part in determining their attitudes towards oil-industry employment. Further, many teens' thoughts and beliefs cohere with the advice that southern Louisiana parents give their children. Teens and parents alike place an emphasis upon higher education, and the majority of teens say that they wish to avoid the oil industry, an attitude heavily influenced, it seems, by how parents regard the industry. However, we have seen that there *are* reasons some teens give for pursuing offshore oil work. Whether or not these teens will in fact seek employment in the oil industry is a significant issue as community leaders and industry officials alike worry that the current offshore oil labor shortage is increasing.

From what teens and parents say, it does seem likely that this shortage will continue to grow. As more teens go to college, more may graduate and use the leverage of their diplomas to find work outside of the oil industry. Also, the current shift towards work in deeper water and longer shifts (such as 28-and-28) coincides with a shift towards increased emphasis on fathers' consistent involvement with children (see "Fathering in the Gulf of Mexico Oilpatch"). These factors do not bode well for industry employment levels on the whole.

However, some teens did say that they would consider oilfield work. The caveat to this was that they would consider only white-collar work or *short-term* blue-collar work. What seems more likely than a general labor shortage, therefore, is a shortage in particular pockets of the local oil industry. As long as local young adults need quick cash, whether for spending or to save for college, low-level labor positions will probably be filled. Young adults who graduate from college with professional degrees may also find the oil industry an attractive opportunity for employment but may not be able to return to the community of their birth to raise their families. The segment that stands to continue to lose local workers is skilled labor. This is the segment once populated by experienced, but not degreed, individuals who had spent years in the industry. These workers' contemporary counterparts are the ones who must tolerate longer work shifts *and* less job security. These are also the workers who tend to be hardest hit by industry instability on the whole: short-term workers get in when the money is good and then get out; professionals are less likely to be laid off in a downturn *and* are more likely to find employment outside the oil industry.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

During the past 50 years of OCS exploration and development, workers employed in the GOM oilpatch, their families, and the communities in which these individuals live and work have all undergone substantial change. This report has focused on the changing roles and expectations of oil workers and their family members in southern Louisiana communities. It began with a discussion of fathering and the changing meaning of work for southern Louisiana men, as well as the changing expectations and desires these workers, as parents, have for their children. Central to this discussion was the issue of work/family conflict and the role of concentrated work schedules in contributing to or mediating this conflict. The next section examined the changing hopes and expectations of Morgan City teens regarding both family and career. For these teens, who are the next generation of community members, changes in work and lifestyle hopes and expectations derive in large part from parents' cynicism with the oil industry and its associated lifestyle and are reflected in a general negativity towards the prospect of oilfield work as a career. The effects of this trend are felt widely throughout the area as oil companies face greater and greater struggles in securing a sufficient pool of workers.

Many fathers in southern Louisiana today are choosing to become involved in their children's lives, rather than assuming a sole role as provider. Fathers and mothers both serve as providers and caregivers, and the responsibilities and time requirements characteristic of these roles often lead to difficulties negotiating family and work. These conflicts have intensified in recent decades as fathers have sought more involved roles with their families, while at the same time companies have cut back on family-friendly policies and have lengthened offshore schedules in an effort to cut costs.

As family involvement becomes more important to southern Louisiana oilfield workers, more attention is focused on work schedules and other company policies that affect the ways in which workers will be able to create or negotiate family roles. Some men want daily involvement with their children and thus find any schedule that keeps them away from home overnight to be disruptive. Others find that concentrated work schedules providing blocks of time at home with their families allow them to be more involved than do traditional work schedules. Workers and their families also value family-friendly policies that allow men to return home for births, family emergencies, and other important events. Preferred schedules and policies vary by family, and depend greatly on the family's life-stage.

Paralleling these changes in men's roles in the family have been changes in the meaning of work. For Old School workers, the oilfield was not simply a job but a way of life, and these men's identities were closely tied to their jobs and their companies. Younger workers, however, do not have the same loyalty to their employers, thanks to their experiences with epidemics of mass layoffs and subsequent industry restructuring. Today's workers base their identities more on roles outside of the workplace, such as those associated with the family. These New Outlook workers switch companies easily, whether in pursuit of higher pay, a preferable work schedule, or other benefits that make family and community roles easier to fulfill. Some who find the concentrated work schedules and industry instability too disruptive altogether for their families leave the oil industry.

Based on their own experiences, many of these workers are discouraging their children from pursuing similar oilfield careers. While acknowledging that the oilpatch has provided many of them with a good life, these parents nevertheless stress that they do not want their children to experience the hardships and problems they have endured. Instead, these parents emphasize to their children the importance of higher education, hoping that education will provide their children with the means to financial independence and security in their careers—whether these careers are within or without the oil industry.

For their part, the vast majority of Morgan City teens said that they do not want to pursue careers in oil. Those who said they might consider oilfield work made clear that the only attractive positions are white-collar ones; manual labor positions are appropriate only for very short stints, and for the specific purpose of earning quick cash. Whereas Old School men centered their lives around oilfield work and New Outlook fathers are negotiating oilfield employment around family function, it seems that Morgan City teens today, for the most part, will avoid the oil industry altogether. Those whose fathers are involved in the industry have experienced firsthand the difficulties of the oilfield lifestyle, and many parents emphasize these difficulties when urging their children to both avoid oilfield work *and* pursue higher education.

Some of these teens will inevitably end up working in the oilfield. It seems likely, however, that – barring imminent and rapid changes in the oil industry – the overwhelming majority will not. A shift away from oil industry employment by the local workforce promises significant consequences for the local oil industry, and perhaps even greater consequences for the community at large.

ENDNOTES

[1] William J. Doherty, Edward F. Koumeski, and Martha F. Erickson, "Responsible Fathering: An Overview and Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60 (1998): 277-292.Ibid, 278. For a discussion of this shift in fathering roles, see Jane E. Brooks, *Parenting in the 90's* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 1994); Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Peter N. Stearns, "Fatherhood in Historical Perspective: The Role of Social Change," in F. W. Bozett and S. M. H. Hanson, eds., *Fatherhood and Families in Cultural Context* (New York: Spring Publishing, 1991): 28-52; Joseph H. Pleck, "Paternal Involvement: Levels, Sources, and Consequences," in M. E. Lamb, ed., *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (New York: Wiley, 1997): 66-103.

[2] Pleck, "Paternal Involvement: Levels, Sources, and Consequences."

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[4] J. Demos, "The Changing Faces of Fatherhood," in J. Demos, ed., *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and Life Course in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986): 41-67.

[5] Data taken from *The 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce*. For more information, see www.familiesandwork.org/summary/nscw.pdf.

[6] Prepared statement of James A. Levine, "Babies and Briefcases: Creating a Family-Friendly Workplace for Fathers, " *Hearings before for the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families*, 102nd Cong, 1st sess., June 11, 1991, p.33.

[7] Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History*.

[8] A 1988 study by McNeely and Fogarty found that, in general, industrial companies were much less likely than other companies to provide or consider adopting flextime or part-time options, job sharing, or sick child leave policies. [R. L. McNeely and Barbe A. Fogarty, "Balancing Parenthood and Employment: Factors Affecting Company Receptiveness to Family-Related Innovations in the Workplace," *Family Relations* 37 (1988): 189-195.]

[9] David Clark, Kathryn McCann, Ken Morrice, and Rex Taylor, "Work and Marriage in the Offshore Oil Industry," *International Journal of Social Economics* 12 (1985): 36-47.

[10] Ibid., 43.

[11] Carl A. Brasseaux, "Four Hundred Years of Acadian Life in North America," *Journal of Popular Culture* 23 (1989): 3-22.

[12] Rushton marks 1901, with the discovery of oil in Acadia Parish, as the advent of the oil industry in Louisiana. The first offshore well and drilling platform was not in place until 1947. [William Faulkner Rushton, *The Cajuns: From Acadia to Louisiana* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1979)]

[13] James H. Dormon, *The People Called Cajuns: An Introduction to an Ethnohistory* (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southern Louisiana, 1983).

[14] Rushton, *The Cajuns: From Acadia to Louisiana*.

[15] For a more in-depth discussion of these issues surrounding roles and transitions, see Part 1in this report "Offshore Employment as Lifestyle and Culture: Work and Family In New Iberia."

[16] Gramling and Forsyth point to the difficulty of building a consensual construction of reality as one reason work scheduling can lead to family problems. [Robert Gramling and Craig Forsyth, "Work Scheduling and Family Interaction: A Theoretical Perspective," *Journal of Family Issues* 8 (1987): 163-175.]

[17] Clark *et al*., "Work and Marriage in the Offshore Oil Industry."

[18] Forsyth and Gauthier, “Families of Offshore Oil Workers: Adaptations to Cyclical Father Absence/Presence.”
[19] Gramling, “Concentrated Work Scheduling: Enabling and Constraining Aspects.”
[20] Ibid.
[21] For a more in-depth discussion of how families cope with these transitions, see Part 1 in this report “Offshore Employment as Lifestyle and Culture: Work and Family In New Iberia.”
[22] Personal communication.
[23] For more discussion on these issues, see Part 1 in this report “Offshore Employment as Lifestyle and Culture: Work and Family In New Iberia.”
[24] For a more detailed discussion of these informal networks, see Part 1 in this report “Offshore Employment as Lifestyle and Culture: Work and Family In New Iberia.”
[25] Levine, “What’s Your Daddy Strategy?”
[26] Ibid.
[27] Stephanie Anderson Forest, “Wanted: A Few Roughnecks. There are Lots of New Rigs, But No One to Operate Them,” *Business Week*, July 17, 2000.
[28] Jorun Solheim, “Coming Home to Work: Men, Women and Marriage in the Norwegian Offshore Oil Industry,” in Jane Lewis, Marilyn Porter, and Mark Shrimpton, eds, *Women, Work, and Family in the British, Canadian and Norwegian Offshore Oilfields* (London: Macmillian Press, 1988): 144.

PART 4
CAPTAINS OF THE ROAD AND SEA: PROVIDING TRANSPORTATION FOR THE GULF OF MEXICO OILPATCH

Andrew Gardner and Diane Austin

INTRODUCTION

Oil and gas exploration and development have been occurring off the coast of southern Louisiana for more than 50 years, and the level of Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) activity has fluctuated through several periods of growth and decline, reaching its peak in the late 1970's. Continual changes in both technology and social expectations have brought changes in the impacts of offshore work as well. The transportation sector has been affected by these changes. For the people and companies who move the people and equipment, changes have come not only from the industry itself, but from laws and regulations that apply to all truck and vessel operators. In particular, federal policies outside the oil and gas industry have had unforeseen impacts on each of the three major offshore oil and gas transportation modes in the Gulf of Mexico: (1) trucks; (2) boats; and (3) helicopters. This report has been prepared to explore the first two. It will demonstrate the interactive effects of industry and federal actions, review how individuals and organizations have responded to these changes, and suggest possible remedies.

Figure 4.1. Truck entering shipyard

The offshore oil and gas industry in the Gulf of Mexico is international in scope. Companies from Louisiana and Texas send materials and people around the world and companies in countries such as Italy and China get contracts to work in the Gulf. Workers come from throughout the United States and, in the fabrication sector, as far away as India and Scotland. Still, OCS-related industries provide many jobs for southern Louisiana residents (see fig. 4.1). This is especially true in the transportation sectors described in this report – the trucking and offshore service vessels that grew up in the Gulf under the leadership of local innovators and entrepreneurs. Though many of these local companies have grown far beyond the boundaries of the Acadian oilpatch, this report focuses on the southern Louisiana story.

The combined impacts of industry restructuring, downturn in oil prices, and changing federal policies have created turmoil. This turmoil and the shift toward larger companies have allowed organized labor to intervene in these sectors in ways that were not possible in past decades. Consequently, where in the Gulf Coast south it would at one time have seemed preposterous for truckers and mariners to be talking about organizing and joining unions, some now are. This report offers some reasons why.

The high degree of local involvement in the development of the offshore transportation sector and its significance to the local economy make this story important. The changes that affect these occupations and local ownership of these companies impact the economy and social fabric of all Acadiana.

Transportation is the linchpin of successful OCS exploration, development, and production. People, equipment, and supplies are moved by trucks, boats, and helicopters, often in record time. Especially during the drilling phase, when day rates for operating rigs are high, those who move people and parts to the rigs must be quick and reliable. This aspect of the offshore oil and gas transportation sector distinguishes it from other transportation arenas. Workers and companies must be organized to respond to regular needs, such as employee shift changes and supply shipments, and to emergencies, such as a broken drill bit or an injured worker.

The transportation sector, especially the specialized trucks and offshore vessels, was initially built by the people of southern Louisiana, glossed here as Cajuns. When the discovery of oil and gas brought Texans and Oklahomans into southern Louisiana, the newcomers created an occupational hierarchy in which Cajuns were placed near the bottom. Only the Indians and blacks were lower, and as activity moved offshore they were initially barred from participating. Lack of local capital precluded Cajuns from investing in major structures such as rigs and platforms. Low educational levels and a weak commitment to formal schooling meant few local residents were prepared for professional positions in the new industry. However, drive, fortitude, ingenuity, and extensive social networks enabled the Cajuns to forge specific occupational niches for themselves in the transportation sector. Individual successes in using trucks and boats to move people and supplies led to the formation of companies. Both historical and recent efforts to find the maximum efficiencies have been the source of tension between workers and companies. As rigs and platforms move farther from shore, transportation becomes more costly, and tensions may increase.

Transportation for the offshore oil and gas industry is potentially dangerous because of the pressures to operate quickly and because of the physical conditions of moving up and down cheniers and bayous, across the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico, and near rigs and platforms. In the early days, there was no licensing and each individual determined the level of risk he or she was willing to accept. Today, the U.S. government regulates all modes of transportation, and changes in regulations have added new challenges to individuals and companies operating in this sector.

TRUCKING AND TRUCKERS IN THE LOUISIANA OILPATCH

A large and unique transportation sector serves the Louisiana oilpatch, for the mountains of metal and miles of pipe that comprise the infrastructure of the oilpatch must be built, moved, and serviced. For anyone who has spent time on the highways and back roads of southern Louisiana, the magnitude of the trucking sector of this transportation system is obvious – during periods of intense offshore activity, these roads and highways fill with large and small trucks moving to and from the docks, fabrication yards, and businesses scattered along the bayous. Just about everyone in southern Louisiana knows a trucker: a family friend or uncle may drive for a living, a young man’s grandfather may recollect driving for one of the oil companies, or a brother-in-law may work as a dispatcher at one of the trucking companies. Sometimes a whole family is involved in the trucking business. Even if this were not the case, anyone who works at the docks or fabrication yards would be familiar with the sight of a line of trucks waiting to load or unload. Trucking is the backbone of the oil industry, for it connects land to sea, connects the thousands of small businesses cast along the bayous to the oil company docks, and connects these small businesses to one another. In that sense, nearly every family involved in the oil industry benefits from the trucking sector. Trucking is the way things move on land.

Twenty or thirty years ago, truck driving presented good opportunities for entrepreneurs in Acadiana. A man could start driving a pickup truck as soon as he got his driver's license. Cajun men would often drop out of high school and start driving a pickup truck for an uncle or family friend. The money from this work was good enough that if he put some of it aside, he might purchase a truck of his own, and get a Commercial Driver's License along the way. If the young man had a head for business, he might buy two or three more trucks over the next couple years, and hire friends, family, or strangers to drive them. To build a successful business in the oilpatch, he would have to depend on friends and family connections to find jobs for his trucks. If he had a brother-in-law at one of the oil companies, he would call him and ask if there was any work around for his trucks. When he hired a new driver, he would consider whether that driver might be able to bring in some business of his own. With hard work, some luck, and an entrepreneurial attitude, a Cajun man could build a trucking company from the ground up.

The life of an oilpatch trucker was never an easy one. The oilpatch is a demanding worksite: the equipment the trucks haul is heavy, oversized, and complex. Many of the bayou roads are just a whisper wider than the truck itself, and the businesses the truckers serve are scattered far and wide. When a rig sends in a drill bit for servicing, the operators do not even consider waiting until daybreak; the drill bit may arrive at the docks at four in the morning, and any dispatcher worth his salt will have a truck there waiting. Oilpatch truckers understand the importance of this drill bit – the driver probably has a brother or friend working on a drilling rig, and he knows there are twenty or more men out there waiting for the bit. He puts the pedal to the metal and, taking his chances with the police, gets that drill bit to the service shop as fast as he can. Being on the road at five in the morning – well, that is just part of the job. The pay is good, his family is home asleep, and he is the master of the road. People depend on him, and this truck is his business. As any oilpatch trucker will tell you, trucking on the bayou is unlike anywhere else. The hauls are short and quick, and when the oilpatch is booming, a driver strings together one load after another until it's time to go home.

This story, and the possibilities it holds, drew many Acadian men to trucking as an occupation. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, Acadian women began to enter the industry as well, not just as dispatchers and office workers, but as truck drivers. The system described above held for about forty years. Then, with a series of changes, the whole oilpatch trucking industry was turned upside-down – mostly due to deregulation of the trucking industry. Today, most oilpatch truckers can hardly make the payments on their trucks. Family budgets are stretched to the limit, small trucking businesses have gone under, and the survivors are in a race to the bottom. Building a trucking business is a thing of the past.

This section explores the details of that change. The perspectives of the truckers, the companies, and the families, communities and individuals involved in the industry will be considered; in the end, the reader should have a better understanding of the intricate connections between the trucking sector and the oil industry, a better understanding of the impacts of changes within this sector upon the companies and people of southern Louisiana, and a clear impression of the constraints faced by the truckers, trucking companies, and the industry they serve.

History of Oilpatch Trucking

Until well into the 1950's, most oil and service companies of Louisiana maintained their own fleets of trucks and hired drivers as employees. There were also individuals who owned fleets of trucks and leased them to the oil industry. Neither of these organizational systems was particularly efficient. Companies that maintained their own fleets found that the trucks were idle too often, resulting in higher overall costs. The owners of truck fleets under lease to the oil and service companies faced another set of problems: the hired drivers did not really take care of the company trucks, and the company owner faced very high repair expenses. Moreover, purchasing a fleet of trucks required capital – too much for a lot of the men in the Acadian oilpatch. In the early 1950's, a New Iberian truck company owner named Sam Broussard, Sr. came up with a business design that would minimize equipment abuse to his fleet of trucks and solve this problem of capital-intensive start-up costs.

Rather than purchase the trucks, Sam Broussard Sr. configured a system in which the trucking company leased trucks from independent owners and owner/operators. The owners of the trucks were responsible for maintaining and operating the trucks. Owners of multiple trucks often hired drivers. The advantages of the system were obvious, as Broussard's son notes:

> "My dad came up with the concept of leasing in the oilpatch. He thought that instead of having a company with employees, he could figure out a way to go in as partners with them. That was the concept of the lease. Because the drivers would own the trucks, they would not only take care of the equipment, but they'd go out and hustle jobs, and then all would be better off … That's how he described it to me when I was a kid – he figured the lease concept would make a man his own boss, let him run his own business, and therefore he'd do a good job."

Other truckers and company owners followed suit, and the independent trucking firm soon became the norm. This basic division of labor remains in place today, as few companies purchase and maintain their own fleets.

Under this system, the amount of money paid by the customer for a haul is divided between several parties. The trucking company, which provides the operating permit (described below), pays the insurance, and completes the paperwork necessary for the job, receives approximately 25 percent of the money. The driver of the truck receives another 25 percent for operating the vehicle, and the rest of the money goes to the owner of the truck. One of the best ways to make money in the trucking sector of the Louisiana oilpatch is to drive your own truck. These truckers are called *owner/operators*. By driving the truck, the owner/operator collects some 60 percent to

75 percent of the money paid by the customer – everything minus the approximately 25 percent paid to the trucking company for the operating permit, paperwork, and insurance.

While the oilpatch trucking companies spent most of their time dealing with customers in the oil and service industry, they also had to deal with the state and federal regulatory agencies charged with overseeing the trucking industry. Truckers who crossed state boundaries were regulated by the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), which regulated a variety of safety and truck-maintenance issues, the amount of time truckers could spend on the road, and the rates charged to the customer. This interstate regulatory structure had been in place since the passage of the Motor Carrier Act of 1935, but many key aspects of the regulatory structure – particularly the government's role in setting the price of point-to-point hauls – were dismantled with the passage of the Motor Carrier Act of 1980. This change in national policy only partially affected the oilpatch truckers, for although the Acadian oilpatch truckers did haul to and from Houston, Port Arthur, and other points in Texas, most oilpatch hauls occurred within the state of Louisiana. For this reason, the state regulatory agency – the Louisiana Public Service Commission (LPSC) – played a much larger role than any federal agencies in regulating oilpatch hauling.

In Louisiana, the LPSC regulated the oilpatch trucking industry through several mechanisms[1]. At the foundation of the commission's regulatory duties were two functions: managing the distribution of the state operating permits required for business, and establishing the price for *line hauls* – the term used for point-to-point freight hauling. By controlling the distribution of permits, the LPSC limited entry to the oilpatch transportation sector; by establishing the price for line hauls (called the *tariff* or *line haul*), the LPSC maintained comfortable profit rates for Louisiana oilpatch haulers and the trucking companies under which they operated. With the passage of interstate deregulation in 1980, pressure began to mount within states for them to follow suit by deregulating intrastate transportation. Pressure from the federal government, combined with lobbying efforts from both the larger trucking companies in the oilpatch and the service and oil companies they served, finally pushed intrastate deregulation through the state bureaucracy as an attachment to the Airport Improvement Program Reauthorization Bill of 1994. While truckers nationwide often talk about to the interstate deregulation of 1980, in the oilpatch the term *deregulation* came to stand for the two major changes instigated in Louisiana by the 1994 attachment: the end of the LPSC's role in managing entry to the transportation business, as well as their role in establishing the price for line hauls within the state. The legislation took effect on January 1, 1995, and in a matter of years, the entire structure of the trucking industry had changed. After a description of the trucks and equipment of the oilpatch, this section will explore the impact wrought by these changes.

Equipment

The smallest vehicles of the fleets that serve the petroleum industry are really glorified pickup trucks (see fig. 4.2). These pickup trucks, called *hotshots* in the Acadian oilfield, come in a variety of shapes and sizes; the smallest are half-ton trucks, the largest over a ton, and many have been converted to flatbeds in the rear. The state does not require commercial driving licenses for hotshot drivers. Nonetheless, these trucks fill the major corridors in the Louisiana oilpatch, and drivers of the larger trucks consider hotshot drivers their brethren in oilpatch trucking. New models of these trucks retail for anywhere from $25,000 to $35,000, making them the least expensive way for an owner/operator to enter the oilpatch trucking business. For that reason, and because no commercial driving license is required to operate the pickup trucks, many drivers get their start as hotshots. For decades, these small trucks have served as a means of moving small pieces of equipment quickly from one place to another. Because much of the operating equipment in the petroleum industry is capital intensive, the breakdown of an essential piece of equipment – a drill bit, for example – can cost a company tens of thousands of dollars in downtime. The hotshot is the transportation sector's response to the unique demands of the industry; these trucks ferry key pieces of equipment to and from the docks and between the service companies scattered across the delta. The drivers' ability to carry vital pieces of equipment at top speed earned them the nickname *hotshots.*

Figure 4.2. Hotshot pickup

Although some truckers operate mid-size trucks, the current mainstay of the oilpatch is the eighteen-wheel tractor. Top-of-the-line tractors usually have an exterior constructed of durable aluminum, accoutrements made of chrome, and the dog-nose style that provides easy engine access (see fig. 4.3). Less expensive fiberglass models have proven quite popular with the oilpatch drivers as a cost-effective alternative. New top-of-the-line tractors retail from $105,000 to $130,000, while less expensive fiberglass models retail for $40,000 to $80,000. Because oilpatch truckers are often forced to sleep over at the various industrial yards as they await loading, many truckers opt for the more expensive sleeper models. Unlike the smaller hotshot trucks, the diesel tractors are built to run for hundreds of thousands of miles if properly maintained.

Figure 4.3. Eighteen-wheel tractor

These rigs commonly pull a standard, flatbed trailer. Flatbed trailers (also called platform trailers) usually come with pine floorboards and are built to carry 45,000 to 48,000 pounds. Most new trailers come with an air ride system that minimizes jostling and impact to the cargo. Platform trailers are used to carry all sorts of oilfield equipment, although it would seem to the casual observer that most platforms on the road carry pipe. These trailers retail for between $15,000 and $20,000, although further customization can push the price well beyond $20,000. Many of the truckers in the oilpatch pull drop-decks instead of regular flatbed trailers. Drop-deck trailers have several advantages: loading and unloading heavy freight is made easier by the lower deck, the lower center of gravity prevents tipping, and the trailers can carry tall pieces of equipment without exceeding the state limits on cargo height. These trailers retail for several thousands of dollars more than the standard platform trailers, and are usually capable of carrying nearly the same tonnage. For the purposes of billing, these trucks are considered special equipment, and therefore incur additional charges to the vendor.

Figure 4.4. Lowboy trailer

Another modified trailer is the *lowboy* (see fig. 4.4). Lowboy trailers are constructed of heavier steel and are built to carry loads as heavy as 120,000 pounds. Lowboy trailers are often manufactured with swing-out attachments allowing the owner to widen the trailer, and often include a rolling tailgate and a winch for self-loading as well. Some are constructed of reinforced steel, and extra axles help support the extra weight. In addition to the lowboy, many of the trucks in the oilpatch pull trailers called *goosenecks*. Gooseneck trailers come in various sizes; the name refers to the particular design of the trailer's hitch. The full-size tractors can pull a gooseneck trailer much like the lowboy described above. More commonly, however, hotshot owners purchase light gooseneck trailers to increase the weight and size of their hauls: because the pay for particular hauls correlates to the weight of the load, these smaller lowboys provide a way for hotshot owner/operators to increase the earning potential of their equipment.

Truckers and Trucking Companies through the 1990's

For much of the history of oilpatch trucking, an individual's success in the oilpatch depended upon his or her ability to find customers. While the trucking companies provided the permit and insurance necessary to operate, they only occasionally provided the trucker with an actual line haul. In general, it was up to the owner/operator to find customers. A trucker's family was often the best place to start. If a trucker had a brother or cousin working at one of the docks, the trucker would put in a call and let them know that he or she was ready to haul if something came up. The same thing applied to high school acquaintances, fishing buddies, or friends of the family. These social and familial networks provided a starting point for setting up a successful business in the trucking industry.

Social scientists sometimes term such networks *social capital* to describe the important role they play in the occupational sphere. Members of large, well-established Acadian families, then, were rich in social capital. Their network of friends and family allowed them not only to find a place at one of the trucking companies, but also to secure financing for a truck, and, most importantly, find customers with something to haul. A large, well-established family and an extensive social network of friends and acquaintances provided a good starting point for individuals in the oilpatch trucking industry. In this sense, oilpatch trucking was overlaid upon the social and familial networks of the Acadian people. Work had a lot to do with family, and family was reinforced by occupational connections.

However, social capital represented only half of the equation. Social and familial networks could carry a trucker a good distance in the business, but at some point in time the trucker had to rely upon his or her entrepreneurship to succeed. As one trucker described,

> "Before deregulation, we hustled all our own work – all of it. We'd call people, stop by offices, whatever it took. We'd show them that we had the right equipment and could give them the best service possible. Our success was up to us, and over the years I was able to develop a good customer base" [I-738].

The truckers weren't just speeding from business to business in their trucks; successful truckers constantly worked at increasing their customer base through cold calls, visits to new businesses, and through new acquaintances.

Once this customer base had been established, the truckers worked hard to maintain those occupational relationships. One trucker describes this process:

> "I was good at keeping customers. I'd bring them boudin in the morning to keep them happy, and on cold calls we'd go out to lunch. I'd get attached to customers quick, and we'd have more fun than the law allows. We'd have dinners together, barbecues, beer – my wife and I would blow $300 to $400 every once in a while on those barbecues. That's just the natural way of living down here. And after a while there weren't many cold calls left to make – most everybody knew me" [I-748].

Again, the line between social and occupational spheres was blurred in the oilpatch trucking industry. To build a business, truckers did these favors; this fact was accepted as part of the business, or, as the trucker above described, "the natural way of living down here."

Before deregulation, truckers depended upon their extended families, their own social connections, and their entrepreneurial ability to succeed in the oilpatch. In turn, trucking provided one of the few avenues through which a Cajun man and woman could set up his or her own business. This made truck driving an attractive occupation to many on the bayou – with some help from the family, a little luck, and a lot of hard work, an individual could build a large and thriving trucking business. And unlike their friends and relatives working offshore, they could be their own bosses.

Truckers and Trucking Companies at the Close of the Century

On January 1, 1996, Louisiana deregulated intrastate trucking. The impact of this policy change can be directly tied to the two aforementioned components of regulation: limited entry and state-established prices. With deregulation, anyone could enter the business by purchasing a certificate from the LPSC, provided they obtained the proper insurance, and, furthermore, any price could be offered for particular line hauls. Competition quickly shifted to price, and the rates for line hauls dropped 20 percent to 40 percent over the next year. Coinciding with this change, the negotiations involved in the trucking business were permanently altered: prior to deregulation, the bulk of negotiations concerning work involved the owner/operator and the customer; after deregulation, customers negotiated directly with the trucking company.

Because competition was now based on price, several of the larger trucking companies moved to establish single source alliances with large customers in the oilpatch. In essence, the trucking companies offered deep discounts for the right to carry all of the cargo for a particular company. These alliances were brokered by the trucking companies, which, as the participating truckers often noted, own no trucks. Alliances not only locked out independent truckers from most of the business in the oilpatch, but they created countless low-paying “contract loads” which, as the number and scope of the alliances increased, comprised the bulk of the work available in the oilpatch. The truckers participating in the study estimated that 90 percent to 95 percent of the business in the oilpatch is now run through the alliance system.

The centralization of power in a handful of large trucking companies can be directly attributed to the policy changes embedded in deregulation. At the same time, however, changes in the structure of the oil and gas industry augmented the power of the large trucking companies. Beginning in the 1980’s, both the oil and service industries entered a period of rapid consolidation. Mergers and acquisitions became the norm as companies struggled to meet the demands of the global market. Some of this resulted from the move to deepwater; the costs involved in drilling far offshore were much higher than locations closer to land or in shallower water. During this same period, many companies broadened into new geographical areas, creating a global market of production and consumption. The demands of this global market pushed companies to merge and consolidate. For the trucking industry, this meant fewer customers, and those customers were often much larger companies than customers in the past. In the reconfigured oilpatch, an alliance with one of the major service or oil companies represented a very significant portion of the total market.

The alliances and subsequent cuts in the price of line hauls resulted in a significant reorganization of the trucking industry itself. With payments to make on trucks, owner/operators faced the choice of joining one of the three or four large, alliance-based trucking companies to haul at their low contract rates, or joining one of the smaller, struggling independent trucking companies seeking to make a go of it with the few service and oil companies not enmeshed in the alliance system. In 1996, just after deregulation, a fair portion of the oilpatch business still functioned outside the alliance system, making the second choice a real possibility for many truckers. However, over the subsequent years, more and more businesses established alliances with the trucking companies. Many smaller businesses were forced into alliances by the larger companies to which they were subcontracted, while others chose to form alliances in order to save on transportation costs. In the end, however, the alliances cut the market for independent, non-allied trucking companies, and forced many truckers to seek work at one of the major trucking companies. Today, only a handful of independent trucking companies survive in the oilpatch. For the majority of the truckers in the oilpatch, the alliance-based trucking companies, despite their low contract rates, are the only game in town.

The economic impacts of these changes were devastating. The truckers in the oilpatch contend that they now work twice as much for half the pay. They are unable to properly maintain their equipment, resulting in increased concerns about the safety of the trucks, and the contract loads leave little money to take home. Owner/operators report that they are increasingly unable to make a go of it under the reconfigured system – trucks for sale line the highways, and many truckers look for opportunities in cross-country trucking or in another industry altogether. For the truck drivers of the Acadian oilpatch, however, the economic impact of deregulation is only part of the story.

The alliance system also disrupted the role of social networks and social capital in the trucking industry of the oilpatch. More specifically, the alliance-based trucking companies were able to short circuit the process by which social capital (described above) could be transformed into the basis of successful entrepreneurship in the trucking sector of the Louisiana oilpatch. Through the alliances, the large oil and service companies were required to utilize a single carrier. To meet the logistical demands of the system, the trucking companies set up 1-800 numbers through which the customers funneled transport requests, while also increasing the role of in-house dispatchers. Under this system, the trucking company assigned the drivers to particular hauls. As a result, social connections between the truckers and their customers became irrelevant; the truckers' social capital played no role in their success or failure in the deregulated oilpatch, and the truckers' entrepreneurial skills were of no use.

It is difficult to measure the impact of this type of change, but the truckers participating in the study feel disengaged from both the oil and trucking industry. In the past, truckers took pride in their role of bringing gasoline to the American pumps. They felt that they were properly compensated for their role in the Acadian oil industry, and that there were good opportunities for entrepreneurial Cajuns to build a trucking business in the oilpatch. The changes stemming from deregulation and the alliance structure ended such opportunities. Truckers nowadays are rarely proud of their role in the industry. They note that opportunities to advance in the trucking industry have largely vanished, and they discourage their sons and daughters from following in their footsteps. Fifty years ago, pioneers in the trucking industry designed a business structure that meshed the interests of truck drivers and company owners. Through deregulation and the subsequent changes in the industry, the interests of the truckers and the trucking companies are now at odds with one another.

Company Perspective

From the perspective of the major trucking companies, the post-deregulation period has been one of intense competition. The three or four major trucking companies that dominate the oilpatch struggle with each other to capture alliances with the large service, oil, and fabrication companies. They compete through a bidding process in which they seek to offer the lowest possible contractual price for hauling. Once alliances are established, contract loads are offered to the owner/operators leased to that company. While the managers at the trucking companies note that their customers consider safety records and proof of ample insurance in deciding upon an alliance partner, the primary factor in the calculation is price. It is this facet of the competition between trucking companies that continued to decrease the line haul rates.

The owners and employees of the major trucking companies note that while some of the burden of these lower prices is borne by the owner/operators, much of the price cuts can be attributed to advances in the efficiency of the trucking sector. Through technological investments and the reorganization of personnel, the major trucking companies have been able to increase the utilization of the trucks under lease. In turn, the increase in truck utilization stems from advances in consolidation, backhauls, and scheduling. As one sales representative summarized the situation,

> "The oil companies started to focus on this little slice of their budget – the transportation slice. Well, we're at a point now where we can't cut the price any more – the best we can do is maybe increase the backhaul ratio and save a little bit more here and there. That's the key: logistics. The oil companies are beginning to listen to us, and technology is serving us better every day. We're to the point now that we can get the cargo manifest of a boat leaving a rig as it pulls away. We can then hold the trucks there for just the right amount of time. There's a lot more email and fax going on now, too" [I-768].

One important aspect of this increased efficiency is the frequent consolidation of loads. Because the major trucking companies handle all the dispatching for the customers, they are able to piece together multiple loads on a single truck, prohibited under the regulated system. For a trucker with an 18-wheeler, a trip to Houston from Acadiana might include four or six stops to pick up smaller items. The truckers are paid a small fee for each additional stop, and the customers receive a discounted rate for those consolidated hauls. Complex logistical systems are needed to organize these hauls. In general, however, the trucking companies note that their ability to consolidate loads means fewer trucks carry more cargo – the hallmark of trucking efficiency.

Under the regulated system, truckers utilized the state-established price for point-to-point hauling. Once they reached their destination, they occasionally called around to find a load to carry homeward. These are called *backhauls*. After deregulation, the logistical systems established by the major trucking companies focused on finding and organizing backhauls. These systems resulted in dramatic increases in truck utilization, as the backhaul quickly became the norm in the oilpatch.

Finally, these logistical systems resulted in the ability to quickly communicate customer needs to the company and truckers. As the sales representative describes, the major trucking companies are able to precisely gauge transportation needs of particular customers even before the boats reach the shore. With the new logistical systems, the trucking companies can locate drivers nearby and get them to the docks at just the right time. Ideally, these systems cut down on the amount of time truckers spend waiting for loads to arrive at the docks.

While these gains in efficiency provide some explanation for the cuts in transportation rates, the major trucking companies concede that the owner/operators have borne much of the burden. Many of the men and women at the trucking companies are sympathetic to the owner/operators' plight, but are forced by the structure of the transportation industry to continue forcing line haul rates down. From their point of view, they are at the mercy of the oil companies. They do what they can, but the system dictates their action. As the sales representative quoted above later noted,

> "I hope the business has seen the bottom as far as pricing goes. The oil companies are beginning to realize that they can only go so low on pricing. They've got to remember that the driver gets out of bed and puts his pants on at two in the morning in order to carry

> their loads. There have got to be other ways of saving money other than lowering the rate even more" [I-768].

The sales director for another major trucking company added,

> "There's definitely some kind of change coming down the pike. The mood of the drivers is real bad, and something is going to have to improve for them … all of what has happened is a natural result of deregulation … but the rates are going to have to give for the drivers to maintain their rigs. The costs of the owner/operator don't vary, you know? Our company tries to take care of its owner/operators, but it's difficult with the competitive nature of the market" [I-673].

As the individuals above describe, the major trucking companies are locked in competition with one another, and price is the primary arena for this competition. While they indicate a desire to avoid burdening the owner/operators under lease, lowering the contract rate is their only option. Should they stand their ground on pricing, another company will win the alliance, and they will have nothing to offer the drivers under lease.

Finally, the company personnel participating in this study report that the decrease in contract rates has made trucking a less and less attractive occupation for the men and women of the oilpatch, and as a result, the quality of the labor pool has dramatically diminished. As the sales director describes,

> "Things are really changing. The quality of drivers is way down, and the average age is going up every year. Our company's drivers' [average] age is somewhere around 46, which is slightly higher than the industry average in the region. There's just not a lot of new blood coming in, and the reason for that is money – there's just not enough to be made as a driver. After deregulation, the rates went down, and the drivers suffer. They don't get enough to maintain their rigs"[I-673].

Another trucking company employee added that,

> "With the rates down so low, there isn't a lot of incentive for good new people to get in on the business. A lot of the guys coming in can't even pass the drug test, the physical, and they probably have a bad driving record to boot" [I-768].

The poor quality of incoming labor, then, is one facet of the problems created by the deregulated marketplace. The alliance-based trucking companies recognize they are fighting for market share. They may be able to shave some costs through efficiency and logistics, but the owner/operators continue to bear much of the burden resulting from the lower line haul rates. While the company personnel participating in this study expressed concern over the fare of the drivers, they recognize there is little they can do in the context of these larger market forces.

Trucker's Perspective

Much of the trucker's perspective has already been described. As the avenues of entrepreneurship in the trucking sector disappeared, Acadian truckers found themselves stuck in a no-win situation. Many of them opted to leave the oilpatch trucking sector – some for jobs in cross-country trucking, others for jobs outside the trucking sector altogether. The owner/operators, like the employees of the trucking companies, recognize that the incoming labor is not of the same quality as years past, and that the poor quality of the labor pool can be attributed to the low pay structure under which nearly all oilpatch truckers now operate. These are difficult times for oilpatch truckers.

While many of the truck drivers in Acadiana feel they are caught in vast economic and political currents, few have adopted a passive role in adjusting to the change. In part, they have focused their frustration on the energy companies and alliance-based trucking companies that control the oilpatch trucking business. As described in the previous sections, this represents a significant change in attitude: prior to deregulation, the owner/operators and the trucking companies functioned as partners in the oilpatch, and each depended upon the other for survival. This relationship has been severed under the reconfigured industry, and an adversarial relationship has emerged in its place.

Moreover, the truckers' perspectives about the oil and gas companies at the core of the industry have dramatically changed since deregulation. In the past, the truckers viewed themselves as an essential and respected component of the oil industry, and trucking families often had long, established relationships with particular oil and service companies. As described above, the reconfiguration of the trucking industry after deregulation severed many of these connections between business and family. In the process, the role of social capital was cut from the trucking industry, and with it, important bonds between individuals, families, communities, and the oil industry were altered. Many of the truckers argue that, in the final accounting, the oil companies are to blame for the condition of trucking sector. By pushing their transportation budgets to new lows, the oil companies instigated this era of penury for Acadian truckers. As a result, the truckers' allegiance to these companies, as well as the trucking companies themselves, has waned.

In their economic position, many of the Acadian truckers have sought new strategies for reinforcing their power in the oilpatch. The primary manifestation of this change in attitude is the truckers' move toward collective action. Over the last five years, the truckers formed several associations to challenge the dominance of the major trucking companies. Collectively, they sought to both legally challenge the premises upon which the alliances were constructed and to simply reinforce their position through the power of numbers. Many authors have noted the historical resistance of southern labor to unionization; in the oilpatch, however, the recent and dramatic changes in the industry led many truckers, as well as people in the marine sector, to explore the possibility of unionization. Support for this move is certainly not universal in the trucking sector of the Acadian oilpatch, as many truckers fear the union will simply introduce more regulations to the transportation sector, and thereby push the industry further away from the family-oriented business they remember. Nonetheless, unionization is being considered as a possibility.

The mariners took the lead in this move. As described in the sections that follow, their association formed links with several national unions in an effort to combat the growing power of the few companies controlling the maritime transportation sector. The mariners, in turn, had followed the template established by the helicopter pilots who had unionized some time earlier (although, unlike both the maritime and trucking sector, few helicopter pilots are from Acadiana). At the time of writing, some Acadian truck drivers are attempting to convert their association to a union-like entity that might collectively bargain with the oil and gas companies, as well as with the major trucking companies, about the rates paid to oilpatch truckers. Finally, a new legal challenge to the business practices of the major trucking companies is underway. The final outcome of these events is difficult to predict. However, it is clear that these are times of great change for the truck drivers of the Louisiana oilpatch.

Conclusion: Truckers, Families and Communities

For the truckers of the Louisiana oilpatch, the late 1990's have been a time of particular hardship. Deregulation and the subsequent restructuring of the industry left many of them unable to make ends meet. As the owner of a small truck company related,

> "Most of these truckers' kids don't even have health insurance … I send my kids to private school so they can get a decent education, but most trucker families don't have these kind of choices. You know, the rest of the world – like these truckers – can't get decent medical help. The oil companies are squeezing the life out of people down here" [I-610].

While the operating costs associated with the trucks have steadily increased, the line haul rates have continued to sink. The families that depended upon trucking as their primary source of income now find their income severely cut, and much of their capital investment in trucks and trailers uniquely tailored to the transportation demands of the oilfield is now unprofitable to operate.

One strategy truck drivers have adopted is to spend more time on the road in an effort to increase the volume of hauling. While this strategy can help make ends meet, it often means that the trucker spends more and more time away from the house. One of the traditional attractions of oilpatch trucking was the amount of time Acadian truckers could spend at home, particularly in comparison with cross-country haulers. Several ex-truckers cited the increased amount of time spent away from their home as one of the reasons for their departure from the industry.

Perhaps the most pervasive impact upon the trucking families of the Louisiana oilpatch, however, is not directly economic. As described above, the changes wrought by deregulation took the social and familial aspect out of the business sphere; truckers now work for a big company, have no opportunity for entrepreneurship in the transportation sector, and are unable to rely upon their social capital for building a successful business. Their skills and knowledge of the oilpatch are of reduced value, and the social aspect of oilpatch trucking, such as getting to know your customers and working to keep them happy, has no place in the new oilpatch. For many oilpatch truckers, these changes are as difficult as the purely economic ones. As a result, their loyalty to the oil industry – an industry that many of their parents and grandparents helped to build – has waned.

In some ways, the recent changes in the trucking industry are mirrored by those in the maritime sector, the second link in the transportation sector of the oil industry. While the truckers handle most of the onshore transportation of equipment, getting materials to and from the docks represents only half of the job. A vast fleet of boats carry this equipment to the production platforms and drilling rigs that drive the offshore industry. The next section explores the impact of industry-wide changes upon the vital maritime transportation sector.

VESSELS AND MARINERS

Southern Louisiana mariners are caught up in a flood of changes. Providing boat transportation to and from offshore rigs and platforms has become as specialized and dynamic as hauling loads on the highways (see fig. 4.5). The worker shortages of the mid-1990's and new requirements for mariners sent companies across the United States looking for employees.[2] Mariners generally work concentrated schedules such as 28 days on and 14 days off, or 14 days on and 14 days off, which makes it possible for them to live outside of Acadiana and commute to the ports from which they will board their vessels. Nevertheless, working as a mariner on an offshore service vessel (OSV) remains an important occupation for southern Louisiana residents.

Figure 4.5. Supply vessel

Restructuring in the oil and gas industry and changes in federal regulations have caused significant impacts on mariners. New training and licensing requirements have become a focal point for talking about and reacting to these changes. Southern Louisiana's formal education system has lagged behind the rest of the United States for over a century, but becoming a mariner once required skills and abilities that could be acquired outside of school. Each change in training and licensing requirements has brought increased time in classrooms and exam rooms and has presented a special problem for many mariners and their families. Boat owners, regulators, and mariners all talk about the increasing demands on mariners and the importance of creating and maintaining a professional workforce. Yet, the response of many companies to the recent downturn indicates that this awareness has not yet been translated into action. This section traces the development of the offshore service vessel industry and its relationship to its workers, the mariners. The story is centered in Morgan City but could be told from many communities along the Gulf Coast.

History of the Offshore Service Vessel

The OSV sector is as old as the offshore oil and gas industry. From the beginning, boats have been needed for locating drilling sites, moving rigs and platforms offshore, and transporting people and supplies to and from these structures. Those activities remain the central tasks of OSVs today, and they have led to specialization within this sector. Large companies have separate divisions for seismic vessels, tug boats, crew boats, and supply boats. All these vessels have changed in response to technological changes in the oil and gas industry and in the boat industry. For example, as rigs and platforms have moved farther offshore, the boats that service them have become larger and faster. Likewise, as new technologies for navigation have been developed, the boats have begun to incorporate these elements. The industry has come a long way from its early days.

Before WWII, Morgan City was a typical southern Louisiana shrimping community. Trawling and trapping were seasonal occupations, and most families engaged in both. They would take their shrimp boats into the Gulf in the spring and early summer and then follow their trap lines in the fall and winter. Not all families owned shrimp boats, but all were influenced by shrimp’s seasonal cycles. Successful families accumulated wealth and built more and larger boats. Others scraped by or lost their boats and went to work for their neighbors. Beginning in the mid- to late-1940’s, local fishermen were hiring out their boats and operators to people looking for oil in the marshes. Some enterprising shrimpers found ways to convert the storage hulls of their wooden trawlers into cargo holds to haul supplies to the rigs that were being set up out on the water.

Over the next two decades, as Outer Continental Shelf activity increased and the offshore industry matured, inventors and entrepreneurs developed and put into service the vessels that kept the industry moving. The size and range of companies providing vessels for the offshore oil and gas industry grew, and the companies began to recognize common interests and formed the Offshore Marine Service Association, an industry trade organization. Responding to the promise of continued expansion, many residents left fishing and shrimping to devote themselves full time to designing, building, and operating the specialized vessels needed by the industry. The early changes included conversion from wooden to steel hulled vessels. Then, crews and supplies were separated on different vessels. Exploration required the use of explosives dropped from the back of the boat, and soon specialized seismic vessels were developed. As rigs moved farther offshore and distances to and from them increased, larger offshore vessels were built to serve them. Though many of the older vessels remain in service, the 1990’s brought in a new era in vessel design, size, and operation.

Regardless of its size, design, or purpose, a vessel requires a human operator. The nature and extent of oil and gas-related marine operations have been determined to a large degree by the abilities of operators and owners to respond to the challenges of a frequently changing work environment. When exploration and drilling began in the Gulf of Mexico, boat operators were trained and approved through an informal, local mentoring system based on social contacts, experience, and demonstration of ability. Children grew up on boats and many were running small outboards through the bayous by the age of seven or eight. Most fishing vessels were family-owned, and individuals earned the privilege of operating them, usually after many years of work alongside family members and close associates.

From its fledgling start in the Gulf of Mexico, the offshore oil and gas industry spread across the globe. Offshore vessel operators became part of a growing international maritime industry, and their activities came under increasing scrutiny. Early in the century, several widely publicized maritime accidents were attributed to human error, so pressures on policymakers spurred international agreements from which national licensing and certification regulations emerged. The first wave of international requirements for merchant vessels operating on the high seas was adopted in 1936, before “mineral and oil” (M&O) vessels existed. Soon after their creation, however, the M&O vessels were brought under regulation.

One effect of the licensing regulations was to formalize the distinction between “bluewater” or “upper-level” mariners (also referred to as “ocean-licensed” mariners), who worked aboard oceangoing ships and generally were trained at maritime academies, and “brownwater” or “lower-level” mariners, who worked in the inland waters and coastal areas and received mostly on-the-job training supplemented by license-preparation courses. The M&O license created a special group of brownwater mariners who could work only in the oil and gas sector. Many offshore supply vessels were smaller than 200 gross tons and could therefore be operated as "uninspected vessels." Their engineers, for example, were not required to have Coast Guard licenses, and their preparation for the job was left to on-the-job training rather than to formal instruction by qualified trainers.[3]

Over the next decades, growing pressures for occupational safety standards, greater professionalism, and efforts to minimize liability led to a mandate for increased regulation and standardization. In the 1970’s, the U.S. Coast Guard developed testing and licensing procedures, and training schools were established to help mariners study for and pass the new essay-style exams.[4]

In 1978, as part of its efforts to improve maritime safety worldwide, the International Maritime Organization established the Convention on Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (STCW). As an international treaty, the Convention had to be ratified by the U.S. Senate. The offshore industry was able, with the assistance of the U.S. Senators from Louisiana and Texas, to place the ratification of STCW-78 on hold until 1991. Nevertheless, in 1980, Congress passed a new federal law requiring licensed deck officers on *all* offshore supply vessels and licensed engineers on all vessels over two hundred gross tons.

It became clear that the Coast Guard could not give the essay exams to all mariners, so the tests were modified to consist of multiple-choice questions that could be quickly and easily scored. Thus, the testing process became standardized. Marine training schools changed their programs to focus on teaching mariners to take and pass multiple-choice exams.[5] Within a few years, some of the schools had developed computer-based training and practice exams. Mariners were still required to accumulate sea time before they could take the exams, but license preparation had strayed far from the early days of mentoring and hands-on demonstration of proficiency.

In the 1980’s, oil prices plummeted and the oil and gas industry went bust. Consequently, offshore vessel companies had all the mariners they needed and were not willing or able to spend money to train new captains, mates, or engineers. Mariners were expected to obtain and/or upgrade their own licenses in order to advance in the industry, and, though many people used the slow period to increase the scope of their licenses, many others left the industry.

The pattern of increasing standardization in training and licensing continued into the next decade. Following oil and gas industry restructuring and an upsurge in activity by the mid-1990's, the oil and gas companies reworked their inland fields and moved into deeper water. Many boat companies and mariners found themselves shifting from supplying working rigs and platforms to providing support for seismic operations. On the larger projects, demand for bigger, more technologically advanced vessels grew, and some companies capitalized on the new opportunities. For example, Edison Chouest Offshore, a family-owned southern Louisiana company, was an industry leader, constructing specialized deepwater supply and anchor-handling vessels under advance contracts with Shell Offshore.

Most companies, however, responded to the sputtering upturn of the 1990's through mergers, acquisitions, and the conversion and refurbishing of an aging fleet, a relic of the harried boat-building of the late 1970's and early 1980's. Newsletters and reports from Marcon International, Inc., a boat brokerage, track the changing industry through the decade: Tidewater, for example, became the largest owner of offshore support vessels when it acquired Zapata Gulf Marine in 1992. Hornbeck Offshore followed Tidewater's lead in acquiring supply and utility boats from Petrol Marine, then itself was acquired by Tidewater in 1996. Tidewater purchased another company in 1997, bringing its fleet to around 750 vessels. Seacor joined the movement, purchasing Smit International's fleet in late October 1996 and then Galaxie Marine Service. In addition to the mergers and acquisitions, vessel companies formed alliances with both oil and gas companies and marine training schools.

Most of the changes have favored large companies and training schools over small ones and pitted the large companies against one another. Similar to what has occurred recently in fabrication, the consolidation has opened up new possibilities for intervention by organized labor. Consequently, all companies now face pressures trying to respond to the accustomed demands of the oil and gas companies and the regulatory agencies and to the new demands of trade unions. To date, most have responded to the latter by attempting to discredit or ignore them.

Boat company profits are a function of day rates and utilization rates. Both were soaring until 1998. Deepwater activity, shelf drilling, and the production demands of mid-decade had driven utilization of the converted, refurbished and, occasionally, newly built fleet to around 100 percent; daily hire rates by the end of 1997 were peaking at $9,000. In this frenzy of activity, worker shortages became common, and personnel managers acknowledged that they had "fished out" the south. Mariners found themselves working for new corporate owners. Recognizing the problems they faced in attracting and keeping southern mariners, following laws such as the Jones Act that prohibit hiring foreign workers, and trying to position themselves in an international market, many of the larger companies shifted their hiring strategies to national recruitment efforts. A slump in the Gulf's bluewater shipping industry helped companies recruit new mariners to the Gulf and further contributed to the growing presence of maritime unions in the region.

In the 1990's, as the changes within the industry were taking place, maritime accidents and insurance data that attributed most accidents to human error increased the push for more stringent requirements. U.S. federal law established certification requirements for specialties such as radar, firefighting, and tanker training, while also dictating that only the Coast Guard could approve courses and issue certificates. New requirements implemented in the 1990's as amendments to the Standards for Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (STCW-95)[6] were at the forefront of conversations with and about mariners at the end of the decade. These discussions also highlighted many of the tensions and issues facing oilfield workers and companies during the decade, so the regulations will be described in some detail.

As amendments, the STCW-95 were treated by the U.S. Senate as being technical in nature, received much less attention than the original convention, and were accepted almost immediately.[7] They entered into force on February 1, 1997 to regulate the training and competence of seafarers internationally. Broad in scope, these amendments lay out a chain of obligations spread across the maritime industry, beginning with maritime administrations and continuing to maritime education and training institutions, shipping companies, and mariners.[8] A key focus of the amendments is seafarer competence, which is defined to include experience, training, medical fitness, and the ability to carry out assigned duties. In many ways, the amendments are a reaction to the standardized multiple-choice tests that had become the focus of both training and certification of mariner abilities. They require that candidates for licenses and documents show their competence, both by taking examinations and by demonstrating their skills aboard vessels. In addition to the courses and examinations, some mariners must maintain a personal training and service record book.

The amendments became the focus of criticism of the interrelationship between industry and the Coast Guard and the absence of "lower-level" licensed working mariners in decisions that directly impacted them. Even though STCW-95 will affect most offshore mariners by February 1, 2002, within southern Louisiana a general lack of awareness or understanding about these amendments persisted even into 1999. At that time, some Coast Guard officials warned that the few courses being prepared to meet the requirements were woefully inadequate for what was needed. Though the Coast Guard cannot report how many mariners work in the Gulf or will be affected by the amendments, most of the industry representatives and mariners in the study reported that the effects would be extensive.

The debate over STCW-95 brought to the surface signs of a much deeper rift between the OSV industry that once existed in the Gulf and that which it has become. It reflects the still significant gulf between what is professed and what is actually done with regard to professional status for OSV mariners. The respect, status, and pay that are awarded to mariners do not yet match the formal education and licensing that are expected of them. Because of their unique history and circumstances, southern Louisiana mariners have been affected by and responded to the changes in particular ways, and following a brief description of the vessels they operate, this section will examine their situation.

Equipment

There are many types of vessels in service to the offshore oil and gas industry. For all types, most companies provide both vessels and crew under contract. The size of the vessel now determines the type of license required to operate it, and mariners must undergo specific training to work on many vessels. In all categories, the trend over time has been toward larger, more powerful vessels equipped with high-tech navigational and operational features.

Seismic vessels are specialized offshore vessels that are equipped with systems that acquire two and three-dimensional (2D and 3D) seismic data in water of varying depths. These vessels may also provide for the acquisition of bathymetric, hydrographic, sonar, gravity and magnetic data collection operations.

As their name suggests, *supply vessels* are designed to carry a wide variety of cargoes, including large amounts of fuel, drilling fluids, cement or mud in tanks and other materials such as casing, drill pipe, tubing and miscellaneous deck cargo. Supply vessels are highly versatile and are known for their size and power. Specialized supply vessels exist for towing and anchor handling activities, wherever they may be required. *Crew boats* are generally smaller and faster vessels. Despite their name, they also transport moderate quantities of cargo along with from one to nearly one hundred workers at a time. These boats also are noted for their versatility.

Offshore tugs are very flexible vessels, providing towing for projects of virtually any size and in locations ranging from shallow to very deep water. Tugs come in a wide range of sizes and power. They are used for many functions, such as towing drilling rigs, providing support for platform construction, and handling anchors for pipe-laying barges. Tugs also are employed in coastal and ocean commercial towage of both containerized and bulk cargoes.

In addition to the above categories, *utility vessels* support offshore production and function as all-purpose vessels in diving operations, offshore structure maintenance, and general assistance. Other specialty vessels include line-handling vessels, maintenance vessels, and diving support vessels.

Mariners and Companies through the 1980's

In the early days of offshore oil and gas activity, Cajuns had neither the capital nor experience to acquire and operate rigs and platforms. Thus, it was the fishermen who, by modifying their vessels to service oil and gas rigs and platforms, were among the first locals to enter the industry as entrepreneurs. At first, they would hire themselves and their boats out to the oil companies. Later, some would build or buy additional boats and hire relatives and friends to operate them. Over time, some families built large companies. Having the mechanical and spatial abilities required to design and operate vessels, locals were soon able to achieve status as well as financial success. Their prowess became recognized internationally when many individuals and their families were recruited to the North Sea in the 1970's to service the developments there. At home, in Louisiana's plantation economy, success at sea and in the businesses connected to the offshore oilfield became a means to gain political as well as economic power. In a television newscast, a Cajun company executive explained why they went overseas:

> They have very little formal education, our captains, our engineers, and what have you. They're very good mechanically, they're good mariners, and especially when there's a big challenge involved… It's a challenge that a Cajun will not take no for an answer to something he can't do. We can do anything anybody else can do, better… The fact that we come from nothing, from nobody. We've been run out of more countries than most people have ever lived in on purpose and the fact that we're back in demand to go back to the countries that ran us off in the first place. Sure, there's great pride to that… For uneducated people, I find more intelligent people per capita in south Louisiana than I do any other place in the world (Dick Guidry, in *Cajuns on the Queen's Sea*).

Gulf Coast mariners were individualistic, skilled, tough, and proud. Traditionally, experienced mariners mentored novice seafarers in a process known locally as “making a captain.” That process involved many years during which captains closely supervised their apprentices, passing along techniques and tricks, and knowing when to push someone out on his or her own. One mate described how his mentor went so far as to put up blankets over the pilothouse windows, and endure the teasing of his buddies who called over the radio as they passed, in order to give him practice operating the vessel in a fog. Though that individual said that his captain was extraordinary, many captains talked about looking for and then mentoring young people who would be successful future captains.

As the oilpatch matured, mariners began to be drawn from outside Acadiana. The increasing industrial activity stimulated greater demand for entry-level workers of all types, including deckhands. With no regulations governing either who could operate the vessel or who could ride along as crew, skill and a willingness to work hard were all that were needed to get a job with the boat companies. Young men with ability and determination were employed on the boats, whether or not they could read or write. Through the 1970’s, most young men entered the oilfield straight out of high school, foregoing the potential long-term advantages of a college education for the short-term financial rewards of an oilfield job. As social pressure to go on to college increased, many young men continued to work on boats to pay their way through school. Few women were employed on vessels, and then only as cooks.

Despite the pride many mariners felt in their occupation, within the oil and gas industry there was never a question that the ultimate control lay with oil and gas companies. That hierarchy was reflected at the level of the workers as well. According to men who worked on the boats in the early days, in the evolving industry structure, production workers occupied the top rung, then came drillers, then contractors and support people, and at the bottom were those who worked on the boats. Pay rates followed that hierarchy, both within and among industry sectors. On the boats, the typical chain of command is from captain to mate or engineer and then to deckhand. As the OSV sector became more specialized, hierarchies among vessels developed, and both status and pay became linked to the type of vessel upon which a mariner worked. According to a mate and a manager,

> "The people on the seismic boats look down on the supply boats. Their attitude is that all [the supply boats] do is haul mud and all. The people on seismic boats tend to act like they're better than people on regular boats, but I feel people on regular vessels are better. One guy on seismic got tired of it and went to a regular boat, and he couldn't handle it. He got a rope caught in the propeller… He couldn't handle it around the rigs. He went back to seismic" [I-604].

> "[The supply boats] require a bigger license, and the people make more money on the bigger boats… On ours [the crew boats], they just run out and come back. They don't run out and stay tied up" [I-603].

Over time, the mariner's identity became linked to the type of boat on which he worked. The formalization of licensing requirements reinforced the hierarchy and set the stage for future problems.

When the Coast Guard instituted written tests that required lengthy essay-type responses, some Gulf Coast mariners and people familiar with them became concerned that the mariners with the most skill and experience would be unable to take and pass the exams. The changes came at the height of the Gulf of Mexico oil and gas boom when companies could not find enough workers who could meet the written requirements, so OSV industry associations lobbied for relief. The U.S. Coast Guard created a special licensing category for offshore vessels and offered oral licensing exams in Louisiana. Experienced mariners were "grandfathered in" based on their service records, without any formal training requirements.

When the essay exams were replaced by multiple choice exams, training schools developed programs to move large numbers of students through their classes. This approach contrasted sharply with a captain's claim that he would "make" only a few captains in his lifetime. And, even with the special licenses and modifications to the training and exams, the Gulf of Mexico faced severe shortages of qualified mariners during the oil and gas boom. Several southern Louisiana high schools started marine education programs, and the technical college in Morgan City developed what is now recognized as a top program in the nation.[9] Young mariners also continued to be trained on the boats during summer vacations.

Throughout the boom years, although much of the control over the qualifications deemed necessary for working on boats began to shift from the mariners and boat companies to the U.S. Coast Guard, local people still had considerable influence over vessel operations. Companies continued to employ experienced captains, even if they had no formal schooling. Work was plentiful and there were many boat companies to choose from, so mariners maintained some control over where and when they worked. Many of the companies were owned and operated locally, and mariners could move among companies and remain within their social networks. In the late 1970's, when labor was scarce, it was not unusual for mariners to move from one employer to another. Working conditions often were harsh, and there were intense pressures to work long hours and in dangerous conditions to deliver parts and supplies or move rigs. Mariners moved among companies to follow offers of higher wages, to escape a boat owner or captain who put them under what they considered to be unreasonable pressure, or as a favor to a friend who needed help. As licensing requirements tightened, some mariners opted to work overseas where the requirements were less stringent.

The 1980's bust affected the offshore service vessel industry in much the same way it affected other OCS-related industries. Many companies went under and their workers lost their jobs; others buckled down and initiated pay cuts for their workforce. Bankruptcies and downscaling reduced both the size and number of companies and, therefore, the number of working mariners. By the end of the decade, the Coast Guard had replaced the trade-restricted M&O licenses with "unlimited" licenses and had effected changes in both the nature of training and the ability of many local mariners to successfully obtain licenses. Two private marine schools that had concentrated on training engineers in the Gulf area closed their doors.

Mariners and Companies at the Close of the 20th Century

Many people argue that oilfield mariners at the turn of the century are treated better than they were in the previous decades. Still, the changes and wrangling within the maritime industry have had a significant impact on them. Contrary to their experience on the water, they have been told that education is something you acquire in school and that college is the path to success. Bluewater captains are still talked about and paid as if they were superior to brownwater captains, and paper licenses now command higher positions and salaries than do experience and ability.

Recent changes in technology and the shift to larger vessels have created a need for mariners with specialized skills, combining the ship-handling and electronic monitoring skills of the bluewater captains with the dexterity and responsiveness of the brownwater captains. Public calls for establishing progressive career paths for individuals interested in the offshore marine industry have come from industry associations as well as mariners.[10] Yet, turnover at the lower levels remains very high, and all companies express concerns about the costs of pre-service training for deckhands that will not last even one shift at sea. Even among marine transportation companies of similar size, there are significant differences in policy and efforts to protect and retain mariners.

The tension between the offshore vessel industry of the past and what is needed to meet the needs of the future is reflected in comments of mariners, industry representatives, and educators. Mariners, for example, commented that if they had the chance to do things differently they would get more education, but, if they were to get that education, it would not be to come and work on vessels and get treated like they do. Industry representatives argued that they had tried to reduce the number of days required for offshore vessel operators to meet the STCW-95 requirements because they knew the mariners would not take off for schooling the hundreds of days initially outlined in the convention. Educators recognize that, given that a first response of their companies during and economic slowdown is to reduce their pay, take away their training allowance, or lay them off, mariners are generally hesitant to invest huge amounts of time and money in education and training.

In discussions with researchers throughout 1998 and 1999, few mariners spoke of STCW-95 as a distinct requirement. Most were as yet unaware whether or how it would affect them. However, they told stories that indicate that licensing and certification requirements already had significantly affected the way they thought about themselves and their work. STCW is only one of many certificates that mariners must obtain in addition to their licenses. When asked about licensing and certification requirements, several mariners took pleasure in pulling out thick folders stuffed with endorsements and certificates to illustrate what they believed to be an excess of certification requirements.

Mariners distinguished again and again those with the ability and those with the paper qualifications. One of the most obvious threads running through these discussions was the comparison between the experienced Gulf mariner and the licensed but novice newcomer. Though mariners are legendary for their bravado and storytelling abilities, the fact that the issue of licensing has made its way into the core of their storytelling shows how important it is to them. Two of the principal patterns of these stories are presented here.

> Johnny, a mate, shared his experiences in great detail. In one instance, he was sleeping when Frank, the new captain, first came on the boat. Frank woke Johnny up, even though Johnny had just been at the wheel for more than 12 hours and had just brought the boat into the port.[11] Frank asked Johnny to come watch him take the boat out of the port because he was not familiar with the area. Johnny got up and went with him. As Frank was getting ready to move the boat, Johnny asked him if he knew about the mud lumps under the ship. Johnny told him you cannot see the mud lumps and explained that the mud lumps are ridges under the water. You have to approach them at an angle. If you try to go over them parallel to the ridgeline, your boat will keep sliding back into the same position and you will never get out. After Johnny explained all this, Frank looked at him and asked if he would take it out. Johnny got behind the wheel and got the boat into the Intracoastal Canal. At this point in the story, Johnny interrupted his tale to comment, "This was a captain with an unlimited ship's license." The story continued as Johnny related how he called the pilot station for information about three boats coming toward him. He called the nearest captain and decided that he would hold his boat in place because they otherwise would meet at a bend in the canal where it is not safe for two ships to pass. Frank admitted to Johnny that he would not have known to do that and would have had a problem. In relating the story, Johnny just shrugged and gave a "what can you expect" sort of smile [I-568].

> Joe, a captain, spoke more generally about the situation. He argued that the Coast Guard changes the rules too often and too much. Now, you have to take a written test to get your license. Too many people take the test and do not have enough experience to manage a boat. He commented, "I wouldn't trust them with my boat!" He said he knows captains who have been adrift three and four times because they didn't know what to do. Though he commented that they would eventually learn by experience, he emphasized that the whole boating culture had changed [I-451].

Some of the new recruits recognize that their licenses are not enough. As one captain said,

> "I was talking to one of the kids the other day. I said, 'I sailed deep sea, you know,' and he said, 'I am convinced that if you want to be a boat handler you need to do this type of

work. What I find out by looking at you all, once you've got this down pat, [is that] you can go and do anything you want to do because you've got the experience.' He said, 'I've got all the education, and all the licenses in the world, which is good, but I'm finding out that I'm needing this [experience] right here. Once I've got this, then these papers will start working for me'" [I-221].

Even though many mariners still are proud to work in the oilfield, the mergers and acquisitions within the OSV industry have left many feeling distant from company management. Institutionalized hiring and firing procedures have replaced the informal social networks that determined who worked and for whom. Within even the largest companies, managers who deal directly with the mariners expressed concern about the present situation. Boat company personnel who know the mariners personally recognize the problems that will face the older (above 40) mariners who are dedicated, trustworthy, and skilled but will be unable to meet the requirements for the latest round of certification.

Mariners can still be characterized as being individualistic, tough, and proud, but often their remarks were laced with defeat. Of special note are increasing concerns about safety in the Gulf. Both mariners and industry representatives observed that some changes have been the result of insurance claims and safety concerns that arose from a large number of accidents. Yet, few maintained that the changes would increase safety. To the contrary, by removing some of the most experienced mariners, they may have the opposite effect. In the late 1990's downturn, many mariners described heightened pressures to perform under any circumstances or lose their jobs (see fig. 4.6). The attrition resulting from such experiences combined with the removal of seasoned captains who cannot meet the new requirements could be overwhelming to the communities and industry. For example, despite the talk about increasing the professional stance of the mariners, even experienced mariners talked of how they are pressured to act against their better judgment. These comments from a captain and a deckhand illustrate their frustration with the loss of control over decisionmaking:

Figure 4.6. Deckhands loading drill pipe onto a supply vessel

"It hasn't [always] been like that in the Gulf. If you went out there and you did a job, you pulled up to the rig and you tried to offload everything. You did what you had to do… [Now,] when you go out there and you say, 'Look, it's a little too rough, but I'll try,' and you might wait around for a few minutes, they might say, 'Look, if you can't do it, I'll get someone else to do it'" [I-221].

> "The worst thing about the oilfield is that even though they are forever talking about safety, nobody really cares when it comes right down to it. They are not really concerned with safety. As long as they are making money, they are happy. That's why there are so many injuries, companies really don't give a s--- about safety… In the beginning of 1998, I got my front teeth knocked out because they had a guy who was not certified running the crane" [I-379].

In the end, mariners talk about not renewing their licenses when they expire, not attempting to obtain certification, and not wanting their children to follow in their footsteps. Still, there are those who have not yet given up, and the debate over STCW-95 became an arena within which they could raise their voices. STCW-95 mandates significant changes in how mariners are certified and sets the stage for at least a partial return to the demonstration of competence that was practiced aboard many vessels prior to the Coast Guard's introduction of multiple-choice examinations. Both mariners and industry officials support this move in principle. What is at issue is how it is implemented and whether or not its implementation is accompanied by significant shifts in power between workers and employers.

Companies, Educators, and Unions: The Provision of Training

Representatives from the Coast Guard, the Offshore Marine Services Association (OMSA), and one of the large marine training companies participated in the negotiations around STCW-95. Then and later, both industry spokespeople and mariners tried to get the OSV industry exempted from the amendments. However, they were up against both a general desire from within and outside the industry to see changes in the nature of mariner education and training, and the power of an international convention that was ratified by the U.S. Senate with almost no investigation. By the end of the decade, though they achieved some concessions, such as the exemption of vessels admeasuring less than 200 gross tons and approval for special OSV-designated certificates, both groups recognized that STCW-95 would be implemented on schedule whether they were ready or not. OMSA began to develop training courses to meet the STCW-95 requirements. Only approved courses could lead to STCW-95 certification and no one else had the approval. Therefore, mariners, educators from public and private training schools, and Coast Guard representatives who were aware of the situation began expressing concern that there would not be enough courses and those that became available would be prohibitively expensive for individual mariners and small boat companies.[12]

Consequently, beginning in 1999, several things happened to shift the advantage away from the established alliance between the association and private training school. Working with companies whose mariners had long turned to them for licensing preparation, entrepreneurial instructors from two technical colleges developed and received approval for curricula for the new STCW-mandated courses. They worked to gain the support of OSV companies and the Louisiana Department of Labor to address the training needs within the state's workforce development programs to provide low cost STCW training.[13]

In a parallel effort, backed by five national maritime unions, a group of mariners and marine educators formed the Gulf Coast Mariners Association (GCMA) in April 1999. Though the GCMA's charter specifies that the organization is not and cannot become a union, its affiliation with the unions caused tremendous concern, and its efforts to organize mariners created a significant backlash in the OSV industry. Some mariners reported to our researchers that their companies had held meetings warning them against joining the association while others said their companies had merely emphasized that unions were bad for the industry. Anti-union sentiment runs so deep in much of the south that even many disgruntled mariners, in addition to managers and owners, were critical of the early association efforts.

Nevertheless, GCMA organizers capitalized on the uncertainty and confusion over STCW-95 as well as the generalized dissatisfaction of many mariners. They also focused attention on larger issues such as company mergers and the lack of local economic improvement when the prices of oil and gas rose, and they linked mariners' concerns to those of other oilfield workers.

Industry association members reacted quickly to the formation and activities of the GCMA. In response to charges that mariners were not represented on the boards and committees whose decisions affect them, the industry representatives pointed out that the companies represent their workers and have long looked out for their interests. By spring, a union had been formed. A new local anti-union organization was formed with the support of a major offshore vessel company.[14] Attacks between the groups became personal and some argued that they detracted from efforts to address the lack of training programs. In the summer, the U.S. Department of Labor announced it would award through the GCMA and to a union-affiliated institute a federal training grant to provide free training to mariners who work on offshore waters and are affected by STCW-95.

A letter to the editor of the Houma *Courier* captures what is now part of the public discussion about mariners:

> The Gulf Coast is home to the best mariners in the world. We have a tradition of pride, a keen sense of family and community values and a strong work ethic handed down from generation to generation. When the oil and gas companies began to drill in the Gulf 50 years ago, our communities welcomed the offshore oil. During the 1970's and 1980's, the industry boomed. Small-boat companies cropped up and grew. As mariners, we made enough money to raise our families, and we got enough time off to enjoy them. Then came the big bust in the mid-1980's and everybody suffered. Today, six big companies control the offshore marine industry and they've reduced us from proud craftsmen to boat zombies. Now we work 28 days on and 14 days off, and you can imagine what that does to our families. We're pressured to ignore Coast Guard rules, working more than 12 … s…
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operating small, versatile vessels in and around rigs near shore differ considerably from those of operating a large, ship-like vessel in open water. Education and training needs also differ.

The changes being brought about by STCW-95 follow a pattern of recent changes in education that emphasize that exams cannot measure competency. But, there are no shortcuts to education. Regardless of the format of testing, learning requires investment of time and energy. Managers within the offshore vessel industry recognize that the mariners need a high level of skill and competence and want them to have them. However, companies have had to pay for training in times of worker shortages and therefore have sought to minimize what is required. They want to maintain the flexibility of a large, expendable pool of labor, especially at the entry levels. Industry representatives argue that the companies have always taken care of their workers, but they have not acknowledged the dramatic changes that have occurred in their industry. Despite the inequities of worker-management relations in the 1970's and early 1980's, when things were booming everyone was making money and there was room for many entrepreneurs and smaller companies – at that phase of the industry cycle the conflicts were avoided or managed. The combined impacts of changes in certification, company restructuring, and the downturn have taken their toll on southern Louisiana.

Mariners, Their Families, and Their Communities

Mariners face the same challenges as many others who work in the oilpatch: the uncertainty of unemployment, concentrated work scheduling, and danger on the job.[15] Their families learn to cope with the health and financial risks and to adapt to a part-time spouse or parent. The downturn of 1998-1999 was accompanied for most mariners by the familiar cycle of demotion in position and cuts in pay in exchange for not being laid off. Boat companies themselves were experiencing drastically reduced revenues from the downturn. Vessel revenues for one of the major Gulf fleet operators fell from $252.5 million during the last three quarters of 1998 to $104 million for the same period in 1999. The company began stacking vessels and, to reduce costs, deferred the normal procedure of repair and maintenance on drydocked boats. It also reduced its crew personnel. Another company's annual revenues declined from $126 million in 1998 to $31 million the following year. The pattern continued into the year 2000. A press release from one of the major Gulf operators endeavored to assuage its stockholders with news that its second quarter loss for 2000 was down to $4.2 million compared to a $9 million loss for the same quarter in 1999; it proclaimed hopefully that day-rates had finally bottomed out. One industry analyst commented wryly that oil producers, after incurring the high charter rate of a few years earlier, had simply been taking their turn at the plate [I-132].

Companies use three strategies to reduce personnel costs: cuts in pay, cuts in hours, and layoffs. One of the larger companies, for example, dropped the pay for captains from $205 to $185 a day (12 hour shifts) and reduced the number of days they could work. The company laid off few people because many mariners quit in search of better wages. In some companies that were short on workers, mariners could increase the number of shifts they worked. Others tried to supplement their income. Several mariners talked about how they would often turn to crawfishing when their pay was reduced, but the crawfish business was down during this study.

While single people can string together several shifts (known as working straight time) to make ends meet, this choice poses a significant problem for families. Several people commented on the difficulties of being gone 14 or more days at a time. Jim, for example, is a captain who has stayed with a 7-and-7 schedule for the five years he has been married. Despite the financial cut he took with the downturn, he does not plan to increase his days:

> "I like it like this. I am home for a week. My daddy worked 14 and 7. I always said if I married I'd never do it. I never saw my daddy" [I-451].

A spouse whose husband worked as a mate and had decided to increase his days at work had adopted a wait-and-see attitude:

> "It will be interesting to see how we handle the 28-and-14 schedule. We really like the 14-and-14, but I do not know about this. His thinking is that if he can do this for two or three years, then he can stop doing it altogether and dictate when he wants to work" [I-285].

Reduction in work time is equivalent to a cut in pay for those people who work extra shifts to make up for already low wages. Deckhands, for example, make around $10 an hour and usually depend on working many back-to-back shifts to make ends meet. When their time gets cut significantly, they often leave, and several mariners and company managers noted that the downturns provided an opportunity for companies to get rid of workers. According to one mate,

> "[In this recent round of cuts, my salary] stayed the same. It was time in a way to clean house. Anyone who caused trouble or was less desirable, they'd let them go. Lots of companies do that. The guys that are working straight time for six months on a boat, they got cut out. The captains and engineers got put on a salary. We're accustomed to working 28 days and got cut down to 14 and salary" [I-604].

Even for those who like being offshore, the lack of control over the schedule and the need to be gone for long periods takes its toll. According to an engineer and 20-year veteran of the industry,

> "The working conditions, the loneliness – these are the negative things. And then there are the times when you are working and you look down at your watch and you realize that it is little Johnny's birthday and there is nothing you can do. You have no control over things that you want to be back for. You remember the party that your wife was wanting to go to, but you know that you are going to miss it" [I-284].

A key aspect of a successful relationship is communication, and older mariners and their spouses described the positive evolution from the marine radio operator, who had to be told all the details of whatever family crisis had occurred, to the public and then cell telephones where mariners could be reached directly and hear the news firsthand. Families also use fax machines, email, and trips to the dock to meet the vessel when they need to communicate. The availability of multiple modes of communication is a significant difference between older, smaller and newer, larger vessels. Some company executives noted that improved communication on all vessels was a change that is within their power to make.

Another subtle but pervasive impact on mariners is the negative attitude toward them that many express, both within their communities and within the larger maritime industry. This was articulated by a mate who worked on some of the larger, specialized vessels and was working on an internet computer course to earn his captain's license. He described how childhood friends would tell his mother, when they learned that he was working on the offshore vessels, that they thought he would have made more of himself. As he indicates, coupled with that was the negative reactions he had received from Coast Guard officials and bluewater mariners. His perceived need to defend his choice of career came through in more than one discussion he had with our researchers:

> "I read an article recently that they call ours a low level license. That is kind of demeaning. [The upper level mariners'] schooling is all book work and theory. They have 90-day semesters and summers off. They go to sea 30 days each summer and accumulate sea time. They leave the states and cruise to the Caribbean, France, occasionally stop and dock the boat, clean the toilets. They are not doing the same type of work that we're doing. It's a totally different type of work that we do. It's like combat compared to just flying a commercial airplane because of the things we have to do. People look down on us because of years ago in the 70's when people were coming into Morgan City and the south from all over. They were lower class people, unemployed, coming in from all over. They would go into bars, get in fights. They were always dirty. They made the industry look like trash. That's where we got the term oilfield trash. The word was that any trash that drifts into town they put to work" [I-604].

On top of the attitudes that are conveyed in the process, the training and licensing requirements lead to additional impacts for mariners. Attending schools, studying for exams, and trips to Coast Guard offices to take the exams and turn in paperwork all must take place during time at home. Such tasks can reduce time with the family from a week or two weeks to a weekend at home. In many families, both mariners and their partners talked about how they worked together to help the mariner prepare for licensing exams and shared the joys of passing and the disappointment of failure. For example, during several visits with Lisa and Tony, one researcher was told about how Tony was preparing to take the exams to obtain a mate's license. Lisa was helping by making flash cards and reviewing the material with Tony. She was confident he would pass the exam. However, several months later during a visit when Tony was offshore, Lisa mentioned that Tony had failed his exam and would have to start over [I-383, I-386].

Another individual argued that he was able to get his mate's license quickly because he was single:

> "[To get the license,] you have to make a commitment. I drove to New Orleans and dropped my $1,900. I had made the commitment. I drove to New Orleans every day for a month. I got there at 7 a.m. and studied till seven or eight at night, then would drive back. I was off for a month. I did that five to six days a week. I went back to work for one month instead of my normal two months. I went back to school for one month and took all my training for a mate's license. I had made the commitment to stay out till I got my license. My company had an emergency, so I went back for one month…" [I-604].

Paying for the training and licensing was an issue that many people discussed. Several of the large companies have policies to pay for training, but those policies are not followed during a downturn, and several mariners said they have just gone ahead and taken the time off and paid for their own schooling rather than wait for the company to get around to it. Because there is no merit or longevity pay associated with working on most vessels, obtaining a new license is the only way to increase one's salary.

The recent association and union activity has added another impact to mariners and their families. The OSV industry began with many small companies and considerable overlap among family, community, and workplace, and that structure stymied organizing by mariners. For many, the owner was an uncle or family friend, so few deemed it necessary to form an association or union to gain representation in decision making. Life in the oilpatch was tough, and workers were expected to accept and even thrive on it. Having only recently risen above poverty, both workers and spouses generally accepted the trade-offs. By the 1990's, workers' expectations had changed, and, as the distance between mariners and their companies increased, some opted to join associations and begin collective action. Those decisions have been perceived by some as anti-community and have generated criticism.

The backlash against the mariners who would join the unions has been painful for many participants. A recent Catholic novena, for example, included a request for prayers for "The Gulf Coast Mariners Association, Offshore Mariners United, and all the southern merchant mariners who work in the offshore oil industry. They are trying to organize into a union, and they are meeting the tremendous opposition from the boat owners." Though many industry representatives acknowledge the right of workers to organize, the negative local response, including the formation of an anti-union organization, has demonstrated that they feel otherwise.

Despite the frequent hardships families face when involved in the oilfield, the mariners and their spouses were quite upbeat in our discussions and emphasized positive aspects of their lives and their companies. Company policies that allowed mariners to be home for the birth of a child or funeral of a grandparent were named. In their discussions, mariners readily distinguished good from bad companies and captains for whom they had worked.

For example, Steve, a mate, offered three reasons why one of his jobs did not work out. (1) He was young and his coworkers were all 50 years or older. They didn't like working with a younger person. (2) He was green, or inexperienced, and that was an automatic strike against him. The crew liked to work with experienced deck hands, so they taught him very little. He had to learn things on his own. (3) He was Yankee, and he felt like they discriminated against him because he was not from southern Louisiana. He described his present company:

> "They are all right to work for, but they are another one of those companies not willing to pay for good work. But I had a good captain, at least part of the time. He taught me a lot. I wanted to be a captain, and he was showing me the things that I would need to learn to be a captain. Then, they switched me to a different [boat], and again, the guys didn't want to teach me anything. The captain was honest, he said the he just did not have the patience to teach people" [I-379].

Female mariners, though rare and subject to significant periods of testing when they first began working, were generally positive about their career choices. Also, though the company mergers and acquisitions were often discussed negatively, one positive outcome was that that parent company's policies on equal employment and non-harassment policies for both women and blacks were implemented in all the subsidiaries. This opened up opportunities for some people that would not otherwise have been available. Some women argued, however, that the companies still were not doing enough to educate men about working with women and, because of some problems that had been reported, were becoming less willing to hire women. Due to the small number of women mariners who participated in this study, these issues could not be thoroughly investigated.

In their discussions about working offshore, all parents were asked whether they thought their children should follow in their footsteps.[16] Their responses ranged from the unhesitating "no" ("I prayed the kid would get sick on the boat his first time out, and he did… I didn't want him doing what I did.") to an attitude that the child should make those decisions ("I never told him what to do."). The one individual who had successfully encouraged his son to be a boat captain acknowledged that he was not like most others with whom we would talk. Yet, among those who left the decision up to their children, the pride in those who had followed after their fathers was evident. According to one captain,

> "I didn't tell them to go on the boats or not to go on the boats. The older boy just took into it. I don't think he's ever done anything else… I'm glad he took into it. He made a decent little captain. He didn't have but a seventh grade education, so it took him awhile to get his license" [I-616].

Though many families are ending their marine tradition, it is not without some sadness.

Conclusion

This study began at a time when word of STCW-95 was just reaching working mariners. It continued during the development of the first training programs in response to the Convention, the formation of the Gulf Coast Mariners Association, Offshore Mariners United, the backlash against the association by industry groups, the development of state Department of Labor incumbent worker programs, and partnerships among companies and training schools.

In the turmoil and uncertainty that characterizes the world of mariners, maritime educators, and offshore vessel companies serving the offshore oil and gas industry in the Gulf of Mexico, solutions are badly needed. Specifically, many Louisiana mariners are talking about leaving the industry and few are encouraging their children to take up the occupation. In their recruiting, companies have brought inexperienced but licensed captains in to work over experienced but unlicensed mariners. These activities have widened the gap between mariners and management and left mariners poised to organize themselves in associations and unions to address issues of work, safety, and representation on decisionmaking bodies. New technology, such as global positioning systems, now lets company personnel watch where vessels are and adjust the locations and schedules of boats. The physical separation of the workers from management has been overcome by technological surveillance.

Even as OSVs grow in size, the need for captains to navigate through the bayous and the Intracoastal Canal and to operate around rigs and platforms continues to differentiate Gulf operations from traditional ocean shipping. Skills learned in training academies are necessary but not sufficient for the work in the Gulf. At the same time, the new computer-based technologies require special training. The new STCW-95 certification requirements emphasize hands-on training, much under the supervision of company personnel. The general approach is reminiscent of the mentoring relationships of earlier times and is both supported by educational theories and attentive to the significance of experience. However, it comes at a time of downsizing and reorganization of the Coast Guard, the agency with regulatory and oversight responsibility for the program, and of increasing distance and distrust between management and workers, and is likely to backfire. The sheer numbers of people who must get certified ensure that at best only superficial attention will be paid to many issues.

In the midst of the reorganization, the role of training academies continues to change. Just as the smaller boat companies that remain are uncertain about their futures, the small schools face significant challenges in finding a niche and surviving. Small companies are disadvantaged because of the numerous job classifications and their associated licensing and certification requirements, and by the alliances between the large boat and training companies.

Because of the initial efforts to exempt OSVs from the new requirements of STCW-95, the development of curricula lagged. The result was significant delays that have left the mariners just now entering the profession with nowhere to turn for the required certification. Though they can still acquire U.S. Coast Guard licenses, they cannot obtain the certification necessary to work offshore. The remaining mariners must obtain certification by February 1, 2002, and there are not enough programs to meet the need. Consequently, special programs that accommodate low levels of literacy and are tailored to those who were grandfathered in during the first STCW era are scarce. Even where those exist, many older mariners have indicated that they would rather let their licenses expire than go through the schooling and certification process. Few would willingly face the possible humiliation of a difficult school experience.

The boat industry association and large training companies had representatives within the STCW-95 negotiation process, and the early response was to establish expensive private certification training programs. Large companies outside the alliances began to develop their own programs. To challenge the near-monopolies of those companies, several public educational institutions worked to establish partnerships with boat companies to build and operate training programs. The challenges of working within the state technical college system cannot be addressed here, but, despite many roadblocks, successful partnerships are beginning to emerge. Most recently, beginning in June 2000, a Department of Labor grant to a union-backed organization offered promise of a third option for training. The February 1, 2002 deadline, however, is quickly approaching.

Though there is concern among mariners and the labor organizations about putting greater responsibility for mariner licensing and certification in the hands of the boat companies, several have recognized the need to adapt the traditional mentoring system to today's circumstances and are establishing policies that address this. Those that are sensitive to issues of seniority and age are working to establish partnerships onboard the vessels wherein both the experienced older individual and the younger schooled captain can be respected and benefit from the relationship. What were not observed anywhere, but would be a significant step toward the professionalization of the offshore service industry, are efforts to recognize the experienced mentors, even those who cannot obtain all the certification, by paying them according to their skills and giving them opportunities to teach others.

Echoing a general sentiment heard in the region, older individuals argued that attitude was the most important element in their ability to work with the younger mariners. Several captains complained that many of the young people, especially those from the academies, are not prepared for the nature and extent of work they will have to do on the boats. As a further hindrance, some companies move the personnel around so much that it is difficult for effective mentoring relationships to develop. Yet, a few have found ways, despite the competitive environment, to foster relationships. Joe, a mature captain, captured it well:

> "And this is what I told [the new captain], something like a school teacher. 'I'll tell you what. You work with me. You show me a little bit of what you know, and I'll show you a little bit of what I know, and I'll let you handle the boat. Let you do some maneuvering and stuff.' And he says, 'Great.' And he's doing good… It is our company policy… They want us to teach these boys, you know. See, I'll retire when I'm 61. They need someone else to come in. Maybe they'll move him in before that, but he's got to get the experience. You can take these young boys and work with them" [I-221].

Positive attitudes such as the one expressed by this captain are unfortunately rare. Though some of the local training schools have developed exciting and innovative programs to meet the needs of the mariners, they alone cannot impact the attitudes among youth and their parents. Even with some innovative strategies, the animosity toward worker organizing makes it unlikely that the large companies, training schools, and mariners associations will come together effectively to address the problems they all face. Those efforts that respect and validate the expertise and continued potential of the older mariners while providing support in learning and dealing with the newer technologically-driven expectations have proven successful. But, they have to date been too few and too far between. If the older mariners just opt to leave as they watch their positions on the vessels be taken by the younger generation, the opportunities for critical mentoring relationships will be lost. A recurrent theme among those who have considered that possibility is the irony that the new requirements, born out of a concern for safety, will result in more unsafe working conditions for everyone.

Beyond the immediate concern for safety, several things will be lost as the maritime industry relies less on local Gulf Coast mariners. The link to the sea has been a strong one for more than a century. Though residents of the coastal parishes have successfully undergone several economic and occupational transitions, those that have involved outsiders coming in to replace locals, as occurred with the Vietnamese in the shrimping industry in the 1970's, have been the most painful and contentious. The replacement of local mariners with academy-trained seafarers is having a similar impact on the local economy and psyche. Ironically, despite their increasing recognition that formal education is a must in the modern economy, Gulf mariners generally do not perceive their jobs to require college education, and their pay and status as brownwater captains is not commensurate with that of professionals in the community. Thus, they are unlikely to encourage their children to stay in school so they can become mariners and meet the new licensing and certification requirements coming from Washington, D.C. To the contrary, they are urging their children to stay in school so they do not have to work as mariners.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Providing transportation for the Gulf of Mexico offshore oil and gas industry is a complex activity that has seen many changes in its more than half-century history. This report has examined the history and development of the trucking and offshore vessel industries that were born and matured along the Louisiana bayous. It looks especially at the changes in the industry in relation to their impacts of workers and families in southern Louisiana. During the 1990's, both sectors experienced the negative impacts of changes in the structure of the oil and gas industry, the organization of the transportation sectors, and the regulation of those sectors. In both sectors, for example, the transportation companies have faced cost-pressures from the major oil and service companies and were significantly squeezed during the recent downturn. Much of this fiscal pressure has been passed on to the workers who operate the trucks and vessels that keep the oilfield functioning.

Daily wages for laborers in these sectors are not high. During boom times, these workers can earn lots of money, but that happens because they work straight shifts and overtime to end up with far more than 40 hours a week. When things get tight, wages drop and often, too, the opportunities for working long hours. At the same time, the burden of these changes have not been borne evenly either between the maritime and trucking sectors or within them. The occupations of both truckers and mariners require significant investment of time and energy, especially in acquiring the experience necessary to excel in their work. Mariners also must invest in extensive formal training and licensing procedures. Many truckers, however, have also invested time, energy, and money in their trucks. The capital investment for a single truck can exceed $100,000, and many truckers in the oilpatch purchased multiple trucks prior to deregulation. In the current economic climate of the industry, these capital investments represent a liability for many of the truck drivers.

Unlike the helicopter sector (which is not discussed here), the labor for both the trucking and maritime sector traditionally consisted of the men – and sometimes women – of southern Louisiana. Many of these truckers and mariners have been forced out by lack of work or sought other employment in the face of pay cuts. Following a trend that began in the boom of the late 1970's and early 1980's, the transportation sector has lost its Cajun dominance. Outsiders are involved at all levels of the trucking and offshore vessel industries, from the entry-level workers to the personnel managers and chief executive officers of the largest companies. Though unable to own and operate vessels in U.S. waters, foreign workers on guest visas have found their way onto the shipyards and are helping to build the new fleets.

In addition to the industry restructuring, the trucking and maritime sectors have also faced regulatory changes and responses at both the federal and state levels. In both cases, the likely impacts of regulatory changes were largely unexamined before their imposition. For the truckers, these regulatory activities dramatically altered the structure of the industry and through those changes impacted who could participate and in what manner. Deregulation resulted in lower rates, so truckers are working more in an effort to recoup pre-deregulation earning levels. For the mariners, the changes were focused on the individual workers and spread to the entire industry. The only way mariners can increase their wages is by obtaining new licenses, so they try to combine extra work and training courses. In both groups, the workers are spending more time away from home, family, and community.

Federal and state responses to the negative impacts of the changes have been delayed, and companies are generally perceived to be contributing to the problems. In the past, laborers in the transportation sector felt allied with the major oil and service companies in bringing gasoline to the pump. In the current landscape, workers now feel alienated from these companies, and this alienation forms the basis for a persistent, antagonistic relationship between companies and laborers. Both the mariners and truckers have begun to organize themselves to challenge serious impacts to their livelihoods and families. In a break with longstanding southern tradition, workers in both sectors now talk of unionization as a possible strategy for reasserting their role in the oilfield.

Despite the problems being experienced in both the trucking and offshore vessel industries, some workers have seen improvements. Through mergers and acquisitions that have resulted from industry-wide competition in the globalized world of energy production, larger and larger companies now dominate the transportation sector of the oilpatch. Although low pay has driven many Acadians from the transportation sector, the hiring policies of these larger companies have also diversified the labor pool in the oilpatch, allowing outsiders, women, and blacks to work alongside the traditionally male Cajun labor force.

The transportation sector of the Gulf of Mexico offshore oil and gas industry is in transition, and it is impossible to predict whether the changes that have occurred in the recent upturn and decline will, in the long run, be positive ones. It is clear that there is no turning back and that the need for strategies for moving through the transition is great.

ENDNOTES

[1] The LPSC has a long and colorful history in the state. Originated as the regulatory agency for oversight of the rail industry, Huey Long transformed the Commission into a political springboard in his ascension to the post of Governor. The Commission continues to play a central role in Louisiana politics.

[2] The companies must hire U.S. citizens. The Merchant Marine Act of 1920, commonly known as the Jones Act, requires that all goods shipped by water from one U.S. port to another be carried on vessels that are built and documented in the United States and owned and operated by U.S. citizens. This Act governs trade between and among ports along the U.S. coasts, the non-contiguous states and territories, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Great Lakes.

[3] The situation was examined in a May 1973 Coast Guard document entitled, *A Report to Congress Concerning the Need for Engineers on Uninspected Towing Vessels*.

[4] In 1972 at the request of leaders of the mineral and oil industry, the Commandant of the Coast Guard sent Captain C. T. Newman to study the licensing regime that governed the offshore oil industry and make recommendations for changes the industry believed were warranted. The report of that study, which became known as *The Newman Report,* recommended a number of changes focused on deck licenses and examinations.

[5] Due to complaints that the exam questions were wrong, inappropriate, or misleading, the Coast Guard began distributing them to training schools for review. They are now available on the worldwide web at http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-m/marpers/pers.htm (2/19/00). There is a long tradition of educational research questioning the role and value of standardized testing (for example, see Northwestern University's Institute for Learning Sciences' Engines for Education http://www.ils.nwu.edu/~e_for_e/nodes/NODE-69-pg.html).

[6] STCW-95 requires certification *in addition to* existing U.S. Coast Guard licenses, certifications, and endorsements. All mariners licensed prior to August 1, 1998 must take a five-day series of basic safety courses and maintain a record of training book. The basic safety series must be repeated every five years, either by returning to school or onboard assessment. There is not yet a system for onboard assessment, but some fear it will turn into a paperwork exercise. Depending on the equipment onboard their vessels, deck officers (masters and mates) also must take a radar course and renewal every five years as well as one-time courses in Bridge Teamwork Procedures, Global Marine Distress and Safety System, and Automatic Radar Plotting Aid (ARPA). Other specialized certificates must be obtained for advanced firefighting, tank vessels, and Roll-on, Roll-off vessels (RO ROs).

[7] The STCW-95 amendments appeared in the *Federal Register* on June 26, 1997 at page 34506 et seq. Six months later, confusion over their applicability prevailed. The lead article for the January 1998 newsletter of the National Association of Marine Educators, for example, was entitled, "Are the STCW Amendments Legally Binding on the United States?" A criticism raised by the author, who states he is "a graduate of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, also holding a Law Degree, and working as a shipboard engineer," was that "treaties are being used to by-pass and avoid, particularity in the economic and commercial arena, the open and, often healthy but contentious process that we normally use to pass laws and develop regulations. A case in point is the major and economically-significant changes to the manner of obtaining and renewing the merchant mariner's documents, certificates, and licenses mariners require to serve on U.S.-flag seagoing vessels of all sizes."

[8]Administrations, such as the U.S. Coast Guard and its National Maritime Center, must implement STCW-95 in national legislation; approve curricula and training; and verify company, instructor, assessor, and mariner competence. Education and training institutions must ensure the competence of educators and assessors; provide curricula; and control, verify, and document the competence of mariners. Companies must verify and document the competence and coordination of their crews. Mariners must demonstrate and obtain certificates of competence.

[9] The Marine Operations program was selected at the Louisiana Technical College "Program of the Year" for 1998 (see http://www.young.tec.la.us/marine.htm).

[10] In 1995, for example, Robert Alario, president of the Offshore Marine Service Association, in a presentation to the Marine Safety Council, argued that the traditional pool of labor from first the southern shrimping and fishing industries and then their farming communities had been

depleted and called for attention to the personnel needs of the marine industry and efforts to appeal to young, better-educated people who would look to the industry as a career. He noted the problems with the lack of employment stability and demands from the oil and gas industry to reduce costs, and also that the industry problems would be exacerbated by the STCW-95 amendments.

[11] The 12-hour rule reads, "An owner, charterer, managing operator, master, individual in charge, or other person having authority may permit an officer to take charge of the deck watch on a vessel when leaving or immediately after leaving port only if the officer has been off duty for at least 6 hours within the 12 hours immediately before the time of leaving" [46 USC 8104]. On many vessels, captains rotate through two cycles of six hours on and six hours off each day. Under that schedule, the rule is violated every time a captain is called to work during his or her off period and then goes on watch for the next six-hour cycle.

[12] For example, the newsletter of the National Association of Marine Educators (NAME) began running regular articles that were critical of the STCW-95 process. According to their newsletter, NAME "is a network of maritime educators organized in 1987 by Walt Martin, a retired Coast Guard officer, and Richard A. Block, a textbook publisher and distributor, and a group of other concerned maritime educators from different parts of the country. This group was brought together to share information about training, licensing, and certification of merchant mariners" (see www.metbooks.com).

[13] In 1999, Louisiana's governor and legislature put $60 million into its Incumbent Worker Training Program and made it available to businesses that needed to train workers to remain on the job. The money is available for partnerships between employers and training schools.

[14] According to its website (www.geocities.com/CCFCOnline/), which can be accessed via links from some offshore vessel companies, "The (Concerned Citizens for Community) is a citizens group dedicated to the preservation and improvement of our community's businesses and labor forces. The CCFC believes that the Unionization of our community's labor will eventually destroy our way of life. Our goal is to educate the public and to raise awareness of the lies and tactics Unions will and have used to attack our community and our future." The CCFC proposed to establish a "CCFC Corner" to appear weekly in the largest southern Louisiana newspaper beginning September 1, 2000.

[15] For more on these issues, see Part 1 in this report, "Offshore Employment as Lifestyle and Culture: Work and Family in New Iberia."

[16] For more on parenting and youth expectations, see Part 3 in this report, "Parents and Children: Changing Roles, Changing Expectations."

The Department of the Interior Mission

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering sound use of our land and water resources; protecting our fish, wildlife, and biological diversity; preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places; and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interests of all our people by encouraging stewardship and citizen participation in their care. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

The Minerals Management Service Mission

As a bureau of the Department of the Interior, the Minerals Management Service's (MMS) primary responsibilities are to manage the mineral resources located on the Nation's Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), collect revenue from the Federal OCS and onshore Federal and Indian lands, and distribute those revenues.

Moreover, in working to meet its responsibilities, the **Offshore Minerals Management Program** administers the OCS competitive leasing program and oversees the safe and environmentally sound exploration and production of our Nation's offshore natural gas, oil and other mineral resources. The MMS **Minerals Revenue Management** meets its responsibilities by ensuring the efficient, timely and accurate collection and disbursement of revenue from mineral leasing and production due to Indian tribes and allottees, States and the U.S. Treasury.

The MMS strives to fulfill its responsibilities through the general guiding principles of: (1) being responsive to the public's concerns and interests by maintaining a dialogue with all potentially affected parties and (2) carrying out its programs with an emphasis on working to enhance the quality of life for all Americans by lending MMS assistance and expertise to economic development and environmental protection.