THE FRAGILE MASCULINITY OF JACK TAR:
GENDER AND ENGLISH-SPEAKING SAILORS, 1750-1850

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

HISTORY

AUGUST 2005

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Abstract

This thesis analyses how English-speaking sailors constructed masculinity during the period between 1750 and 1850. Building off of Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical work on gender, the paper theorizes that sailors, as a community and as individuals, based their conceptions of masculinity on their ability to respond to domination through "physical masculinity." This type of masculinity is largely based on the ability to project and defend against interpersonal violence, valuing strength, aggression, and "toughness" the ability and proclivity to withstand pain and discomfort in the effort to withstand domination. This thesis will explore why such a masculinity took hold among sailors, with an emphasis on their place in society and the homo-social nature of their world. Furthermore, this thesis will examine how such masculinity was understood and interpreted by landsmen as reflected in literature, pictorials, and other sources. Finally this thesis will show that the physical masculinity of sailors further entrenched seamen in a cycle of domination, both through the self-destructive behaviors they undertook in order to portray a masculine persona, and through landsmen's cultural interpretations of their masculinity that portrayed them as unsuitable for public life.
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~Introduction~

*In the navy, you can sail the seven seas,*
*In the navy, you can put your mind at ease,*
*In the navy, come on now people make a stand,*
*In the navy, can’t you see we need a hand?*
*In the navy, come protect the motherland,*
*In the navy, come on and join your fellow man,*
*In the navy, come on people make a stand,*
*In the navy, in the navy!*

—“In the Navy,” *Performed by The Village People*

When John Nicol died in 1824, there were only two things he wanted people to remember him as, a sailor and a man of pride. In 1769, when Nicol was fourteen, two incidents occurred that would change the course of his life. His father, a cooper by trade, had obtained work in London and took his young son with him on the sea voyage from Edinburgh. The first incident occurred on the trip down the coast, when an immense storm hit the Yorkshire coast, wrecking, by Nicol’s recollection, some thirty merchant vessels. In 1822, when he was dictating his life story to printer/author John Howell, Nicol recalled that though “All the passengers were sea-sick; I never was.” Whether the strength of the storm was an accurate memory or the product of an old sailor’s artistic license will never be known, but the event left an obvious impression on Nicol. During the storm, he decided once and for all to become a sailor, a decision influenced by his youthful love of *Robinson Crusoe* and the excitement of the storm.

The second incident involved a fight in London, when an English boy tried to bully Nicol out of a dead monkey he found floating in the Thames. Nicol swam into the
river to retrieve the monkey, while the English boy, who was unable to swim, waited by the shore for Nicol to return. When Nicol returned, the other boy challenged him to a fight with the monkey as a prize. What a dead monkey was doing floating in the Thames is, unfortunately lost to history, as was the intent of Nicol or his southern nemesis upon obtaining this waterlogged prize. Nicol did record who the victor in this monkey business was, and, of course, it was a hard-won victory for the Scotsman. Upon returning home, his father beat him for getting into a fight, but Nicol felt he simply had no other options, for he “was not of a temper to be easily wronged.” No other specific events are recorded about Nicol’s life until he skipped out on a comfortable career as a cooper and, against his father’s wishes, joined the Royal Navy. The only possible exception was the death of his mother, and even this was mentioned in passing. Only these two incidents were deemed worthy of any detail in his memoir, and as such they provide an insight into how Nicol saw himself.

He envisioned himself as a sailor and a man, though in his mind the two were one and the same. From this early account, it would seem that Nicol’s masculinity was based on several intertwined attributes. Foremost was his physical strength, which gave him the ability to swim out into the Thames, retrieve the monkey, and violently reject attempts to dominate him. Second was his “pluck” or “toughness,” which allowed him to face both the storm and his would-be oppressor bravely and with little mind toward his own safety. Third was Nicol’s lack of obedience toward his father, who Nicol remembers as a “strict parent,” who he “dared not disobey.” This seemingly contradictory passage is actually an extension of the toughness mentioned above, a willingness to cut away the patriarchal ties that bound him to a life of obedience to his
father, the government, the church, and to any other individual deemed higher than him within British societies social, economic, and cultural order.¹

In order to distinguish it from other conceptions of male gender, this masculinity will be categorized as “physical masculinity,” since it is largely based on the individual’s ability and proclivity to project, defend against and withstand physical violence. This physical masculinity has had a long association with sailors, dating back at least to the time of Chaucer and his “hardy” mariner in *The Canterbury Tales.* Because of the deep historical roots that the concept of sailors’ masculinity has in the European and American psyche, it makes a perfect subject for an exploration of how this particular brand of masculinity functions, its role in society and the effects of this conception of masculinity on those associated with it.

In this thesis it will be shown that British and American sailors adopted an identity based largely on physical masculinity as a response to their low status on land and oppression at the hands of the government and employers. In doing so, they attempted to make use of symbolic ties between masculinity and dominance to form a psychological and cultural defense mechanism against their near absolute domination by elites on land and at sea. It will explore how sailors projected the imagery of this masculinity and how it was received and interpreted by landsmen. Special attention will be paid to the somewhat chimerical nature of masculinity and the way that it was and is more of a display than a reality, that masculinity was simply a façade put up in an attempt to deal with seamen’s forced submission to the upper echelons of society. The somewhat shallow and artificial nature of sailors’ masculinity, indeed of all gender roles,

resulted in a fragile masculinity whose illusion was constantly at risk of being ruined by sailors’ continual power. Furthermore, sailors’ dependence on physical masculinity only perpetuated their own domination, both through direct effects on their health and economic well-being, as well as indirectly through landsmen’s exploitations of the sailors’ masculine identity.

**Gender Confusion**

A number of previous works, both in the field of gender studies and maritime history, have been used to form the theoretical and historiographic foundation of this thesis. Of greatest influence has been the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s *Masculine Domination*, a work that applied Bourdieu’s theories on societal and cultural capital to the field of gender studies. These types of capital, which were largely ignored by historians and other academics before the last twenty years, are presented as important counterparts to economic capital in the maintenance of the hierarchies found in most societies. In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu claims that all societies, but particularly those based in the Mediterranean world, are based on the domination of women through literal and symbolic violence. Masculinity is seen as the signifier of domination; in other words, to be masculine is seen as to be dominant, while to be feminine is seen as being submissive.

All hierarchies within society are based on this duality and are constructed in such a way as to always privilege the masculine over the feminine. Using the Kabyle people as a case study, Bourdieu shows how oppositional relations such as wet/dry, powerful/weak are gendered in such a way as to reinforce societal acceptance of male
dominance over women. Rituals, both of the everyday and special-occasion variety, also help perpetuate this system of dominance. For instance, male coming-of-age rituals in Kabyle and other societies often focus on ritualized acts of violence toward women, as well as emotional and spatial separation from the mother. More everyday rituals, such as eating, working and socializing, also take on gendered meaning in terms of what actions, spaces and relationships are acceptable for each gender. In all of these situations, male dominance over women is shored up by societal acceptance of norms, which are followed unquestionably, as they are considered to be natural and timeless. By showing that these norms and as well as the “natural” dominance of men are actually constructions, Bourdieu sought to force French society to look deeper into its own societal and cultural beliefs for the elements of masculine domination that are intricately woven into their daily lives.²

An extension of Bourdieu’s thesis that masculinity is the accepted signifier of domination is that men can enhance their masculinity through the domination of other men. A man who dominates another is putting himself in the masculine role in their relationship, therefore placing the other man in the feminine role and effectively performing an act of symbolic castration. The corollary to this is that masculinity can be used to signify domination, i.e. the male who acts more masculine or portrays more masculine characteristics is assumed to be more dominant than other males. Often this means that the male who is the best at portraying masculinity is granted dominant status, even if that masculinity is nothing more than a façade. Bourdieu describes the theatrical nature of masculinity best when he writes of ties between childhood games and the

gendered lives of adults. "Man," he claims, "is also a child playing at being a man," thus masculinity is often nothing more than a mirage of dominance, and while individuals within society often confuse the two concepts, displays of masculinity do not always reflect the ability of the individual to project and defend against dominance. 3

Bourdieu’s work is in line with much of contemporary academic thought on gender as being largely a historical construction. Other well-known theorists of gender who have helped develop this line of thought include Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and R.W. Connell. While all of these theorists have contributed to the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis, none of them has been quite as useful as Bourdieu. Foucault’s History of Sexuality, Part 1, for instance, was one of the first major works to question the modern belief that homosexuality among males is an essential failing of the individual’s masculinity, which is perhaps one of the most widespread notions of gender in America today. Foucault forces the reader to evaluate the supposed normality of gender roles assigned to heterosexuals and homosexuals and, by extension, the very concept of a gender norm itself. He did not, however, delve into the violence, explicit and implicit, that fuels the masculine-feminine divide. In addition, Foucault’s concentration on a few selected writings of middle- and upper-class individuals lacks much of the empirical backing of Bourdieu’s study on the whole of Kabyle culture.

Another gender theorist who has focused too narrowly on elite writings is Judith Butler in Gender Trouble. Despite this, Butler’s work has been instrumental in establishing the current theoretical model of gender construction. In some ways, Butler goes even further than Bourdieu, claiming that even sex, the physical attributes that

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3 Ibid., 75.
distinguish between male and female, is also constructed. As with Foucault, Butler does not focus on violence nor spend much time examining the minds of non-elites and as a result is less useful than Bourdieu when exploring the ties between dominance and masculinity among seamen.

The idea that sailors' vision of masculinity may differ from that of elites is something that depends to a large degree on the theories of R.W. Connell, author of *Masculinities*. Connell proposes that not only is masculinity constructed, but also it is constructed differently for different groups. One's conception of masculinity is based on one's upbringing and place in society. Therefore, an individual raised in East Los Angeles may have a different view of masculinity than the scion of a wealthy aristocratic family in Saudi Arabia. The claim that there are many different masculinities rather than just one masculinity is central to this thesis. Connell is also helpful in establishing a middle ground between theorists such as Butler who claim that there is no genetic basis for sex nor gender and theories that claim that certain aspects of gender construction may be heavily influenced by biological factors, such as hormonal differences, average size and the temporary effects of pregnancy. Connell argues that there are indeed some genetic and biological aspects of sex that affect gender, which is an essential step in trying to understand the links between physical violence, domination and masculinity discussed by Bourdieu and in the following chapters. ⁴

Connell's work also highlights the largest problem with Bourdieu's conception of masculinity in relation to this thesis. Bourdieu's approach is to analyze the relationship between domination of women and masculinity on a grand scale, conflating

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all masculinities into one. While this is useful in the construction of a broad theory, as
in Bourdieu’s case, in applying Bourdieu’s work, care must be taken to look at how
different conceptions of masculinity may relate to different methods of domination.
Bourdieu never explicitly says that such multiple masculinities may exist, but his
methodology does make such an interpretation possible.

All of these views differ significantly from traditional views of masculinity that
attempt to find a one true masculinity, or a platonic essence of masculinity. One of the
most recent and most popular adherents of this view is Robert Bly, a poet, “masculinity
guru,” and author of Iron John, a work of popular philosophy that reached a high level
of cultural recognition. Written in 1990 amid a supposed crisis in masculinity brought
on by women’s limited legal, economic and cultural gains, Bly attempted to use rituals,
including the frequently spoofed all-male forest retreat with drumming, howling, and a
fair degree of manly weeping over lost masculinity, to “return” men from the wayward
path of the “soft male.” The work struck a chord with a significant percentage of men
who felt that the gains made by feminism had robbed them of their masculinity and
sought to regain this masculinity through a return to sensual pleasure and pseudo-
primitive ritual.

Though Bly’s book did reach the top of the self-help list, and probably has more
cultural currency outside of academia than any of the theorists named above, its failings
as a serious academic work on masculinity are numerous. One of the key complaints
about Bly’s work is that he fails to take into account any possibility that the masculinity
he sees as natural is as much of a societal construct as the supposed “soft males” that he
sought to free from feminine domination. He simply assumes that a certain form of
masculinity exists and that society can only work to cloud such masculinity, rather than playing a pivotal role in creating it. The masculinity he espouses, largely shaped through Germanic myth and other European societal constructs, is assumed to be simply true. For the historian, Bly, like any author who treats masculinity to be static and universal, is of little use other than as a primary source on conceptions of masculinity.5

**Sailor History**

In addition to gender theorists, much of the foundation for this paper was established through the work of historians and others working on maritime topics. Until the 1960s, most professional maritime historians concentrated mostly on autobiographies of admirals and accounts of famous battles while the examinations into the lives of common seamen were left largely to amateur historians such as British Poet Laureate John Masefield. His popular *Sea Life in Nelson’s Time* (1905) provides a vivid and entertaining look into the life of the common seaman and is one of the earliest examples of a “Seaman’s Histories,” a work dedicated to understanding the lives of common seamen as a whole.6 This field first emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, and the end of the age of sail inspired a longing in the British public for tales of the sea and a fascination with “Jack Tar,” the generic sailor of British poetry and prose, a character whose popularity was exploited in Masefield’s poems, Joseph Conrad’s stories and a number of other works of maritime literature.

More than any historian before and since, Masefield captures the physical essence of life at sea. He fills the book with the deafening sounds of battle, the smell of

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the ship’s pitch-soaked ropes, the dreaded monotony of peace, and the painful loss of humanity in the battles that made Nelson famous. Masefield describes a harsh world, where the ship’s people, as its crewmen were called, were treated like animals, living in subhuman conditions both mentally and physically. For instance, when describing the humiliation and physical pain of being “started,” or beaten to speed up work, Masefield claims, “The privilege of the cane was very much abused.” It encouraged the warrant officer to treat his subordinates cruelly, and the lives of those subordinates were made sufficiently miserable as it was.”

Masefield also puts a very sentimental spin on sea life, no doubt mirroring his internal debate between his love of the sea and his rough time aboard ships in the late nineteenth century. Using many of the same sources as From the Lower Deck, Masefield allows the reader to see the ship through the sailor’s eyes. In addition, he uses a number of more traditional sources, including the Admiralty archives to flesh out the brutal reality of the sailor’s world. One example of this is Masefield’s description of the color schemes of the typical man-of-war: “Internally, the sides of the ships were painted blood red, in order that the blood, which so often and liberally splattered them, should not appear.” Masefield also pays strict attention to social boundaries and small markers of status within the ranks of common seamen that many professional maritime historians seem to ignore as insignificant, such as where hammocks are placed in relation to a seaman’s station and ability. Masefield gives the thick, ethnographic description which anthropologist Clifford Geertz utilized in “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese

7 Ibid., 83.
8 Ibid., 16.
Cockfights,” and he does it more than a half-century before Geertz. In addition, Masefield’s analysis of the signifiers of rank and other factors can almost be seen as a precursor to the work of maritime ethnographer Greg Dening.

Foremost on this list are those inspired by the New Left movement of the sixties, who first touted the life of the common sailor as a vehicle for an improved understanding of the past rather than simply rehashing the “great man/great battle” histories that had once composed the entirety of maritime history. Next are the neo-Marxists, including Jesse Lemisch, who was also a member of the New Left, and Marcus Rediker, both of whom attempted to understand sailors as laborers exploited by and resisting against land-based elites and officers. Finally, there are historians of the last twenty years who have attempted to explore sailors’ lives through recent historiographic trends relating to race, gender, and ethnography.

During the 1960s the growth of New Left social histories and what E.P. Thompson called “history from below” led several historians to begin serious study of the lives of common sailors in Britain and the United States. Henry Baynham, for instance, author of *From the Lower Deck* (1969), described the battles of the Revolutionary/Napoleonic wars as seen by the common British “tar.” Baynham plotted a new course for maritime historians by relying primarily on the voices of seamen aboard British vessels during the battles. He uses a combination of published memoirs, such as Jack Nastyface’s *Nautical Economy*, and unpublished diaries to describe the battles on an experiential level. Other historians had previously used these

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sources, but only as a colorful trimming for their tales of bold captains, daring tactics, and the pluckiness of the British spirit. Baynham’s work gives details that are often ignored, such as the services provided by women and children aboard British ships during battle and dramatically un-British outbursts of sorrow at the loss of a messmate after a battle. While Baynham’s work provides a wealth of information that can be used to analyze the masculinity and communal identity of common seamen, he does not discuss in depth land/sea interactions nor develop any conclusions based on analysis of the sailors’ conceptions of the world. This latter is no failing of Baynham’s since historians’ interests in gender and identity have only flourished in the last two decades.

The New Left’s “history from below” was a perfect fit for the seamen’s history genre and its focus on the “lowly” seaman, as seen in Christopher Lloyd’s *The British Seaman* (1968), the most chronologically comprehensive look at the lives of sailors.\(^{11}\) A contemporary of Baynham’s, Lloyd also seems inspired by “history from below.” His text explores the lives of British seamen from the time of the Armada to the end of impressment, the Royal Navy’s practice of kidnapping sailors, in 1833. Lloyd includes some interesting information about the sailor’s world, but most of it is of a technical or organizational nature. Little is said about the culture or mentalities of sailors, but forms of punishment, food, pay, and the hierarchies of sailors are described in detail. This is the first attempt by a professional historian to deal exclusively with daily life aboard ship.

N.A.M. Rodger’s *The Wooden World: Anatomy of a Georgian Navy* (1986) is one of the most recent works to focus on descriptions of shipboard life. Though he does

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not focus entirely on the lives of the common seamen, he does give their lives a great deal of coverage. Because of the sheer volume of information contained in *The Wooden World*, Rodger has created an essential text for any maritime bibliography. Rodger describes not only the daily lives of sailors, but also the effect on their lives of the Admiralty Board, the Victualling Board, politics, and patronage in ways that Masefield did not attempt. Rodger is able to tie the wooden world to the land, though largely in political and logistical areas, such as outfitting a ship or pressing a crew.

Rodger's text is a belated attempt to take "seamen's histories" away from amateurs and "New Left" historians like Baynham. While Baynham was also a professional maritime historian, his text was sympathetic to the plight of British sailors of old. N.A.M. Rodger, professor of Naval Studies at the University of Exeter, is a more conventional naval historian. His other books are primarily traditional naval histories and biographies, and he seemed to have little sympathy or respect for the work of amateurs like Masefield. In his introduction, Rodger even states that he is writing to counteract the "common opinion, derived in considerable measure from Masefield's *Sea Life in Nelson's Time*, that naval discipline was harsh and oppressive, officers frequently cruel and tyrannical, ratings drawn from the dregs of society, ill-treated and starved."\(^{12}\)

*The Wooden World* marks the entrenchment of "seamen's histories" in the professional maritime historiography. It does little, however, to advance the genre. It uses a "history from below" approach that was new when Baynham and Lloyd used it in 1969, but takes advantage of few of the historiographic advances of the last forty years. Nor does Rodger seek to truly understand the lives of the sailors he writes about. Unlike

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Masefield or Greg Dening, who attempt to understand sailors through an understanding of how sailors experienced their world, Rodger concentrates completely on quantifiable facts: pounds of biscuit per man per day, average age of sailors, death rates, and other factors. By including more analysis or cultural and social information, Rodger could have created a fuller view of life aboard a naval vessel.

One of the biggest flaws with many seamen's histories is that they frequently lack any rigorous analysis of the economic, societal, and cultural mechanisms that controlled sailors' lives. They discuss rituals aboard ship without discussing the symbolism behind those rituals, they discuss punishment without looking into the societal hierarchies on and off the ship being reinforced by those punishments, and they discuss seamen's wages without examining the role of the period's labor practices and the economic elites that exploited their own social, economic, and cultural resources to maintain a steady supply of cheap, docile labor. In failing to analyze these topics, they also inevitably fail to address sailors' understanding of and responses to ritual, punishments, and labor conditions. Issues of gender are even less likely to be addressed, largely because they were not frequently considered in the field of history, let alone maritime history, until the last fifteen or twenty years. While these works perform an essential task in cataloging and sorting data on the lives of sailors, they leave much work to be done by other historians.

Perhaps the historians who have had the most impact on maritime history are the neo-Marxists, particularly Jesse Lemisch and Marcus Rediker. Both are American historians who have tried to demonstrate that sailors occupied the lower rungs of the class structure, were exploited by the shipping industry as well as the British
government during the pre-Revolutionary War period, and actively sought to end their exploitation through various means, including rioting, desertion, mutiny, and piracy. While Lemisch, a somewhat prominent member of the New Left movement, is often acknowledged with being the first to deal with such topics in a serious academic manner, some credit must be given to J.R. Hutchinson’s *The Press Gang Afloat and Ashore* (1914) for his early work on the oppression and resistance of sailors.\(^\text{13}\)

Hutchinson deals with every aspect of impressment, including its historical origins, how the public perceived it, its effect on naval morale, and the various means by which sailors avoided the press. It should be noted that Hutchinson admits in his foreword that his intention was to help dissuade British voters from allowing conscription during the period right before the First World War. Regardless of his admitted bias against the Royal Navy, his discussion of the oppression of sailors through impressment and their resistance was decades ahead of its time. In addition, his coverage of the basics of impressment is useful for those who wish to know the basic principles surrounding the practice. Hutchinson discusses its origins, necessity, and effect on the image of the navy for both the sailors and the general English population, along with the eventual end of impressment in the nineteenth century. As of the writing of this essay, *The Press Gang* still stands as the only monograph on the subject.

Jesse Lemisch’s landmark 1968 article “Jack Tar in the Street: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America” explored impressment as well as other aspects of seamen’s repression in colonial America, but placed more emphasis on the use of

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mob violence as a way to combat British policies.\textsuperscript{14} He was also the first historian to study the motivations and actions of sailors as a community, particularly their actions ashore. Lemisch showed that seamen attempted to preserve some measure of control over their labor through riots, defending themselves against impressments, and other outbreaks of violent resistance. He further argued that these actions helped to feed the resentment of American colonists who saw impressment as a sign of British tyranny. Sailors and other colonists even joined forces on many occasions, most famously during the “Boston Massacre,” when the first man shot down was Crispus Attucks, an African-American sailor.

While Lemisch, like most Marxists, is willing to accept and even celebrate the agency of sailors in the form of violent revolt in defense of the right to control their own labor, he is unwilling to accept that they had any form of social or cultural agency. In his view, the cultural identity of sailors was a construct of capitalist society, an attempt to rob sailors of their humanity and their rights. Lemisch’s view were put quite clearly in the following quote:

\noindent If we think of Jack Tar as jolly, childlike, irresponsible, and in many ways surprisingly like the Negro stereotype, it is because he was treated so much like a child, a servant and a slave. What the employer saw as the necessities of an authoritarian profession were written into the law and culture: the society that wanted Jack dependent made him that way and then concluded that that was the way he really was.\textsuperscript{15}

It is hard to argue that society did not exploit public perceptions of sailors in order to exploit his labor, in fact a significant amount of this paper is dedicated to supporting this very point, but Lemisch’s contention that sailors had no role in the construction of these perceptions is a bit more problematic. Lemisch’s sources are largely pulled from the

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 380.
writings of landsmen, and elite landsmen at that, so he fails to examine how sailors interpreted the behaviors that landsmen interpreted as "childish" or antisocial. To turn Lemisch's own terminology against him, he is writing "history about the bottom up" rather than "history from the bottom up."

Lemisch's work has inspired a number of other historians to follow in his footsteps, the most well-known of whom is Marcus Rediker, who has spent most of the last twenty years elaborating on Lemisch's theme of capitalist oppression and proletariat resistance. In Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea (1987), Rediker makes the case that the British seaman is the prototypical proletariat and was thus instrumental in the struggle against oppressive eighteenth-century British capitalism. Rediker portrays sailors as fair-dealing, hardworking industrial workers. Their work, like that of the factory worker, is essential to industry, technically demanding, dangerous, and underpaid, but in every case, the work of the sailor was far more intense in each of these ways than that of a factory worker. Rediker not only explicitly labels seamen as proletariats, but as revolutionary proletariats, actively resisting their oppression through mutinies, the spread of revolutionary ideas, and piracy, the ultimate act of warfare against the mercantile system.

Rediker goes even further in The Many Headed Hydra (2000), co-written with Peter Linebaugh. In Hydra, Linebaugh and Rediker explore resistance to mercantile colonialism across the Atlantic. Sailors' resistance through piracy and mutiny is seen as parallel to revolting slaves, English "land-roving," and other attempts to destroy the

societal stranglehold of the British mercantile system. By portraying sailors’ society as part of a larger Atlantic world, economically, militarily, culturally, and mentally, Rediker and Linebaugh show that maritime history is essential to the understanding of British and American society as a whole.

Unlike Lemisch, Rediker does not deny that sailors had a role in forming their own identity, but he defines this identity almost strictly in terms of their labor. He does this through two sets of relationships. The first is between men and the material elements of the profession: the ocean, the weather and the ship. The second is a purely social relationship between men. In Rediker’s conception of the sailors’ world, this is seen purely as a matter of labor conflict; relationships outside of this conflict are not considered. In doing so, he, or anyone else who focuses strictly on economics, ignores the role of social and cultural capital had on sailors. Their oppressors were not just the wealthy, but also the social and cultural elite, and sailors’ resistance was often manifested itself through social and cultural means. Any discussion of the role that masculinity played in the sailors’ lives must come to terms with these other types of capital, as issues of gender lie primarily in their spheres of influence.

While the Marxist leanings of Rediker and Lemisch leave their work slanted heavily toward economic determinism, both historians have made significant contributions to the effort to understand the common seamen. The same Marxist leanings that blinded them to struggles outside of the labor/capital binary also led them to examine oppressed groups such as sailors who were previously denied any serious historical attention. It would take a new breed of historians to take research on the common sailor forward again, a group who, like the Marxists, were interested in the
oppressed, though this time through the lens of race, gender, and ethnography rather than class.

In the last twenty years, a number of new historiographic trends have been changing the field of history, similar to what the “New Left” did in the sixties and seventies. An emphasis on race and gender has flavored many recent works, and Pacific/maritime historian Greg Dening has brought ethnographic developments to a field desperately in need of them. These works provide an essential backdrop for an exploration of sailors’ masculinity, in each in their own ways. Works that exposed the significant role of non-white sailors, for instance, force future writers to acknowledge the role of race at sea and, in this case, explore the possibility that definitions of masculinity may have differed across racial boundaries and therefore analysis of gender constructions among seamen will have to work on multiple layers. Dening’s work on the Bligh mutiny, *Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language*, provides a model for any historian attempting to understand the complex system of signs aboard ship, as well as providing the incredibly useful metaphor of the ship as a theatre.

*Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language* is a nuanced excursion into the world of semiotics and anthropology, using the infamous and seemingly threadbare Bligh mutiny as a vessel. Captain Bligh’s failure to control his crew is one of the best and most researched incidents in maritime history, yet Dening manages to make the topic interesting again. The culmination of a lifetime of research, *Bad Language* does not portray the mutiny as the result of a one-dimensional abuse of power or an idealistic rebellion against tyranny as it is often seen in film or even some maritime histories. Rather he shows that the

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mutiny was the result of a complex transition in naval culture from a hierarchy of skill to a hierarchy of social standing. The influence of Michel Foucault is seen throughout the book as Dening describes this change in hierarchies, namely the evolution of a disciplined navy that still relied heavily on "a theatre of discipline."19

Dening's work explores not only the mutiny, but also the culture of seamen, describing rituals such as the crossing of the line, conceptions of class, and hierarchies outside of admiralty control. The crossing of the line is a well-documented initiation ritual that involves hazing sailors on their first crossing of the equator. It is often seen as one of the few times when the officers are not in control of the ship. Bligh's resistance to the ritual as "cruel and dangerous" shows how he was unable to understand that the ritual was a matter of "personal achievement and boasting,"20 which allowed the men to define themselves outside of the captain's rigid rule. Dening weaves a smooth narrative and an overview of British maritime culture and society into one cohesive work. He effectively breathes new life into a topic of maritime history that had been intellectually beaten to death in the last two hundred years.

More than any other maritime historian to date, Dening has delved into the semiotics of the sailor's world and attempted unravel the complex web of signs that made up the seaman's world. The "theatre" that he describes was composed of signifiers whose meanings among sailors were quite different from the meanings gleaned by landsmen, both at the time of the mutiny and now. Only by attempting to understand the sailor's identity could Dening explain the mutiny. Dening's account,
unfortunately, concentrates on all of the aspects of the seaman's life that had a direct impact on the mutiny except conceptions of gender. Perhaps an exploration of the role of masculinity among sailors and the Polynesian groups they interacted with may have generated an even fuller understanding of the Bligh mutiny in particular, and also of mutiny in general.

Just as Dening took the first significant steps in introducing ethnography to maritime history, Jeffery Bolster and others have brought a greater understanding of the role of race at sea. In 1997 Bolster's *Black Jacks* confronted the common fallacy of maritime racial homogeneity head on.\(^{21}\) His work brings to light the widespread existence of African-American sailors in the Atlantic trade and their importance to both African-American communities and maritime history. This text it is the first that deals exclusively with non-white sailors in the Atlantic world, but it also shows that African Americans consciously adopted the masculine sailor identity in part to resist oppression from white dominated, land-based societies. African-American sailors could use their identity to claim respect aboard ships that were denied ashore, as well as earn wages to help support their cash starved African-American communities. Some African-American slaves, such as Frederick Douglass, even found their freedom by imitating sailors. Throughout the book Bolster negotiates the subtleties of not only how seamen saw the world, but also of how African-American seamen saw the world. His attention to the semiotics of the African-American seamen's world is yet to be matched on a wider, non-race specific level.

Like non-Europeans, women are often left out of professional maritime histories, except for brief tongue-in-cheek passages about prostitutes rowing out to ships. Seen and celebrated as a homo-social, masculine culture, the sea had no room for females or the questioning of gender constructions. With the rise of feminist scholarship, however, a number of historians and others have taken a broadside to this perception. Joan Druett, author of *She Captains, Heroines and Hellions of the Sea*, is one such historian. Druett, who has written a number of other works on women sailors, is an “amateur” historian who has made a profession of writing the history of women at sea, from the warrior queens of the Vikings and Irish to port city prostitutes and New England ship owners. While earlier, traditional maritime historians ignored the maritime role of these women, Druett’s status as an amateur made her more open-minded about these women and their role in maritime history, a common trend in historical research discussed in Bonnie Smith’s *The Gender of History*. Often this role was that of a link between the sailor and the land, economically and otherwise. Druett points out, as an example of this importance, how most port city businesses depended on female employees because men could often find better wages at sea. Druett brings to light both the roles of landside women and the lesser-known role of women at sea. What Druett does not do is examine how these interactions affected and were affected by sailors’ conceptions of gender and identity.

Another work, the collection of essays *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920*, analyzes not just the existence and

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importance of women in the maritime world, but also conceptions of gender within the maritime world. This is the first major effort to explore gender across the spectrum of deep-sea sailing and presents everything from female pirates to the ship-owning women of New England. The collection even includes an article by Bolster that analyzes the way African-American sailors gendered their world, an article whose mere existence would have been laughed at thirty years ago. Not only does it deal with the mentalities of common seamen, but it also deals with non-whites and discusses their views on gender. The fact that this essay was written by a professional maritime historian shows that significant progress has been made in the last twenty years in opening the field to new ideas and focuses. The book’s wide focus, largely based on the various interests of the contributors, leaves the in-depth analysis to be done in other works, such as those written by the co-editors, Margaret Creighton and Lisa Norling.

Creighton and Norling have both written monographs on the American whaling communities, with a heavy emphasis on gender. In *Captain Ahab Had a Wife*, Norling discusses the impact of whaling on those left ashore, namely wives and children. Margaret Creighton’s *Rites of Passage* provides a larger overview of the whaling life, but she too examines closely the impact of the whaling life on the home communities of whalers and vice versa. Among other things, Creighton attempts to decipher the way whalers constructed masculinity and created their own social world aboard ships. She also shows how the close-knit communities of whaler’s families ashore created a situation where whalers’ identities often remained tied to their home communities in ways most deep-sea seamen did not.

Between the two of them, Norling and Creighton provide an innovative approach to studying the effect of gender on whalers, their families and their communities, but their concentration on New England whalers excludes a great deal of the maritime world. New England whalers composed only a percentage of all deep-sea voyaging during its peak periods, but before the 1820's it was primarily considered a shore-based operation, rarely leaving the coasts of North America and Europe. The nature of whaling and its demographics, even during its deep-sea periods, also differed from that of most sailors, and as a result Norling and Creighton’s work cannot be accepted as being representative of all sailors.

The Work at Hand

Building off of the gender theories developed by Bourdieu, Butler and others as well as the scholarship of Dening, Rediker, and other maritime historians, it is possible to develop a relatively comprehensive look at the way sailors constructed masculinity and how it affected their lives. Using Bourdieu’s vision of masculinity as a signifier of domination and marrying it to Connell’s conception of multiple masculinities, it is possible to piece together how sailors created a gender identity based on physical masculinity as a method of resisting domination in a time when physical domination and masculinity were no longer the dominant paradigms. The maritime historiography contains a number of works that have discussed this cycle of domination and resistance in terms of more traditional, economics-based labor history, but by looking at the role of gender and the role it played in the sailors’ social and cultural conception of the world, a more complex vision of maritime history will emerge. Such a project will need to look
closely at the ties between sailors and the communities they interacted with ashore, particularly with women, as this can provide a wealth of information regarding sailors’ conceptions of gender as seen in Creighton and Norling’s work. Furthermore, Bolster and others have shown that no exploration of maritime culture can be considered complete without examining the role a sailor’s race played at sea and ashore, something that will be attempted in this thesis.

This thesis will build on the work of the historians and theorists mentioned above and, in doing so, will argue the following: that American and British sailors of the period between 1750 and 1850 saw themselves as culturally and socially separate from landsmen and their officers; that they based a large part of this separation on a conception of gender that privileged “physical” masculinity as a form of resisting domination; that landsmen acknowledged and exploited this masculinity through cultural and social means; and finally, that this type of masculine resistance was futile against the social, cultural, and economic forces that were responsible for the domination over the seamen and in many cases helped to perpetuate that domination.

The limits of this project derive from practical as well as academic origins. The chronological limits are partially the result of the need to hear the voice of seamen in order to properly understand their conceptions of their identity. Before 1750, few seamen were literate and therefore left behind little in the form of textual sources. Sources on what landsmen thought of “Jack Tar” before 1750 are plentiful, as are the thoughts of officers, ship owners and other non-sailors, but the common seaman’s voice from this period is little more than a whisper. After 1750, a number of seamen wrote or dictated their stories, which were published either then or posthumously. Chapter One is
based largely on these writings, and a brief description of each work used can be found in the opening pages of that chapter. After 1850 the nature of the maritime world had changed, and with it came significant changes to the sailor’s conception of masculinity. The onslaught of industrialization took a heavy toll on the culture of the seamen, as new technologies and methods of organization drastically changed the very nature of naval and merchant service.

The body of this thesis will be split into four chapters. Chapter One argues that sailors consciously separated themselves from landsmen and consciously adopted a new identity. This is a necessary step in the overall process, as it is needed to show that sailors based their masculinity largely on the definition of masculinity dictated by the group. Without showing that sailors did indeed identify themselves socially and culturally as a group, the whole thesis becomes unraveled. Chapter One shows how a complex set of linguistic, physical, and behavioral signs served as the key markers of a communal sailor identity, as well as looks into some of the roots of these signs and attempts to interpret the meaning that sailors attached to each type of marker. This chapter also shows how seamen used this identity to claim prestige and respect from a society that often sought to exploit them, as well as to express a sense of superiority over landsmen who considered themselves the superiors of the common seaman. The majority of the sources for this chapter have been taken from published sailor’s autobiographies and journals.

Chapter Two and Three investigate different ways in which sailors’ masculinity was understood, first from through the eyes of sailors and then through those of landsmen. These two chapters reflect a continuous discourse between sailors and the rest
of society about the meaning of masculinity that has been simplified for the sake of organization. Chapter Two will examine how and why sailors' communal identity was tied to a definition of masculinity based largely on physical violence, and will describe some of the behavioral signifiers used by sailors to establish their personal masculinity. It will draw heavily on Bourdieu's conception of masculinity as a signifier of domination, as well as Dening's concept of the ship as a theatre. Behaviors that tie directly to the ability to project and resist violent physical domination will be explored, and also the different ways that sailors attempted to "fake" these qualities through attitude and behavior. Again, the majority of the sources for this chapter are taken from seamen's writings.

Chapter Three is written from the perspective of landsmen, who acknowledged the masculinity of sailors through the recognition of many of the same behavioral signifiers mentioned above. However, their interpretations of this masculinity were often different from those of the sailors themselves. Landsmen interpreted these markers in ways that privileged their own perception of the world, often using them to justify further exploitation of seamen. At times this meant celebrating the seaman as an object of nationalist pride, at others it meant ridiculing and denouncing their antisocial behavior. The sources for this chapter include pictorials, novels, plays, and songs of landsmen.

The fourth and final chapter discusses the ways in which the sailors' quest for masculinity affected their everyday lives, often in a negative manner. Instead of ending or evading their domination through the presentation of a masculine persona, sailors further imprisoned themselves in a lifetime of submission to the economic, cultural, and
social elites of the period. Their own behavior was often self-destructive and helped maintain a large, cheap pool of maritime labor, as well as allow landsmen to rationalize the continued oppression of seamen. In a world where the social, economic, and cultural elites no longer maintain their position through the personal projection of physical power, the seaman’s physical masculinity simply was unable to provide any relief to their dominated state.
Boundaries

In the time before steamships, or then more frequently than now, a stroller along the docks of any considerable sea-port would occasionally have his attention arrested by a group of bronzed mariners, man-of-war's men or merchant-sailors in holiday attire ashore on liberty. In certain instances they would flank, or, like a body-guard quite surround some superior figure of their own class, moving along with them like Aldebaran among the lesser lights of his constellation. That signal object was the "Handsome Sailor" of the less prosaic time alike of the military and merchant navies. With no perceptible trace of the vainglorious about him, rather with the off-hand unaffectedness of natural regality, he seemed to accept the spontaneous homage of his shipmates. A somewhat remarkable instance recurs to me. In Liverpool, now half a century ago, I saw under the shadow of the great dingy street-wall of Prince's Dock (an obstruction long since removed) a common sailor, so intensely black that he must needs have been a native African of the unadulterate blood of Ham. A symmetric figure much above the average height. The two ends of a gay silk handkerchief thrown loose about the neck danced upon the displayed ebony of his chest; in his ears were big hoops of gold, and a Scotch Highland bonnet with a tartan band set off his shapely head.

—Herman Melville, Billy Budd

The "handsome sailor" described by Melville is seen as both the ideal and the ideal male. His size, strength, and seemingly instinctive dominance over other males are the foundation of his physical masculinity, as well as his identity as a sailor; the two are essentially the same. While most people do respond to the pressure to conform to gender norms as individuals, through their own actions and thoughts, often these individual actions and thoughts are guided through participation in a communal identity. In effect, belonging to a community with an established and acknowledged set of gender norms allows the individual to assume those established gender norms as a whole package. This brings with it certain expectations that limit the freedom of the
individual, but it also grants the individual a certain status in terms of gender. For instance, if cheerleaders are seen as feminine, all one has to do to be perceived as feminine is become a cheerleader and conform to the gender standards of the group.

In response to pressures on land and at sea, sailors formed just such a community, with the rugged, physical, and carefree sailor as their ideal of masculinity. As pointed out by maritime historian Marcus Rediker, sailors formed this community in large part as a response to attempts of capitalists and the government to control their labor, though he neglects the role of social and cultural hierarchies in this process. This communal identity had gendered, cultural implications, particularly the creation of a link between sailors and a very specific definition of masculinity based on physical strength and, for lack of a better word, toughness. Just as Rediker showed that sailors used their communal identity as a way to fight economic oppression through riots, desertion, and other labor oriented acts, they also attempted to fight oppression through cultural means by portraying themselves as masculine.

Before exploring the ties between masculinity and sailors’ group identity, it must first be shown that such an identity did indeed exist, that sailors intentionally created and maintained a communal identity and that they saw themselves primarily as sailors, not as individuals who just happened to be sailors. Boundaries and hierarchies had to be established that strictly delineated who was a part of the group and where they fit in the group. By examining these boundaries and hierarchies, greater insight can be found as to why sailors separated themselves from society, who they were most adamant about being separated from, and what role masculinity had in establishing and maintaining the communal identity. This chapter will define some of the boundaries and hierarchies
within the world of the sailor and, when pertinent, how conceptions of masculinity fit into this organization.

In order to best represent the sailors’ perspective, the vast majority of the sources for this chapter are published sailor’s narratives that cover a wide range of sailor experiences from the time period in question. The earliest is Olaudah Equiano’s *The Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, originally published in 1789.\(^{25}\) Equiano’s narrative, best known as an abolitionist tract, also described his life as a British merchant and Royal Navy sailor from the Seven Year’s War until the mid-1770’s. Though doubts have been raised regarding Equiano’s proclaimed African origins, his discussion of his role in the Royal Navy has not been questioned. Next is *The Life and Times of John Nicol, Mariner*, as dictated by Nicol to John Howell in 1822. Nicol’s career spanned from 1776 to 1801 aboard both British merchant and Royal Navy vessels and has been used by a number of maritime historians such as Sian Rees and Henry Baynham. Samuel Leech’s *A Voice From the Main Deck* covers Leech’s time in both the American and Royal Navy between 1810 and 1818.\(^{26}\)

The journal of Stephen Reynolds from his time aboard an American merchantman between 1810 and 1813 was later published as *The Voyage of the New Hazard*.\(^{27}\) Although not originally intended for publishing, the diary was later discovered and edited for publication. It has been included because its nature as a journal provides verification of certain aspects of maritime culture with less of the self-

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censorship or self-aggrandizement that a typical author may indulge in. The journal of Jacob Nagle is another source that was published long after the death of its author, though its style and format suggest it was originally intended to be read by the general public. It was not discovered until the 1980's, when it was published as *The Nagle Journal*. Nagle served as an American privateer in the Revolutionary War, a British naval seaman under Nelson, aboard an East India Merchant and as a regular merchant sailor in the northern and southern Atlantic. Though the journal records an extraordinary career, Dann has verified many of Nagle's claims through ship's logs and the like.  

William Robinson's *Jack Nastyface: Memoirs of a Seaman*, covers his time in the Royal Navy between 1805 and 1811. Like Nicol, Robinson originally volunteered for naval service; unlike Nicol, however, Robinson became disgusted with naval life and eventually deserted.

The best-known source used in this thesis, Richard Henry Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast*, covers his experiences aboard an American merchant vessel between 1834 and 1836. *Two Years* has been studied extensively both as literature and as a factual account, and with the exception of a few liberties taken when describing his personal conduct, it has largely been verified as honest in its reporting of his time as a sailor. Finally, Henry James Mercier’s *Life in a Man-of-War* deals exclusively with Mercier’s cruise aboard the U.S.S. *Constitution* from 1839 to 1841. Rear Admiral

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30 Richard Dana Henry, *Two Years Before the Mast*, 100 Greatest Masterpieces of American Literature (Franklin Center, PA: The Franklin Center Library 1997).
Elliot Snow, C.C. U.S.N., has verified Mercier's account and its author as authentic through his own investigations. All spelling and italics throughout this chapter and the following are as they appear in the published text, except where stated.

Room of Their Own

Without something to define oneself against, it is difficult, if not impossible, to create or define an identity of one's own. In order to understand how sailors identified themselves, an effort must be made to discover what distinctions sailors made between themselves and others within their home societies. In the case of sailors, who were using their identity to defend themselves against economic and social domination, it should come as no surprise that they defined themselves against the groups most likely to exploit and dominate them, officers and landsmen. One of the key distinctions in the sailors' world, one that Rediker considers to be of utmost importance, was the distinction between common sailors, often referred to as the ship's "people," and their officers.

In numerous memoirs, the difference between the crew and the officers has been strongly emphasized. In Jack Nastyface, Robinson, the former Royal Navy man, began by stating "My Brother Seaman and old Shipmates, The British Public has been amused with various accounts of naval affairs, by quarter-deck and epaulette authors, and now one of yourselves ventures to come forward, and give his yarn."32 The author here has made an appeal for his own authenticity based on his perceived identity as one of the ship's people, which was clearly distinct from that of an officer.

32 Ibid., 15.
This distinction was often buttressed by the harsh realities of sailors' experiences, as seen at the end of Robinson's account. An impressed seaman, after being sentenced to 300 lashes and a likely death by a court martial composed strictly of officers for attempted desertion, was addressed by one of his messmates. His messmate, a relationship that typically denoted a close friendship, attempted to console him by saying, "I was sorry to hear you were found guilty; I was in hopes you would have been acquitted." The sailor responded, "So I would have been . . . had I been tried by a jury of seamen . . . for my only attempting to escape after having been impressed."33 The sailor clearly drew a line between himself and his oppressors and understood the distinction between justice expected from one's peers and the cold, uncaring demeanor of the officers and admiralty law.

As on naval vessels, sailors aboard merchant ships acknowledged the distinction between themselves and officers through terms of address. In Stephen Reynolds's journal, the officers are usually referred to in terms of respect; they are known as "Mr. Hewes"34 or "Captain Porter" (emphasis added).35 Reynolds's fellow crewmen were simply referred to by first name "Tom and John,"36 or in a mass as the "people," as in "Raining fast; sent for people to come on board."37 In Two Years, when a member of the crew was chosen by the captain to replace an incompetent officer, Dana wrote, "Foster went forward into the forecastle as a common sailor, and lost the handle to his name, while young foremast Jim became Mr. Hall, and took up his quarters in the land of

33 Robinson, Jack Nastyface, 142.
34 Reynolds, New Hazard, 24.
36 Ibid., 44.
37 Ibid., 88.
knives and forks and teacups.” Jim, a sailor, had been removed linguistically and physically from the people, thereafter he was Mr. Hall, an officer. These differences in forms of address are largely the result of the rigid social structure aboard ship, but they also create an exclusionary discourse that further separated the identities of the crew and the officers.

Even more so than officers, landsmen were excluded from the community of seamen, and only by consciously supplanting their connections to land with connections to the seamen’s community could they become accepted. Until such a transformation had come about, landsmen at sea were under constant pressure to conform through frequent reminders of their lowly status aboard ship. Landsmen, who normally dominated seamen, became the dominated once aboard ship. In Two Years Before the Mast, Dana described himself in his first days aboard as the lowest of the low, in terms of health, ability, and the social hierarchy of the ship. He recalled, “There is not so helpless and pitiable an object . . . as a landsmen beginning a sailors life.”

In addition to the misery of seasickness and the difficulty of adjusting to the rigors of sailing, first-time sailors were also subject to hazing in the form of verbal abuse or pranks. The simplest of pranks was that of telling a tall tale in order to instill fear into a nascent sailor. In Life in a Man-of-War, a farm boy aboard the USS Constitution is told of the strength of storms around Cape Horn. He was told, “Why, one night . . . It blew so infernal hard as to whip the large brass buttons with one shot, slap off the starboard side of my peajacket; one of them hit old Crout, the Dutchman, who was at lee dog’s ear bim

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38 Dana, Two Years, 25.
39 Ibid., 3.
in the eye, and knocked it out as slick as if he was gouged by a Kentuckian."40 The farm boy, who was already seasick and terrified of the strange world he was in, was mortified that soon he too would have to face the infamous cape. Some methods of hazing crossed the line between harassment and larceny. After enlisting, Robinson witnessed a number of items being stolen from other new sailors as a form of "larking."41 This is most surprising considering the normally rigid view of theft from one’s fellows aboard ship, the common punishment to which was something akin to "running the gauntlet," and one of the few punishments that other seamen were more than willing to participate in.42

After a period of hazing and instruction, the potential sailor, if worthy, began to be identified as a sailor, though still a novice. Indicators that former landsmen had been accepted into the sailor community could be seen in as simple a thing as where one bunked. Dana, five months into his first voyage, was finally allowed to bunk with the rest of the crew after he showed his worth. His previous berth in steerage had excluded him, spatially and culturally, from being accepted as a sailor. Such a berth served as a liminal space between sailor and landsman, or as Dana put it, “while there, however useful and active you may be, you are but a mongrel — a sort of afterguard and a ‘ship’s cousin’ . . . the crew never feel as though you are one of them. But if you live in the forecastle, [you] are a sailor.”43 This move was one of a number of signals that Dana was becoming an accepted member of their community.

Other signals of the landsmen-sailor transition took the form of organized ceremonies. The most widely known initiation ritual was "The Crossing of the Line."

40 Mercier, Man-of-War, 15.
41 Robinson, Jack Nastyface, 29.
42 Ibid., 143-145.
43 Dana, Two Years, 65.
This ceremony was used both to initiate new sailors and as an opportunity for a good laugh at the expense of any passengers aboard ship. Upon crossing the equator a sailor, dressed as King Neptune, would hold a mock court aboard ship. Anyone aboard, be they officer, passenger or crewmen, who had not previously crossed “the line” was forced to pay a fee of cash or rum, endure a dunking in the ocean, or some other physical penalty.44 Harry Miller Lydenberg has gathered a number of accounts of this ceremony in the aptly titled Crossing the Line. Some of the accounts date from the 1600’s and were written in French, English, Dutch, and several other European languages. The custom, though varied in practice, was widespread throughout the period in question. In 1752, the Reverend John Newton of London reported the ceremony, as did James F. Munger, a seaman aboard a whaler in 1850.45

John Nicol described one such ceremony in 1790 aboard the Lady Julian. The Lady Julian was a transport ship carrying a number of female prisoners to Australia, and as a result there was an unusual gender distribution aboard. In this case, not only was the ceremony about separating landsmen from sailors, but also reinforcing the sailors’ masculine identity as discussed below. Nicol describes the scene as follows, “Upon crossing the line, we had the best sport I ever witnessed upon the same occasion. We had caught a porpoise the day before the ceremony to make a dress for Neptune with the tail stuffed. When he came on deck, he looked the best representation of a merman I ever saw . . . one of the convicts fainted, she was so much alarmed at his appearance.”46

44 For more on this ceremony, see Dening, Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language or Rediker, Devil and The Deep.
46 Nicol, John Nicol, 139.
As seen in the passage above, the ceremony’s role in ridiculing landsmen was often just as important as its role in initiating green sailors. This was particularly true aboard the profit-driven merchant vessels of early nineteenth-century America. Upon crossing the line, Dana did not participate in the ceremony, but he indicates that the crossing itself retained a degree of importance:

Crossed the equator . . . I now for the first time, felt at liberty to call myself a son of Neptune, and was very glad to claim the title without the disagreeable initiation which so many have had to go through. After once crossing the line, you can never be subjected to the process but are considered a son of Neptune, with full power to play tricks upon others. The ancient custom is now seldom allowed, unless there are passengers aboard, in which case there is always a good deal of sport. 47

While the crossing itself was still important as a marker of cultural belonging, the prank-playing on non-sailors was now the essential part of the ceremony. Since there were no “full” landsmen aboard, only Dana and another novice sailor, there was no real motivation to go through the trouble of the ceremony.

This sort of trickery is seen at other points in Dana’s memoir. “This day we got under way with the agent and several Mexicans of note as passengers . . . we hoped as there was no officer in the boat, to have a chance to duck them, for we knew that they were such ‘marines’ that they would not know whether it was our fault or not.” 48 The “ducking” of the passenger was seen as both a break in the monotony of the sailors’ work and a way of showing the superiority of the sailor at sea. The use of the term “marine” also hints at the low status non-sailors, such as marines, had aboard a sailing vessel, though their role as the officers’ enforcers no doubt contributed to sailors’ animosity of marines. This and other pranks played on non-sailors helped engender

47 Dana, Two Years, 23.
48 Ibid., 285.
solidarity among sailors by identifying themselves as different from and better than landsmen.

In addition to physical mischief, sailors also used linguistic trickery to show their low opinion of landsmen. Terms that implied a connection to land, for instance, were frequently used as insults. Dana’s captain, who was somewhat gifted at cursing, would call a man a “soger” or “soldier” when no other expletive could contain the proper amount of venom. Similarly, when the Constitution “bumped” and damaged an English ship that had attempted to block her exit from port, one of Mercier’s shipmates stated that the accident was “a complete lubberly piece of business on their part altogether.” The use of connections to land as an insult among sailors, whose ability to curse creatively has rarely been called into question, is yet another indication of the lowly status given to landsmen within sailor culture.

Even among those who were identified as one of the crew, there were some individuals whose occupations insinuated a certain degree of “lubberliness.” These men, known as “waisters,” occupied the waist of the ship during the working day and were skilled workers who manufactured necessary items aboard ship. Their skills were associated with occupations ashore, such as coopering, blacksmithing, carpentry, sewing, and cooking. Unlike the rest of the crew, these men were not required to stand watch or man the sails; in fact, their actual labor was seen as that of a landsman performed aboard ship. They were still seen as maintaining a cultural identity closer to that of a sailor than that of a landsman, though their perceived “lubberliness,” and possibly their higher rate of pay, made them a frequent target of jest from the crew.

49 Ibid., 163.
50 Mercier, Man-of-War, 275.
The crew's mixed feelings about the identity of the "waisters" are seen in the use of occupation-based nicknames to identify them. These nicknames acknowledged a privileged status among the crew, yet they were also somewhat different. The cook was often known as "the doctor," the sail-maker as "Sails," the carpenter as "Chips," and the cooper as "Bungs." John Nicol, who fluctuated between coopering and sailing duties on different vessels, recalled a battle in the "American War" in which his position as a "waister" made him the target of a jest even among the bullets and shot. "I heard the Irishmen call from one of the guns... 'Halloo, Bungs, where are you?' I looked to their gun and saw the two horns of my [anvil] across its mouth; the next moment it was through the Jason's side."51 "Bungs"' perceived connection with the shore was a source of tension that partially challenged his identity as a sailor and made him something of an object of ridicule aboard ship.

Other hierarchies among seamen also indicate that the farther one could remove oneself from land, and land-based work, the more respect one garnered. Many sailors, for instance, saw whalers as an inferior brand of sailor. Dana mentions that a crew of whalers he saw in California looked and smelled unkempt compared to Dana and his compatriots, and, furthermore, they were unable to perform basic tasks of seamanship as well as a merchant crew. "There was only one splicer aboard, a fine-looking old tar," Dana recalled. Other than this "old-tar," the rest of the crew was mainly composed of green hands and those others that had been to sea had been "only on whaling voyages."

51 Nicol, John Nicol, 55.
a comment made by Dana, who was still on his first voyage, though it was on a “proper” merchantman. 52

The term “tar” is itself a reference to sailors’ work, stemming from the frequent tarring work done aboard a sailing vessel to keep everything waterproof. The tar found its way into the men’s clothes, hair and skin and was an ever-present scent aboard ship. Its association with the ship and sailors’ work made its smell and related grime acceptable, while residue associated with the non-sailing aspects of whaling was looked down upon as un-sailorly filth. The filth aspect of this does not seem to be as important as the association with landsmen. Whalers sailed, but they also labored as hunters, skinners, boilers, and butchers — landsmen’s tasks. Their work, as well as their experience, was “un-sailorly,” and as such they were assigned an at best marginal status within sailor society. Oddly, similar work performed by sailors when ashore, such as the tanning of hides done by Dana in San Diego, seems to be seen as a welcome respite from the grind of coastal sailing and the constant surveillance of the captain. It would seem that a proven sailor might take on such duties, as long as it was ashore and it was seen as a temporary chore rather than a permanent duty.

This reflects the value system held by sailors, in which the virtue that sailors valued most aboard the ship was ability. The capable man, be he a common sailor or an officer, was well respected. Considering the dangerous environment in which sailors worked, the skill and experience of the sailor could mean the difference between life and death not only for himself, but also for his shipmates. As Mercier notes, the man who did not act in unison with the crew puts more strain on the rest. For instance, during a

52 Dana, Two Years, 279.
"reefing-match" when the whole crew was involved in reefing the main sail, a man who slacked in his duty would become "an object amongst the men for scorn to point its finger at."53 Dana bragged about his emerging abilities as a sailor while attempting to round Cape Horn: "Inexperienced though I was," he claimed, "I made out to steer to the satisfaction of the officer. . . . This was something to boast of."54 Whether or not this was true or mere literary narcissism, it shows that Dana felt his identity as a sailor was largely based on his abilities as one.

Even among sailors who had proven their skill, connections to land, however fleeting, could be seen as a point of weakness within their sailor identity. When William Robinson’s ship was assigned to guard the channel, they felt slighted that they were to be "channel gropers." Though channel duty meant good rations and relative ease, it opened Robinson and his shipmates up to the "ridicule of seamen who may be coming home from foreign stations."55 One of the taunts that William Robinson and his mates suffered when engaged in channel duty was "that they might as well be by their mother’s fire-side, and tied to the apron-strings." The feminine world that their physical proximity to land exposed them to was horrifying, since "nothing hurts Jack’s feelings more than being taunted of anything unmanly or inferior."56

It should come as no surprise that seamen would connect the land to femininity, especially considering their own attempts to equate the sea with masculinity. If the sea is presented as masculine, and the land as feminine, then in the patriarchal conception of society, sailors were superior to landsmen because they are more masculine. In addition

53 Mercier, Man-of-War, 27.
54 Dana, Two Years, 33.
55 Robinson, Jack Nastyface, 104.
56 Ibid., 103.
to connections to family and mothering as seen in Robinson’s account, land had a number of other feminine qualities about it. Sailors’ activities ashore, for instance, would also lend themselves well to this binary relationship of sea/male versus land/female. Seamen’s only non-sailor companions ashore, for example, were predominantly women with whom they would cohabit, often in exchange for money, and the most common activity ashore, drinking, was usually done in establishments that featured female servers. Land was a place of women, where sex and other services were offered to seamen. For seamen, these connections lasted until at least the beginnings of the twentieth century.

In Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and other novels, land, particularly Europe, is presented as a womanly place. Charles Marlow, the narrator and Conrad’s sailor *par excellence* finds himself having to turn to his female relations to find a job, a disturbing and emasculating experience. When he confides in his audience about it, he seems ashamed: “I, Charlie Marlow,” he says, “set the women to work — to get a job. Heavens!” When an aunt secures him an interview through the wife of “a very high personage,” Marlow arrives at the interview and is met by a discomfortingly omnipotent woman. Her attitude makes clear to Marlow that he is merely a visitor in her world, the world of women, the world of dry land. In *Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), Conrad again establishes Europe as a land of women. The title character, James Wait, for instance, describes Europe as a place of sexual and gastronomical satisfaction, both provided by a woman ashore, as his own remembrances of the continent are a woman he

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visits and the oysters she cooks.\textsuperscript{58} In addition, the captain’s wife, the only memorable non-sailor in the book, symbolically greets the ship as soon as it docks, removes the captain, the sailor’s authority figure, and transforms him into an unrecognizable gentleman by her mere presence.\textsuperscript{59}

In a way, proof of one’s connections to foreign lands was as important a part of being a sailor as was the lack of connection to one’s homeland. The difference was that connections to foreign lands often improved one’s place within the sailor hierarchy. Many sailors picked up trinkets and curios during their travels, with which to make gifts to people at home, or to sell at a pretty profit. By attaching themselves to exotic goods and experiences, they themselves took on an air of the exotic. In a time when most individuals rarely traveled outside of national or even local or regional boundaries such as counties or parishes, seamen traveled around the world, visiting different countries and interacting with a diverse network of merchants, boatmen, prostitutes, and other sailors from around the world. Dana and Nicol both acknowledge this in their writing, spending much of their accounts discussing these interactions and assuming for themselves the role of amateur sociologists. These connections to foreign lands were part of what made a sailor a sailor. They are one of the things that made seamen unique among landsmen, and in a world where many people were limited in their geographical range yet becoming more and more interested in the rest of the world, these connections gave sailors a sense of superiority over landsmen and over some of their less-traveled brethren.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 167.
The nature of Europe and America’s relationships with these “exotic” foreign ports may help to explain how these trips may have helped to shore up sailors’ masculinity. Most ports that sailors would visit in this time period were either under direct European control or could be easily subjected to European naval dominance. Sailors recognized this and in their foreign travels were quick to exploit the situation to increase their own sense of masculinity. Taking advantage of their access to European trade goods, many sailors obtained sexual relations, “exotic goods” and other services at a nominal fee. Nicol and Reynolds both describe sexual relationships with native Hawaiian women and Dana, though he does not report it, did keep a Mexican woman as a sexual partner in California. Nicol also describes obtaining cheap domestic services such as shaving, hair trimming and laundry washing done in China for little more than a few scraps of food. Like other Europeans who participated in imperialistic ventures, sailors increased their own sense of masculinity by economically and occasionally physically dominating colonized peoples in colonized lands.

If it Looks Like a Sailor, and Quacks Like a Sailor . . .

Once initiated into the ranks of the seamen, a sailor was able to further separate himself from landsmen, both while ashore and aboard ship, through distinctive styles of dress and speech. These markers of sailor identity were obvious enough that landsmen could easily identify them and prospective sailors were quick to mimic them. Dana, upon signing himself onto his first ship, exchanged his landsman’s kit for “the loose duck trousers, checked shirt, and tarpaulin hat of a sailor,” in an imitation of the physical

60 Nicol, *John Nicol*, 97; Dana, *Two Years*, Editor’s notes, 7
markings of his new profession. He later realized this did not make him a sailor, that
"while I thought myself to be looking as salt as Neptune himself, I was, no doubt, known for a landsman by everyone aboard as soon as I hove in sight. A sailor has a peculiar cut to his clothes, and a way of wearing them which a green hand can never get." 61

The dress of a sailor was one that both the sailor and the landsman recognized as a cultural marker; yet only seamen were in touch with the details of their own fashion, relating to buckles, ribbons, fabrics, pins, hats, and other items. Dana's clothes were not inappropriate for the physical task of sailing, but the sailors aboard ship saw them as unfashionable, implying a particular sense of fashion among sailors as a form of identification.  As with all fashion insiders, sailors used their insider's understanding of trends as a way of differing between themselves and outsiders in a manner only understandable to themselves. The use of fashion as a marker of sailor identity was as important for those trying to strip themselves of a sailor identity as it was for those attempting to assume one.

John Nicol took advantage of the connection between sailor identity and sailor style to avoid impressment. He later recalled, "When we cast anchor, as I had a suit of long [landsman's] clothes in my chest. . . . I put them on immediately," in order to fool the press-gang. 62 Clothes even played a role in excluding certain segments of seaborne labor from full access to the sailor identity. One of the factors that caused Dana to label the whalers he met in California as outside of the sailor mainstream was their dress. "The men," he claimed, "looked more like fishermen and farmers than they did like

61 Dana, Two Years, 1.
62 Nicol, John Nicol, 196.
sailors. . . [T]hey all had on woolen trousers — not blue and shipshape but of all colors." Their clothes, like the nature of their labor, marked them as landsmen at sea, not proper “shipshape” sailors.

Sailors also used distinctive language to help create a sense of separation from landsmen. In his preface, Mercier includes a barrage of sailor lingo to prove that the writer, though originally writing under a nom de plume, was a real sailor. “I had made up my mind,” he stated, “to slip the moorings of the present little Craft and let her glide into public without anything in the shape of a prefatory remark.” His shipmates protested by saying, “Print your book without a preface, that ain’t ship shape no-how; I thought you had more savey than all that; damme, man, now-a-days a book without a preface is like a topmast without a fid,” or “a purser’s jacket, without naval buttons.”

Robinson also attempted to establish his sailor credentials through the use of language. “D’ye see,” he wrote, “I cannot, like some of these great cabin and high-flown gentlemen writers, shew much reading, by dressing up the figure-head and stern-gallery of my work.”

Even Robinson’s nom de plume, Jack Nastyface, was itself a reference to commonly used sailor lingo. “Jack” was a common term for sailors, often used in a somewhat sentimental manner, while “Nastyface” was a derogatory term often used by officers when “motivating” the men to work harder.

Technical language was also used to separate sailors from landsmen. The understanding of certain terms aboard ship, like jib, gig or mainsail, may have been a requirement for the actual running of the ship, but many of the terms used by sailors

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63 Dana, Two Years, 278.
64 Mercier, Man-of-War, xv.
65 Robinson, Jack Nastyface, 15.
were actually simple replacements for land terms and seem to have a primarily cultural importance. The widespread use of these could be seen as an indication that their purpose was more about identity than occupational competence. The method of telling time through “bells” is one example. This system revolved around the striking of a bell every half-hour. Time was then expressed through the number of bells that had been rung since the beginning of a watch. One bell was half an hour into the watch, two bells was an hour into the watch, and so forth.

While there are practical roots to sailors’ expression of time in terms of bells, the necessity of this system is questionable. The time of day could easily be delivered in a standard hours and minutes format as it was on land or in the modern maritime world, but instead, the sailor was expected to learn a new way of verbalizing time, based largely on the same system of hours and half-hours as landsmen, pushing the sailor further the culture of the ship and distancing him from land. 66 Another linguistic practice that seems to have a similar purpose is the use of “larboard” (later port) and “starboard” for describing the left and right sides of the ship. As technical terms, they were outdated since the adoption of the stern rudder and were actually quite awkward to use due to their similar sound. 67

The questionable technical necessity of some elements of sailors’ speech and clothing supports the claim that they consciously maintained a communal identity apart from landsmen. The use of certain terms and the attention paid to maritime fashion were exclusionary discourses that separated them from landsmen, who could mimic but not quite capture the physical and linguistic style of seamen. This “sailor style” acted as the

66 Ibid., 31.
67 Dana, Two Years, 4.
signifiers of the limits of the community, providing tangible boundaries between seamen and landsmen, which everyone could understand but only sailors could construct.

**Crossing the Lines of Race, Nationality, and Class**

Within the sailor community, there were a number of divisions based on skill, ship size, length and type of voyage, experience, and other factors. These new hierarchies had a tendency to erase or at least weaken land-based hierarchies based on race, religion, regional background, and class. The logistical problems faced when attempting to recruit the large number of sailors needed can be seen as a significant factor in this change. The numbers of sailors at sea at any particular time is hard to pinpoint due to the number of ports involved, the varied duration of voyages, the regularity of wars, and other factors. The best records of the time are probably the Royal Navy’s, from which at least some minimum conception of the numbers involved can be gathered. The Royal Navy alone grew from 50,000 sailors in 1756 to 129,000 sailors in 1802. Though these numbers reflect the Royal Navy in times of war, they also exclude the growing British and American merchant fleets and the newly created American Navy as well.

These sailors were essential to global trade, and England and America were absolutely dependent on them for their economic livelihood. The combination of three factors — the sheer number of sailors required, their importance to trade, and the harshness of life at sea — led many maritime labor recruiters to be relatively blind to certain prejudices seen on land. Place of origin, class, and race were minor

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68 See Rediker, *Devil and The Deep*, for a full examination of these new hierarchies.
considerations compared to the willingness to work for the going rate. As a result, merchant and naval sailors alike were recruited from different races, nations, and classes. To a certain degree, these individuals supplanted these traditional identities with that of a sailor, which rendered these differences secondary to the sailor/landsman distinction. While these differences were still maintained, they lost much of the strength that they held on land.

With contemporary academia’s high level of interest on questions of race, it is not surprising that there is increasing scholarship delving into the role of non-whites on Western ships. David Chappell’s *Double Ghosts*\(^70\) has examined the role of Pacific peoples in Western shipping, and W. Jeffery Bolster’s *Black Jacks*\(^71\) has explored the world of African-American sailors both at sea and ashore. Both of these books helped establish that there were large numbers of non-white sailors in the service of English and American vessels, and that they found a level of acceptance based on their identity as sailors.

Dana also documented the prevalence of Hawaiian or *kanaka* sailors in the West Coast trade. Several ships, such as the *Loriotte* out of Honolulu, were crewed entirely by Hawaiians.\(^72\) Dana befriended a community of Hawaiian sailors based in San Diego, where he and other sailors were left to cure hides while their ships scoured the coast in search of trade. When one particularly close Hawaiian friend of Dana’s, Hope, became ill and lacked medicine, his ties to the sailor culture saved him. Though unemployed at


\(^{72}\) Dana, *Two Years*, 78.
the time, Hope was able to obtain medicine through his former shipmates. The average sick Hawaiian would not have been able to get free medicine off of a merchant ship, but Hope, as a sailor, was part of the community and therefore accepted, but only to a certain degree.\textsuperscript{73}

Racial prejudice against Hawaiian sailors still existed, especially among officers who had trouble dealing with the Hawaiians’ seemingly lax attitudes toward work. Unmotivated by many of the economic, social, and cultural concerns that drove many European and American sailors, Hawaiians were less likely to perform work that they saw as unnecessary, leaving many captains angered at their supposed laziness. One captain, who Dana asked for medicine, replied “What, a d----d kanaka?” and refused to even consider helping him.\textsuperscript{74} Reynolds’s writings also indicate that Hawaiians were not always accepted as sailors, as he repeatedly refers to Hawaiian sailors simply as “kanakas,” and never by name as he does for Western sailors. Reynolds never refers to a work crew going ashore as “a number of the ship’s people and 3 kanakas.” This seems to imply that the “kanakas” were considered among the people, though they were still seen as a subset of the people.\textsuperscript{75}

As Bolster points out in \textit{Black Jacks} and his article “Every Inch a Man,” African-American sailors were common in the American merchant fleet, at times making up the entirety of the ship’s people.\textsuperscript{76} Sailors of African descent were also frequently mentioned in sailor memoirs as well as in the writings of sailors turned authors, such as

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 352.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 327.
\textsuperscript{75} Reynolds, \textit{New Hazard}, 85, 145. Reynolds never refers to a work crew going ashore as “a number of the ship’s people and 3 kanakas.” Whether this implies that the “kanakas” were considered among the people or whether the situation never came up is not something I was able to determine, but I suspect the former.
the "handsome sailor" taken from Herman Melville's sea tale *Billy Budd*. The cook on Dana's ship was African-American, a common situation in the American merchant service. The position of ship’s cook was an interesting one. Though a "waister," the cook was still a valuable ally for any sailor. He was in charge of the galley, the only area where open flames were allowed on most ships and the only covered area where smoking was allowed. As Dana put it, "The cook, whose title is doctor, is the patron of the crew, and those who are in his favor can get their wet mittens and stockings dried, or light pipes at the galley in the night watch." The cook, obviously, was also in charge of food and there were certain gastronomic perks to maintaining good relations with such an individual.

At the same time, the cook was also one of the few individuals on board whose work was associated with domesticity and therefore with women. A similar position, that of steward, a waister in charge of serving the officers' mess and performing similar domestic chores, was also frequently filled by African Americans. The supposedly feminine nature of these positions seems to have discouraged most Caucasian sailors, at least in American fleets, from taking them, but not African-American sailors. Since African Americans confronted more social, economic, and cultural barriers on land than Caucasians, their conceptions of what made a profession masculine or feminine was also different, something that will be examined further in Chapter Two.

Caucasian sailors' accounts provide some insight into how some African American's connections to domestic work affected and were affected by discourses of race aboard ship. Mercier recalls a fight between two African-American sailors, both of

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77 Dana, *Two Years*, 14.
whom were free men assigned to the upkeep of the officers’ quarters. The two fell in love with the same woman while stationed off the coast of Chile and decided to settle the matter with a fight in the forecastle. The two are portrayed as cowardly fighters, more interested in talking about the fight beforehand than actually fighting. This lack of action was considered unmanly, leading the audience booing and taunting them with comments such as, “I’ve seen two old fish-women make a better fight of it.” The direct comparison to women as well as perceived connections between cowardice and a lack of masculinity show that these men were considered less masculine than the typical sailor, but that little more would be expected from boot-shiners and fork polishers. 

While it is possible that other sailors might have attributed their cowardice to their domestic positions, Mercier’s telling of the story indicates there was also a racial component to the sailors’ responses and potentially to the way in which Mercier remembered the event as well. While in other sections his descriptions of sailors are largely based on their personality, in this section Mercier uses their skin tones and other physical characteristics associated with race as key points of reference. Mercier refers to the darker-skinned combatant, Sam Grubbings, as “the darkie,” while the other combatant, Caleb Chubbs, is called “the mulatto,” and another sailor comments that the two of them are “thick-lipped cowards.” Even the language of the two is distinctly separate from that of the rest of the sailors, resembling more the dialogue of a minstrel show than a sailors’ brawl. “If you hab de blood ob de gentleman in your veins,” challenges Grubbings, “you will gib me satisfaction for dis insult.” 78

78 Mercier, Man-of-War, 209-214.
No other seaman is identified by such distinct racial stereotypes. Although other African-American sailors are identified by their race, they are presented as part of the crew and not singled out, except for the cook, though he receives far less racial commentary than the two brawlers. It seems that only in situations where African-American sailors were seen to have acted in an unsailorly fashion were they truly seen as being different from other sailors. This indicates that the sailor identity was only stronger than that of land-based racial identities when African American’s acted the part of a proper sailor, otherwise they were denigrated both for their behavior and for their race.

The vast majority of African Americans at sea did not ship as stewards or cooks, and it seems that these sailors fared better in terms of acceptance their by their colleagues. Olaudah Equiano’s stint as an able seaman and Mercier’s mourning the death of “one of our ship’s company, a quiet unassuming coloured man by the name of Anderson,”79 show that African descent did not rule out joining the mainstream of sailor culture. Leech also reported the desertion and recapture of “a colored man named Nugent,” who was a well-liked and capable sailor.80 It would seem that a sailors’ role aboard ship was of far more importance than his race and that the low position of African-American cooks and stewards reflected more on their own standing than on that of their all sailors of their race. These favorable remembrances show how the sailor identity trumped racial identity, as long as the individual performed his role as a sailor well.

79 Ibid., 193.
80 Leech, A Voice, 43.
The sailor identity crossed national lines as well as racial ones. The ease with which Samuel Leech and many of his fellow British sailors switched from the British Navy to the American Navy during the War of 1812 is a testament to this. Many, if not all, sizable English and American ships of the period also contained crewmen of different national origins. The carpenter on Dana’s ship, for instance, was a Finn posing as a German. Finns, it seems, are one of the few nationalities/ethnicities not accepted as sailors, as they were commonly believed to be warlocks. N.A.M. Rodger has also gone into some detail over how sailors were more than happy to desert or otherwise avoid service in the Royal Navy during wartime. Such actions indicate that sailors were far more likely to act in their own interests than those of the nation. Overall, the evidence seems to indicate that seamen were not terribly concerned with nationality or nationalism as element of identity.

Even within the larger culture of the sea, which included officers and masters, there was a surprisingly strong bond that crossed national bonds, as seen in the common practice of visiting at sea. When two ships spotted each other at sea, it was a common practice for the captains and, if possible, the crew to meet and trade news, goods, and tales, assuming a lack of hostilities between the flags under which the ships sailed. In some cases, even war between the nations of two merchant ships was less important than maintaining a sense of community at sea. A British merchantman met the New Hazard at sea in August of 1813 and warned the Americans that “an English letter of marque had left six weeks since. The captain of the brig advised our captain to go further.

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81 Ibid., 105-107.
82 Dana, Two Years, 49.
leeward for a harbor." During the American Revolution, British sailors faced re-impressment or worse penalties if caught aboard American ships. Nagle recounts how several British sailors captured with him aboard the Trojan, an American schooner, seeing no officers they knew aboard the British ship, confidently claimed to be Americans, knowing "the seamen that new them well, even messmates, would not inform." Their loyalty was to their fellows far more than to their country.

This international unity extended to relations between sailors ashore. In Dana's case, shore leave was often taken in conjunction with ships of other nations in harbor on Sundays. In addition to Dana and the Hawaiians, the close-knit sailor community in San Diego also contained "two Englishmen, two Scotchmen, two Welshmen, one Irishman, three Frenchmen . . . one Dutchman, two or three Spaniards . . . half-a-dozen Spanish Americans and half-breed, two native Indians from Chile . . . one Negro, one mulatto, about twenty Italians . . . one Tahitian and one Kanaka from the Marquesas islands," who had shipped aboard American, Italian, South American, and Hawaiian ships.

In terms of class, sailors' were far more homogenous than in terms of race. Most sailors were born, raised, worked, and died as members of the working class. The physical nature of the work, the low social status, relatively low pay, and the dangerous conditions associated with sailing meant that very few individuals from the upper or middle classes would ever consider a life swabbing the decks as common seaman, unless as a necessary experience on the way to a career as an officer. Some individuals from the upper and middle classes did find themselves aboard, either through a desire for

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84 Reynolds, New Hazard, 151-152.
85 Dann, Nagle Journal, 46.
86 Dana, Two Years, 211.
adventure, severe economic distress or, to "harden" themselves through work and extreme conditions, as Dana did in 1834. A student at Harvard before an outbreak of measles forced him to suspend his studies, Dana decided to spend some time at sea as a cure for ill health. While one might expect that his working-class compatriots would scorn this dilettante sailor, this does not seem to be the case.

For the most part, his fellow sailors accepted him as one of their own after the standard period of hazing and initiation. Even after he had left the sea and became a lawyer, he was still held within the cultural bond created by a shared identity and fought for the causes of common sailors. As long as Dana pulled his weight aboard ship, drank with his mates ashore, and did not attempt to exploit his social and cultural differences to the detriment of his fellow sailors, everything was copacetic. Dana’s education even made him a popular shipmate; literate sailors included him in their ad hoc book-lending system, illiterate sailors asked him to read and write letters to and from loved ones, and on at least one occasion Dana performed a reading for the entire crew during a rare period when no work could be done and other avenues of entertainment were unavailable. Even after he left the sea, Dana’s education, social rank, and cultural prominence allowed him to continue to aid his fellow seamen, acting as a legal counselor and using his popularity as a writer to expose the ill-treatment of sailors by officers and employers alike, eventually publishing *The Seaman’s Friend*, a manual on sea law intended to aid his fellow sailors.

Only two examples of tension between Dana’s class and his identification as a sailor can be found in *Two Years*, though Dana may have excluded others from his

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87 Ibid., Editor’s notes, 20.
writing. In the first incident, the resentment of the officers caused by the flogging of one of the men by the captain led Dana to believe that some of the others were considering mutiny but that they chose not to act in part because of the presence of Dana and another dilettante sailor Ben Stimson. As Dana recalled:

> If a thought of resistance crossed through the minds of any of the men, what was to be done? Their time for it had gone by. Two men were [bound] fast, and there were left only two men besides Stimson and myself . . . and Stimson and I would not have joined them in a mutiny as they knew.

Dana and the crew were both aware that his class status would prevent him from aiding them in a mutiny, as he had far more to lose in resistance to authority than they had. Dana’s future lay in his entrenchment in the very social and economic order that gave the captain the power to flog the men, and, regardless of whether he saw himself as a sailor on most occasions, when push came to shove, loyalty to his class was more important.\(^88\)

In the second incident, Dana purposely used his class identification to obtain privileges unavailable to the other sailors. Fearing that if he remained at sea much longer he would become too tainted by his experience and never be capable of finishing his degree at Harvard, Dana attempts to exploit his high connections in New England to persuade the captain to allow him to return home. The captain secures him a berth on a homebound ship at the expense of a shipmate named Ben, “a poor English boy.” This represented a clear violation of the sailors’ group solidarity and resulted in Dana’s temporary ostracism from the other sailors. His connection to the other sailors was strained nearly to the point of breaking until Dana was able to find a third shipmate willing to fill his berth in Ben’s place for a promise of a large sum of cash. After using

\(^{88}\) Ibid., 132.
his economic capital to restore the harmony of the ship’s community, Dana was welcomed back into the community. His attempt to use the social and cultural capital available to him through his class status backfired when it was seen to be detrimental to others within the group, and harmony was only restored through the exploitation of his economic capital. These two examples show that sailors were very conscious of class, particularly in situations where a sailor’s class identity threatened to prove itself stronger than his sailor identity. In such situations, the seaman’s contradictory allegiances, whether real or imagined, came to the surface, while in most situations it remained largely submerged.

**Conclusion**

Not unlike any other group that sought to separate themselves from the mainstream, from hippies to Shakers to the clergy, sailors used every tool in their power to create boundaries between themselves and outsiders such as officers and landsmen. Sailors marked the boundaries of their identity through linguistic and physical signifiers that both landsmen and sailors could recognize, though only sailors could properly navigate the subtle details of these signifiers deftly enough to satisfy other sailors of their identity. In many ways, the sailor community defined by these boundaries overshadowed those of race, national identity, and class, yet these land-based divisions were never actually negated.

While seamen’s ability to perform their work was deemed more important than their race, land of origin, or class, these powerful societal constructs still played a role at

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89 Ibid., 358.
sea. In terms of race, the differing cultural assumptions about the nature of work caused some tensions to arise between Hawaiians and Caucasians, just as different assumptions about the connections between certain types of work and masculinity led many African Americans into “domestic” roles aboard ship where they never received the full respect of their Caucasian colleagues. Seamen’s largely working-class origins, as well as the working-class nature of their work, were suspicious of dilettante, upper- and middle-class sailors such as Dana whenever there was a question of divided loyalties. Dana’s class did not keep him from being accepted as a shipmate, yet neither he nor his mates ever forgot that he held the potential to defend or exploit his class status to their detriment.

What this shows is that sailors’ separation, like that of most sub-groups, from the societies that spawned them was of a limited nature. As much as seamen tried to distance themselves physically and culturally from England or America, they were still raised in and ruled by those societies and, as a result, were still a part of those societies. Just as their language and clothes were essentially only altered forms of those found ashore, their conceptions of race, nationality, and class were formed by their experiences ashore and altered by their time at sea. Following this logic, it can be proposed that sailors’ conceptions of gender, particularly masculinity, were also formed by experiences ashore, and through the catalyst of the sea, they can become suitably altered in such manner that they become part of the sailors’ communal identity. Sailors’ conceptions of masculinity in general may have been formed ashore, but their conceptions of their own masculinity as sailors was formed on the decks and in the forecastles of the deep-sea fleets.
Our seafaring people are brave, being cowards in only one sense, that of fearing to be thought afraid.
—Benjamin Franklin

Following Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical conception of masculinity as a symbol of domination, it would seem almost counterintuitive that sailors could successfully define themselves as a masculine community, considering how dominated they were as a group. On shore, seamen were subject to government persecution through impressment and other legal measures, as well as to the economic exploitation typical of most early industrial-era occupations. At sea, the situation went from dominated to utterly oppressed. Merchant sailors and naval men alike had to make due with substandard and frequently insufficient rations, constant verbal and physical abuse from officers, and the ever-present threat of flogging. The mere act of verbally defending oneself could lead to a brutal whipping, and responding to an officer’s blows with force could very well be seen as mutiny, a crime for which hanging was a standard punishment.

Sailors had few practical tools to fight this domination, and the majority of those available focused on evasion rather than direct conflict. Admiralty courts were notoriously unfriendly to plaintive sailors, though in some cases the excessive use of force, even by the brutal standards of the time, led to decisions in favor of common
seamen. Lack of wealth and social position did not allow sailors access to the legislative or cultural modes of power that would have allowed them to better their situation, and those who had such power were loath to use it to help those who could not help them in turn. Most often seamen merely evaded domination through desertion and by otherwise denying their employers the benefit of their labor. Often sailors utilizing these methods ran the risk of further domination, as employers legally maintained the right to detain, fine, beat, or otherwise punish them for the audacity of attempting to control their own labor.

This was particularly true in the Royal Navy, where desertion was met with an odd combination of punishments, depending largely on the whims of the captain. In some cases, deserters were simply returned to duty upon being captured, in others they were beaten to the brink of death. William Robinson records one case in which four impressed seamen aboard a Royal Navy frigate were convicted of conspiracy to desert and sentenced to three hundred lashes, a punishment they were unlikely to survive. The vessel being in port, the four were forced to undergo the further torment and humiliation of being “flogged around the fleet.” This meant placing the sailors in a boat and rowing them to each of the ships in port, where the sailor would receive a portion of their punishment as the ship’s crew was forced to watch, breaking the body of the punished and as well as the spirit of the audience.

The whip used was the cat-o’-nine-tails, which was composed of a handle with nine tendrils, often studded or otherwise embellished in order to better peel the flesh of its victim. Robinson reported on the state of one of the deserters “after he ha[d] been alongside several ships, his back resemble[d] so much putrefied liver, and every stroke
of the cat [brought] away congealed blood; and the boatswains' mates [were] looked at with the eye of the hawk to see that they [did] their duty, and clear the cat's tail with every stroke, the blood at times streaming through their fingers. This punishment was intended to make clear to seamen, many of whom had been impressed, or kidnapped and ordered into the service, that their lives and their bodies were not their own, and any attempt to claim them as such would be met with horrific violence. The officers' use of boatswains' mates, petty officers picked from the crew, made it clear to the seamen that their physical strength was useless against the officers, who commanded the strength of numerous individuals without needing to raise a finger. The message was simple and dehumanizing; sailors' bodies were not their own.

Such symbolism was even clearer in the case of hanging, the most common method of execution. Most official, organized hangings that happened on land utilized a platform off of which the guilty party would be pushed or dropped, causing, if done correctly, a snapped neck and quick death. In the navy, sailors, usually the shipmates of the man to be executed, were forced to haul on a rope that ran through a pulley and jerked the man into the air, where he slowly died of suffocation. Try as they might, the men could rarely pull quick enough to snap their shipmate's neck and offer him a quick death. Officers stood over the ceremony, physically separated from the action yet clearly in control, often through their command of the marines, whose bayonets and muskets kept the sailors from dropping the rope or otherwise aiding their comrade. The authority of the officers again dominated the bodies of the crew in life and death, a clear message to be sent to all who dared challenge that authority. For the ship's people, who

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were either pulling at the rope or forced to watch under the muskets of the marines, the message was understood quite clearly.

Sailors had few options to fight against such oppression, and these few were not terribly powerful. The most potent tools for fighting domination, social status and wealth, were unavailable to sailors. Status and capital allowed individuals to vote, to retain legal advisors, to bribe officials, to run for office, to find alternative means of supporting themselves, and to make their voices heard. The common sailor lacked access to this power, which is the very reason that elites were able to dominate sailors in the first place. This lack of access was at the heart of the domination over sailors and, ironically, the basis of their particular conception of masculinity, as it left open very few arenas in which sailors could save their personal sense of masculinity.

Why Physical Masculinity?

The constant domination of sailors, at sea and on land, threatened to symbolically castrate sailors if left unchecked, a situation of almost unimaginable horror to males brought up within a patriarchal society. Some way of negating their domination had to be found, and fortunately one of the oldest conceptions of masculinity, one based on the ability to project and withstand physical domination, was within easy access of sailors. This physical masculinity, as described in the introduction, emphasized the ability of the body to dominate other bodies, an incredibly personal and easily understood masculinity whose origins reach back to the first time two cavemen fought over a leftover mammoth bone. As society developed, so did its conflicts, and at the forefront were those who were most accomplished at physical
combat, warrior elites. These warriors became aristocrats, such as the European
nobility, the Aryan/Hindu Kshatriya, and the samurai of Japan, using their combat skills
to dominate those around them and to fight off other warrior-aristocrats.

Eventually the need to commit personal acts of violence to reinforce one’s power
waned among the elite as social rank and economic wherewithal allowed them to control
armed forces without the need to resort to personal violence. By the nineteenth century,
for instance, the typical British nobleman was far more likely to succeed through politics
than by his ability with a sword. Though military service may have been a boon to one’s
career, this service was most likely in the officer corps, whose noncommissioned
officers performed any physical punishment or motivation at the command of the
officers. Still, the easily comprehended nature of physical domination, as well as its
continued importance in the streets, dueling grounds, and farmlands of Europe, meant
that it was a masculinity that retained a significant degree of cultural currency ashore.

This physical masculinity also fit in well with the nature of sailors’ work. The
same hardened muscles and tar-stained hands that trimmed sails and raised anchor could
also wield a cudgel and pummel another man with ferocious strength. Mental
“toughness,” as well as strength, was developed at sea, where being able to withstand
the long hours, harsh climates and otherwise adverse conditions strengthened a man’s
will just as the work strengthened his body. All that was required was reasonably good
health and enough luck and rations to keep the sailor alive and well. Those who already
had access to other methods of domination, such as wealth and social status, jealously
guarded this access in order to maintain their dominance.
Physical masculinity was allowed to flourish by officers and land-based employers because it often served their own purposes while providing a minimal threat. As shall be seen in the fourth chapter, many of the behaviors that sailors associated with masculinity kept the availability of a cheap maritime labor force high, allowing naval and merchant ships to easily and inexpensively fill their ship’s complement, except during times of war, when impressment became a necessity. Direct and indirect appeals to sailors’ masculine pride also proved to be an important motivational tool that played off of sailors’ strength, courage and toughness. In some cases, sailors even volunteered for dangerous duties in order to enhance their masculine standing with the rest of the crew.

During a sudden storm on his first passage around Cape Horn, Richard Henry Dana’s ship was caught unprepared, with the sails still set for fairer weather. One of the sails, the jib, needed to be pulled in order to maintain control of the ship. This was normally routine work, but during a storm, let alone one of the cape’s legendary gales, this was no safe or easy task. The chief mate asked for two sailors to furl in the jib, but only one experienced man stepped forward, the rest declined uneasily. Dana, still fresh from land and desiring to prove himself a sailor as well as a man, jumped forward to volunteer for a job that the threat of punishment alone would not motivate the other sailors to do. This willingness to face danger and physical distress, a characteristic that will be referred to as “toughness” for lack of a better term, was an important part of the sailors’ masculinity, and the desire to display his toughness and therefore his masculinity was an important motivator for Dana and many other sailors as well.91

91 Dana, Two Years, 36.
The physical masculinity of seamen was rarely a serious threat to the control of officers and employers aboard ship, as the slightest show of individual defiance was often met with brutal repercussions, clearly displaying the strength of the officers’ position over the powerful, masculine bodies of the sailors. Even on merchant ships the strength of the sailors was unable to aid them against the authority of the captain. One of Dana’s most memorable passages is about the flogging that one of his crewmates, “John the Swede,” one of the ship’s best men, received for daring to ask why the captain was flogging another man.

While being trussed up for the punishment, John then asked why he was now being whipped, and the Captain replied, “I flog you for your interference, for asking questions.” John then asked, “Can’t a man ask a question here without being flogged?” The captain answered with repeated blows to John’s back and a string of curses. The other sailors stood by and watched, knowing that any action of their own would be interpreted as a mutiny against not just their captain, but also against the power structure ashore that had placed him in such a position of authority.\(^9^2\) The omnipotence of this power structure was as clear to the sailor then as it is to the historian today: Regardless of how strong the individual’s body was, the authority of the officers commanded far greater physical strength through his position; resistance was useless, and potentially fatal.

Through this sort of brutal response, which was performed before the entire ship’s company, officers were able to keep sailors fearful enough that they rarely, if ever, attempted to use their physical strength to directly challenge an officer. If such an

\(^{92}\) Ibid., 132.
action were attempted, it would need to be part of an organized, coordinated assault, in other words a mutiny, or else the individual sailor would be easily overcome by the sheer numbers of other sailors or marines who maintained their submissive role. In a way, the masculinity of sailors was a fragile one, built on strength and a capability for physical violence in an age where physical dominance had become largely obsolete. It was a façade of masculinity meant to disguise the emasculating domination of the sailors’ everyday lives rather than to truly free them from it.

Another condition that helped drive and shape sailors’ masculinity was the homo-social nature of life aboard ship. With the exception of passengers, the occasional officer’s wife, and, in extremely rare circumstances, female sailors in drag, the career sailor spent most of his adult life out of the company of women. Among other things, such a closed environment within a larger patriarchal society would create a system that creates inherent challenges to the individual male’s masculinity. In a hetero-social, patriarchal society, males, even those dominated by other males, are still considered to be superior to women of a similar state. They are still able, and encouraged by society, to dominate women, often through physical violence, and are thus allowed to maintain a shallow pretense of masculinity.

For the male in a homo-social environment, this guaranteed masculine minimum did not exist. There were no women aboard to dominate, therefore, every man risked being the most dominated, becoming the most feminine or the most submissive in response to violence or threats of violence from other males. As a result males in a homo-social atmosphere are even more sensitive about their masculinity than normally and exert even more energy in trying to maintain and project an aura of masculinity.
Often physical masculinity is seen as a way of creating and maintaining hierarchies within an otherwise uniform group of equals. In recent times the need to accentuate one’s masculinity within a homo-social environment has been connected to high-profile sexual assault incidents such as the infamous Tailhook scandal. In 1991, eighty-three women attending an annual naval aviation gathering associated with the Department of Defense were raped, molested and harassed, largely at the hands of the all-male cadre of Navy fighter pilots.⁹³

The homo-social world of the fighter pilots, as well as that of sailors, encouraged the creation of a masculine identity on a personal and collective level. The homo-social world of the fighter pilot created a situation where males are constantly competing against each other to prove their masculinity. At the same time, masculinity became associated with the group identity; if masculinity is key to acceptance and rank within the group, then it only makes sense that belonging to the group is understood as being masculine. Removed from the rigid confines of Naval regulations, this competition to be the most masculine, combined with a group dynamic based on violent, aggressive masculinity, quickly degenerated into sexual attacks on women. They were seen only as victims, as objects to be dominated, not as individuals, let alone equals. Degrading and dominating women increases the masculine standing of not just the group, but also the individuals within it, who try to outdo each other in exhibiting their disrespect and domination of the non-masculine other.

As with the Tailhook incident, the occasional appearance of women in the homo-social world of sailors can shed additional light on the importance of masculinity in all male groups. This is particularly true in cases when women trespassed upon the masculine territory of the ship without the protection of a mate, causing a potential threat to the masculinity of the sailors’ home through their very presence. John Nicol’s description of the Lady Julian provides a vivid example of the ways in which homo-social cultures used cruelty toward women to fortify their collective and individual masculinity. The way in which the sailors, including Nicol, gloried in the opportunity to shock and frighten the women aboard is first seen in the crossing of the line ceremony described in the last chapter. It was, according to Nicol, “the best sport I ever witnessed upon the same occasion.” A porpoise was caught and skinned for “Neptune’s” dress, and was so frightening that “one of the convicts fainted, she was so much alarmed at his appearance, and had a miscarriage after.”

In another incident, a woman, who proved to be rather contemptuous of the captain’s authority, was placed in a barrel with the top and bottom cut out. This method of punishment was both humiliating and tiring, as it did not allow her to sit or lie down in the hot tropical sun, much to the merriment of the sailors. It proved to be a memorable enough incident for Nicol to recall decades later, and a pleasant memory it seemed to be. Causing a miscarriage, terrifying women, and punishing and ridiculing them was the “best sport” the men could have, reinforcing their image of themselves as the superiors of the women aboard, heightening their sense of masculinity.

The work of the gender theorist Eve Sedgwick can shed additional light on the way the male homo-social world reacts to the presence of females. In Between Men:
English Literature and Male Homo-Social Desire, Sedgwick proposes that male relations can be understood through the expression of male desire for other males. Seen through this lens, incidents like Tailhook become as much about cementing interpersonal ties and hierarchies within the group as maintaining the masculine identity of the group and the individuals within it. In all-male environment, the intrusion of women gives the other males an acceptable outlet for their desires. Rape or otherwise violent treatment of women allows men to share in a common sexual and physical experience without having to publicly express such desires through other, socially unacceptable, means.

On the surface it would seem that Sedgwick would be out of place in thesis which uses Bourdieu as its model since Bourdieu claims that all relationships in society stem from men's efforts to dominate women, while Sedgwick argues that all relationships in society, including heterosexual ones, stem from men's desire for other men. The two can, however, be reconciled, though not completely. First, Sedgwick does not argue that her understanding of desire is always sexual in nature, but rather that it is essentially the desire to control. Sex is seen as simply one of many forms of power that men seek over other men, and therefore just one expression of desire. Bourdieu similarly argues that male-to-male interactions are about establishing dominance, and that since hetero-sex is frequently used as an act of dominating females, homo-social desire is also about dominating males through various means. The key difference between the two is simply which male desire is more basic, the domination of women or of men. This being a largely philosophical point, it can be argued back and forth for decades without any resolution. This is not, however, an argument that has much
bearing on this thesis. Either way, the violent treatment of women by individuals within homo-social male groups can be seen, at least in part, as an expression of the desire to dominate other men within the group, in addition to reinforcing the masculine nature of the group, its members, and the physically domination of women by men.

The nature of homo-social male groups and sailors' near-complete domination by officers and the elites of land-based society indicate that the masculinity that sailors projected was often a façade put up in order to fit in with other sailors and to avoid an emasculating sense of being the lowest individual in the pecking order, the individual who was dominated by all and unable to dominate any. To steal a metaphor from Greg Dening, the ship was a theatre and the masculinity of sailors was just an act. Like in all theatre, there were certain formulaic elements that came to be expected: displays of physical strength and ability, expressions of mental and physical toughness, heavy drinking, and frequent relations with prostitutes. These theatrical tricks were how sailors projected their masculine act to each other and to the world.

Violence

The behavior of sailors, aboard ship as well as ashore, serves as evidence of the high value placed on masculinity as sailors defined it. Analysis in this and the following sections will be reserved to behaviors that fit one or both of two general criteria for "masculine reinforcement." The first category is behavior that corresponds directly with the ability to either exploit or avoid some form of dominance, physical or otherwise. The second category is behavior that reinforces gender associations widely held within society. Sailors’ reliance on violence as the foundation of their masculinity can be
proven by examining how sailors used both of these types of behavior to portray
themselves as masculine, even though this masculinity rarely translated itself into actual
dominance. In essence, these behaviors were the formulaic elements of the masculine
genre in which sailors excelled.

The simplest expression of physical masculinity relates directly to ties between
dominance and violent interpersonal altercations. When Jacob Nagle found himself
imprisoned by the British, he was roomed with several other prisoners, including the
ship’s boatswain. The boatswain tried to establish himself as a leader by bullying Nagle
with the help of an accomplice. Another seaman, Jack, “the ablest” among the
prisoners, decided to stand as Nagle’s second. As Nagle recalls, “He jumped up and
came to me and swore if I did not flog the boatswain he would flog me.”94 Within the
world of sailors, social status demanded the ability to physically project dominance and
to reject dominance by others.

Sailors also participated in sports that emphasized violence, such as boxing,
head-butting and cudgeling. In the eighteenth century, bare-knuckle boxing found an
early participatory base along the docks and among sailors and other groups eager to
find new expressions of masculinity. According to Elliot Gorn, sailors were some of the
earliest proponents of boxing in America, bringing it to the port cities from its British
origins. In Black Jacks, Jeffery Bolster describes how black prisoners who taught and
promoted boxing in an English prison during the War of 1812 found it to be both a
popular pastime and a profitable venture. Sailors of both races also participated in
wrestling and fencing, both as a pastime and as a spectacle, and African-American

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94 Dann, Nagle Journal, 49.
sailors often engaged in butting contest, in which the head was used as a striking weapon. Though prize money was often a factor in this, the key motivation often seemed to be pride.

Jacob Nagle also provides evidence of violent sport among sailors, again from the confines of prison. Mistakenly placed in a French prison for British sailors, the American Nagle found himself introduced to the brutal sport of cudgeling, when he picked up a stick with a basket handle on it. Another prisoner approached him carrying his own stick and promptly delivered a blow to Nagle’s head, believing that Nagle was already familiar with the popular pastime known as cudgeling. Nagle attacked him furiously, and the other man stopped and complained that Nagle “did not play fair.” The rules of cudgeling apparently consisted of more than simply bashing one’s opponent about the head and body with a stick. Soon Nagle learned the intricacies of the sport and became a sparring companion of his one-time attacker.95

All of these sports, like most sports, are ritualized expressions of violence intended to display the physical ability of the individual to dominate others and to establish a masculine hierarchy without upsetting the peace of the society in which the sports are taking place. These sports, like the proclivity of sailors to engage in actual combat, accentuate the masculine perception of the sailor as being a dominator rather than dominated, ignoring the impotence of this sort of masculinity to truly improve the sailors’ low standing in society.

95 Ibid., 57.
**Tough Act**

Another of the core expressions of masculinity among sailors was toughness, a concept that, like pornography and art, is far easier to judge than to describe. Toughness, also known as gumption, pluck, or spirit has been a common theme of masculinity in Western culture from Tacitus’s fawning over the Germanic tribes to Clint Eastwood’s roles as a tough, physically resilient and physically violent policeman, cowboy, prizefighter, and even in a somewhat embarrassing role as a singing miner. If forced to do so, one could define toughness as the outward portrayal of the ability to withstand pain and duress, just as masculinity is the external expression of dominance. The ability to withstand pain and duress are easily translated into an ability to fight against domination on an individual level, just as a capability for violence translated into an ability to project dominance onto others. As with masculinity in general, however, many of the signifiers of toughness are more about demeanor and representation than reality. In other words, acting tough was often as important in creating a masculine image as actually being tough.

The sports of sailors mentioned earlier are as much about the ability to deal with violence as they are about the ability to project it. It is one thing to beat another man with fists, cudgels, and foreheads, but it is quite another to be able to withstand similar treatment. The fact that sailors voluntarily underwent such treatment simply for the opportunity of proving one’s masculinity is a testament to their desire to be seen as manly. These sports were not just potentially painful, but also dangerous, and risking one’s life to prove masculinity was seen as an essential component of true toughness.
For many sailors, the most popular and dangerous way of proving masculinity was on horseback. Notoriously poor riders, particularly in the middle of a shore-leave bender, sailors were known for renting horses and galloping at breakneck speed until the horse tired out or threw them out of the saddle. The combination of speed, drunkenness, and inexperience often made this a painful and potentially fatal pastime, in other words a perfect fit for the sailor eager to prove his toughness.

An excellent example of the importance of toughness among sailors is found in the pages of Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast*. A 16-year old “veteran” named Nat had taken to tormenting a younger, thinner boy, George, who was on his first voyage. After a few months of this George challenged Nat to a fight, which was arranged by the chief mate. Standing toe-to-toe on deck and watched by the full ship’s complement, except the captain who was ashore on business, the two took turns swinging at each other. Nat, being the stronger of the two, knocked George down repeatedly, but George, contrary to everyone’s expectations, continued to rise to his feet and attack Nat ferociously, though ineffectively. After a particularly brutal knock down George got up and vowed that “he would stand there until one or the other of them was killed, and set to like a young fury. ‘Hurrah in the bow!’ said the men, cheering him on. ‘Never say die, while there’s a shot in the locker!’” Nat soon gave in, though unhurt, he was unwilling to further fight someone willing to die rather than surrender, and the ship’s company complimented George on his “pluck.” From that moment on, George became “Somebody aboard, having fought himself into some notice.”96 George’s willingness to receive pain and possibly death before submitting, at least to another of the same rank,

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96 Dana, *Two Years*, 313.
was a recognizable model of the image of toughness that all sailors felt obligated to portray, even if they did not always live up to it.

Often sailors attempted to portray an illusion of toughness through attitude and demeanor rather than risk actual injury as in George’s fight with Nat. That sailors felt the need to falsify or exaggerate this trait is informative, accentuating both the importance of masculinity in the sailors’ world as well as the shallow nature of this masculinity. The simplest method of portraying false toughness was through a gruff demeanor that symbolized a lack of sentimentality and an inability to feel emotional distress for one’s self or for others. This emotional distance was often used as a placebo for the ability to withstand physical pain and duress. Take, for instance, the attitude of an “old salt” aboard Leech’s first voyage. When asked by a new man where he might bunk, the sailor replied, “Have you got a knife?” ‘Yes, sir.’ ‘Well, stick it into the softest plank in the ship, and take that for a bed!’”97 This sort of gruff attitude helped the older sailor maintain an appearance of rugged masculinity that he might not have been able to back up had the occasion demanded it.

Another way in which sailors displayed their supposed toughness was through the heavy abuse of alcohol, which has long been a part of their public persona. Sailors themselves considered heavy drinking an important expression of their identity. One individual who Dana referred to as “a thorough seaman,” in addition to being amicable and generous, was also noted to be “at the same time, a drunken, dissolute dog.”98 Dana was too good an author to have juxtaposed the sailor’s drunkenness and the phrase “a thorough sailor” by accident. Drinking with one’s crewmates was an essential bonding

97 Leech, A Voice, 21.
98 Dana, Two Years, 213.
ritual, something that reinforced both the sailor community and an individual’s identification as a sailor. On his first liberty in California, Dana went ashore with his shipmates and sailors from other vessels and “sailor-like, steered for the first grogshop.” Though Dana intended to see more of California than the adobe interior of a grogshop, he first had to drink with his companions, since “When the voyage is at an end, you do as you please, but so long as you belong to the same vessel, you must be shipmate to [your fellow] on shore or he will not be a shipmate to you on board.”

Officers even seemed to encourage this alcohol-induced bonding, handing out extra alcohol rations for special occasions such as a victory in battle, the crossing of the line, and Christmas. Though they often punished sailors for drunkenness, they still expected them to get drunk, even greenhorns barely in their teens. They even expressed a mix of scorn and surprise when sailors did not get drunk on shore. Upon Leech’s return from his first liberty, his duty officer actually expressed surprise and disapproval when the then thirteen-year-old Leech arrived sober and on time. It was the responsible thing to do, but it was most “un-sailorly.”

There are a number of cultural connections between alcohol abuse and masculinity that sailors would have had before ever setting foot on board a ship. Historian A. Lynne Martin has also found gendered meanings in alcohol consumption, particularly among alehouse and tavern patrons. In Alcohol, Sex and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, Martin describes typical alehouse patrons as being...

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99 Ibid., 151.
100 Leech, A Voice, 69.
young men between “Puberty and their mid-thirties.”¹⁰¹ This also fit the profile for the
most prolific drinkers of the time, though most adults, including women, still drank
regularly during meals and on other occasions. Since heavy recreational drinking was
still largely a male phenomenon, sailors would have been culturally indoctrinated into
considering such acts masculine.

More tangible connections between drinking and toughness, the ability to
withstand domination, do exist, but they are tenuous at best. In some ways, excessive
drinking has some physical side effects that can be seen as tests of an individual’s
willingness and ability to withstand pain and distress. Alcohol poisoning, hangovers and
injuries incurred while drinking, both accidentally and as result of altercations, all
certainly test one’s ability to handle some forms of pain and discomfort, though this
does not necessarily equate to the ability to defeat physical domination. In addition, if
one ignored genetic differences and built up tolerances, the size and strength of an
individual was often directly proportional to their ability to consume alcohol. Since
muscle tissue has more water than fat tissue, a sailor with more muscle mass will be able
to dilute more alcohol in his bloodstream than a sailor with a less toned physique of the
same size. Similarly, a larger sailor will be able to dilute more alcohol than a smaller
sailor of equal muscle-fat ratio.¹⁰²

Since larger, stronger men were more likely to be able to drink more as well as
more likely to be physically dominant and resist physical domination, a connection

¹⁰¹ A. Lynn Martin, Alcohol, Sex and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe (Hampshire,
UK: Palgrave, 2001), 73.
¹⁰² National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, “Are Women More Vulnerable to Alcohol’s
Affects?” Alcohol Alert 46 (December 1999) [online newsletter]; available from
between the ability to consume and masculinity was probably made at an early stage.
Since human females typically have a lower body mass and a higher fat-muscle ratio
than males, a link between sex and alcohol consumption may have also been made.
These observations of the biological connections between sex, body mass, strength, and
alcohol consumption may have played a significant part in creating the ties between
sailors’ masculinity and the heavy consumption of alcohol. Despite these biological
arguments, genetic differences and addiction-driven tolerance probably played a greater
role in determining drinking capability than the above factors, except in extreme
conditions. Ties between drinking and the capability to project and withstand violence
were exaggerated by sailors as well as by generations of other young men looking for an
excuse to pickle their livers.

Another common and primarily symbolic expression of toughness among
sailors was the explicit rejection of powerful societal and cultural institutions,
particularly the patriarchal family that was the model for many of these institutions.
Dana recalled how any man who showed too much emotion upon receiving news from
relatives, particularly mothers and other older female relatives, was “made common
stock for rude jokes and unfeeling coarseness to which no exception could be taken by
anyone.” In the article “Davy Jones’ Locker Room” in Iron Men, Wooden Women,
Margaret Creighton also concludes that maternal affection was strongly proscribed
aboard ship and replaced by connections to other sailors.

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103 Such as with the 400+ pound sumo wrestler Konishiki, who has claimed to have drunk in excess of 120 bottles of beer in one sitting.
104 Dana, Two Years, 334.
Connections to sailors' female relations were commonly used as a weapon of ridicule within the sailor's world. Recall how William Robinson and his mates were taunted when engaged in channel duty as sailors and even prostitutes told them that "they might as well be by their mother's fire-side, and tied to the apron-strings." The feminine taint of their mothers that their physical proximity to land exposed them to was a direct threat to their masculinity. Sailors were therefore likely to reject ties to the safe ports of their motherland as well as the safety of their mother's hearth, since, as Robinson put it, "nothing hurts Jack's feelings more than being taunted of anything unmanly or inferior." In some ways this may have been a defensive reaction for men far removed from their loved ones, but it also reflected a degrading of maternal institutions as well as resistance to paternal control.

As seen above, connections to family were often associated with connections to the mother. Since most sailors were relatively young, this connection would make the most sense. As seen in numerous works on the role of women in childrearing practices of the time, parenting duties were largely the duty of the mother, at least until an age when males were expected to either become a provider or begin training to do so. Distancing oneself from maternal nurturing was seen as an important part of adopting a masculine, adult personality. This rejection of maternal love is a popular motif in male adulthood initiation rituals, such as those Bourdieu found among the Kabyle Berbers, as

106 Robinson, Jack Nastyface, 103.
well as essential element in the establishment of an all-male communal identity based on “toughness” inspired masculinity. 108

The patriarchal family also meant paternal control, in essence the domination of the father over the son. For many young sailors, this was a situation that they were loath to return to. The father, like the government, officers, and employers, was a force of domination that threatened to emasculate the sailor by placing him in the submissive role of the son. Some sailors, such as Nicol and Robinson, seem to have even joined the navy as a way of distancing themselves from paternal control. Nicol and Robinson both used the navy to escape from following their fathers’ wishes that they follow their footsteps into reputable artisan professions, which would involve apprenticeship, itself a knockoff of the father-son relationship. In addition to countering their fathers’ wishes, they also placed physical barriers between themselves and their fathers, which bought them a significant degree of freedom from their fathers’ domination, unfortunately at the expense of placing themselves at the mercy of their officers.

Because of its structural and cultural ties to the family, organized religion was as frequent a target of sailors’ masculine ridicule as filial piety was. Seamen’s irreligious attitude was a key part of their identity, and religious figures often became the butt of jokes. When Robinson and his fellow shipmates were saddled with a monk as a passenger, they joked of throwing the friar overboard in order to better their luck. 109 Rediker discusses the anti-religious language and attitude of sailors in The Devil and The Deep Blue Sea, but fails to draw any conclusions from it other than that the sailor had little time for religion at sea. When John Nicol sailed aboard a Lisbon merchantman

with a priest and a highly religious and inexperienced Portuguese crew, he drew a similar conclusion. The crew's dependence on the priest for salvation during rough weather prevented them from taking full responsibility for their posts. When faced with a storm, they ran to the priest to pray, rather than running to their post to save the ship. The smaller, less-experienced, and less-developed deep-sea sailor community among the Portuguese maintained closer ties to land-based religion that promised salvation in exchange for submission. Most English speaking tars believed in supernatural forces, but were too experienced to depend on supernatural forces in a situation when quick thinking and smart sailing could still maintain them. In the words of one ship's captain when told his sailors were praying, "I am afraid that if they have stopped swearing and started praying there is no hope for us." For experienced sailors, prayer was for saving souls, not ships.

While English-speaking sailors also relied heavily on supernatural forces, they saw this relationship almost strictly in terms of luck and the ability to foretell the future. Organized religion, with its emphasis on obedience to the church and the church's guardian, the state, held little appeal for most sailors. Religious institutions were an important part of the power structure that dominated the lives of sailors and others ashore, exploiting the same top-down, patriarchal structures as the family. The archbishop of Canterbury, for instance, is appointed by the king, comes from the same aristocratic moneyed families as the officer corps, and was far closer in class to wealthy ship owners than to lowly seamen. The rule of the church was buttressed by its relationship to the secular power structure law, and it expected its decrees to be obeyed,

just as the church and the state supported the rule of the father over his family. Through its connections to wealth and government, as well as its immense cultural power, organized religion threatened to dominate sailors through cultural and legal measures, encroaching on sailors’ private lives at home and abroad. By denying religion’s power over their personal lives, sailors attempted to embellish their own masculinity.

Moreover, religious behavior, like filial connections, also had strong ties to femininity during this period. Samuel Leech’s mother, for instance, gave him a Bible and prayer book upon leaving England. The Bible and religion were a tie to land, family and femininity, a tie that he felt weakening the longer he was at sea.¹¹² In addition, many of the religious movements in Britain and the United States were quite popular among, and often driven by, female parishioners who saw religion as a way of combating the evils of society, many of which were connected to the very sort of masculinity that sailors personified, such as drinking, cursing, and whoring. The motherly connotations associated with organized religion may have been a key factor in the sailors’ attempts to escape its influences.

One method that English-speaking sailors used to reject organized religion was a strong belief in superstitions specific to life at sea. As Mercier stated, “I have never seen an accident occur on shipboard but someone would step up with a prophetic countenance.”¹¹³ Superstition, here defined as a belief in the metaphysical outside of the teachings of large-scale, hierarchal religions, has long had associations with outsiders to power, who are affected by the decisions of religious hierarchies yet have little role in the leadership of said organizations, such as the sailor. In addition, the sailor was

¹¹² Leech, A Voice, 64.
¹¹³ Mercier, Man-of-War, 53.
largely at the mercy of unforeseeable weather patterns and other natural elements.

Superstition could be seen simply as a way to preserve some sense of control over one's own life, which is what Rediker makes of it in *Devil and The Deep Blue Sea*.\textsuperscript{114} Samuel Leech suggests as much in his description of how the crew of the H.M.S. *Macedonian* was filled with a "presentiment" that the ship would never return home. Always on the lookout for signs of the future, the crew spotted one they considered an ill omen. "The presence of a shark for several days," writes Leech, "with its attendant pilot fish, tended to strengthen this prevalent idea."\textsuperscript{115} When the *Macedonian* did finally meet its nemesis, the U.S.S. *United States*, the sailors could look back at the omens and claim some sort of ability to foretell the unknowable.

Superstition was not, however, just a way of maintaining a sense of security while at sea; it could also be seen as a form of resistance to the dominance of land-based Christian beliefs and practices. The belief in superstition is a way in which people could retain a spiritual or religious existence outside of organized religious settings. In *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, Angela Bourke claims that, in the 1890s, the belief in fairies served as a form of resistance to the encroachment of English/Protestant culture and the loss of traditional, rural, Catholicism in Ireland.\textsuperscript{116} Similarly, the reliance on superstition among sailors can be seen as a way of rejecting the overbearing reach of established religion, specifically, in the case of most English-speaking sailors, Protestant Christianity. Finally, sailor superstitions were yet another way in which sailors could separate themselves from and diminish the status of landsmen at sea. The knowledge of

\textsuperscript{114} Rediker, *Devil and the Deep*, 181.
\textsuperscript{115} Leech, *A Voice*, 79.
these superstitions was one of the things that made a sailor a sailor, since no landsman, and definitely no Christian landsman, would understand the “significance” of sailor omens. At sea, the seaman was the supernatural authority, not a minister, a priest, a bishop, or a pope, who would draw little significance from the natural signs in which the sailor attempted to foretell the future.

In the cases of organized religion and family, sailors’ symbolic attempts to deny the power of these institutions were insignificant on a large scale and left little or no impact on the power of organized religion. Sailors’ rejection of religion, for instance, though it frequently allowed them to act as if they were free from the restrictions of the church, did not free them from religion-related regulations. If a captain demanded that his seamen worship regularly and not curse aboard ship, the boatswain’s mates and their whips assured that the sailors would maintain a “godly” lifestyle. If regulations in port restricted sailors from engaging in certain activities due to religious influence in the legislature, then sailors really had no recompense. Similarly, even if sailors rejected the love of their mother and their father’s authority, they were still under the patriarchal control of the captain, the owners and the government, which was based in large part on the model of the patriarchal family. Society still dominated the sailor and society was still dominated by institutions such as the patriarchal family and religion.

**Sex and Money**

At the same time that sailors were attempting to free themselves from the maternal ties and patriarchal supervision, they were also attempting to set themselves up as patriarchs in their relations with women ashore. Sailors were known for their lusty
demeanor, and after months at sea with little or no privacy heterosexual release was a major concern for the recently discharged sailor. Economics and the expectation that sailors would need to quench certain thirsts created some organized form of prostitution in most port cities, which drained “Jack” of both his sexual tension and his hard-earned cash. Even if a man was not allowed leave ashore, as was often the case during times of war, prostitutes were made readily available to him aboard his ship.

Upon coming into port, Robinson reports “these girls flock down to the shore, where boats are always ready.” The women would be allowed to remain aboard the ship as the “wives” of the sailors until the ship was set to sail again, its stores replenished and its crew drained. These pseudo-marriages were also quite common among sailors ashore, as well as when confined to ship and were perhaps even more frequent in foreign ports; they may have even been the dominant form of relationship among active seamen. A supplement to early British sociologist Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* published in 1851 dedicated two sections by two investigators on “Sailors’ Women,” or prostitutes, either part time or full, who made a living primarily by setting up these temporary domestic situations with sailors.120

117 The possibilities for homosexual encounters existed and in all likelihood they were relatively common, however, the evidence for this is not found in the sources used. Though the topic does bear further exploration, it would be imprudent to conjecture more on the topic without more evidence. The number of homosexual encounters among 20th-century sailors does, however, suggest that the lack of heterosexual opportunities may have encouraged a Georgian-era version of “don’t ask, don’t tell.”


Aboard the *Lady Julian*, John Nicol described the barter prostitution arrangements among sailors and female convicts as a form of marriage. “When we were fairly out to sea,” he later recalled, “every man aboard took a wife among the convicts.” The women received the protection from other sailors, better food, better quarters, and extra privileges. In return, the men got a temporary domestic partner and more importantly, perceived ownership of the woman’s sexuality. The women were dependent on the men for all things in a peculiar version of the patriarchal marriage that was complete in terms of male-over-female domination, yet highly temporary and overtly materialistic. The same thing happened during visits to foreign lands. In Hawai‘i, Nicol refers to the relationships between sailors and native women as marriage again: “Almost every man on board,” he claimed, “took a native woman for a wife while the vessel remained.”

The terms “wife” and “marriage” are peculiar ones in this context, representing perhaps the loosest definitions of the terms at the time. One late eighteenth-century statistician/police magistrate, Patrick Colquhoun represents the other extreme, with his claim that there were 50,000 harlots in London, including women cohabitating without the benefits of marriage. The implication here is that only marriages accepted by the church or state could be considered “real” marriages. For many of the poorest individuals within society, at least in urban London, and presumably elsewhere, marriage was more a description of a living situation that involved long-term cohabitation and some degree of monogamous sex rather than the result of an official ceremony. As E.P. Thompson noted, the lack of legal divorce during the period would

have forced many cohabitating couples to remain unmarried due to a previous marriage. Other couples may have simply lacked the resources or the desire to have an officially sanctioned marriage. According to Lawrence Stone, many couples performed a formal ceremony in front of witnesses, but without official government or church participation. Sailors, it seemed, found even this definition too confining and chose to call their temporary relationships with prostitutes marriages, based largely on the cohabitation aspects and an expectation of sole access to her sexual favors. In all these cases, the term “wife” had connotations of male ownership or sovereignty over the female partner. Even in some cases where the term wife was not used as a description, sailors seem to have favored temporary co-habitation relationships in which they retained the dominant status.

While Dana fails to mention such relationships in his time at sea, the editors of the 1977 Franklin edition of his work found some interesting clues that such encounters did occur in Dana’s time, including hints that Dana himself undertook several such relationships. They discovered a letter from a shipmate of his, Ben Stimson, who ribbed Dana for excluding “‘the beautiful Indian lasses, who so often frequented your humble abode in the hide house.” Dana’s middle- to upper-class associates and readership may not have approved of Dana’s relationships, though they were part of what completed his transformation into a sailor that was so well received by the public.

The peculiarity of the prostitution/temporary marriage relationship cuts to the core of how these relationships escalated sailors’ masculinity. Not only does the conjugal act, which was assumed to be part of both prostitution and marriage, renew the

122 Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage*, 386.
123 Dana, *Two Years*, Editor’s notes, 7.
male’s belief in his masculine virility, but by setting up a domestic or pseudo-domestic situation with prostitutes, sailors also attempted to fulfill a basic masculine requirement within any patriarchal society, the domination of a woman in a sexual relationship. This basic male/dominant-female/submissive relationship forms the basis of patriarchal society and was so essential a part of the definition of masculinity during that period that it was inevitable that sailors would attempt to construct some semblance of marriage as a way to establish their masculinity. In these relationships, the sailor saw himself as in complete control of the situation, at least temporarily. He purchased the services of his partner and, as long as his money or trade goods held out, he received not only sexual satisfaction but also the knowledge that, at least for the time being, she was “his” woman. This ownership, or at least leasing, of a woman’s sexual and domestic services, gave the sailor a sense of dominance and masculinity in the most basic of ways.

Unfortunately for the sailor, alcohol and cohabitation with hookers were relatively expensive methods of proving one’s masculinity, particularly when combined. Sailors could easily squander a year’s wages in a month or less ashore, leaving them broke and at the docks looking for more work. Even without the expenses of cohabitation, alcohol and boarding, which shall be discussed in the last chapter, sailors were notoriously bad with money, spending their wages on just about anything they could get their hands on. One prostitute interviewed for one of the sections on “Sailors’ Women” in London Labor explained how her current “husband,” one of many sailors to whom she was “married,” gave her all his money to watch over when he returned from a voyage. She defended this practice by saying, “if I not to take care, he would spend all in one week. Sailor boy always spend money like rain water; he throw it into the street
and not care to pick it up again, leave it for crossing-sweeper or errand-boy who pass that way."\textsuperscript{124}

Sailors’ own accountings of how they spent their money support her claims. Mercier reported going broke without even knowing it, only realizing his poor fiscal situation when his landlord informed him that he was out of money and actually $25 dollars in debt, a relatively common occurrence.\textsuperscript{125} Jack Nastyface described a typical shipboard market in which merchants frequently fleeced sailors by selling them overpriced luxury items of questionable quality, such as silver watches and gold rings.\textsuperscript{126} Samuel Leech recounted how all of his money earned giving tours of the captured Macedonian to American ladies was quickly spent pursuing the fast-paced life of a sailor on land.\textsuperscript{127} In almost every published account, sailors ashore were quick to spend their money and loath to save a single dime.

In the past, many have seen the spending habits of sailors as simple ignorance of the power of money, but this could not be farther from the truth. Sailors were painfully aware of this power, and like most individuals, they understood that it was wealth that really ran the societies from which they came. Their spending habits were not born of ignorance, rather they were an attempt to deny the power of money, just as they denied the power of religion and family, and to deny their domination at the hands of those who possessed great wealth. This rampant spending denied the economically based emasculation that forced sailors into submissive labor positions in two ways. First, the sailor emulated those who dominated him, particularly the economic elites, by spending

\textsuperscript{124} Mayhew, \textit{London Labour}, 230.  
\textsuperscript{125} Mercier, \textit{Man-of-War}, 1.  
\textsuperscript{126} Robinson, \textit{Jack Nastyface}, 92-3.  
\textsuperscript{127} Leech, \textit{A Voice}, 112.
his money on things that in his mind, only the wealthy could afford. By obtaining what he perceived to be the outward symbols of wealth such as watches, fancy clothes, and gold rings, he attempted to portray himself as the equal of those who possessed true economic power. Even the renting of horses described earlier could be seen as an aspect of this, particularly in England and even New England, where the horse still carried with it connotations of wealth and aristocracy.

At the same time, the sailor also denied the power that money, and the wealthy, had in his life by treating money carelessly, perhaps even spitefully. Sure, he wanted the objects that symbolized economic power, but he knew enough to know he would never be the true economic equal of those who oppressed him. As a psychologically defensive measure he openly scorned the building of wealth, the source of the oppressor’s power, by refusing to even attempt to compete with the wealthy on their terms. The money he made on his voyage would never make him an equal of the lords and capitalists who oppressed him, so why attempt to do so through financial planning, careful spending, and investment? To the sailor it made more sense to spend the money in such a manner as to show contempt for the means of their oppression. By denying the power of money, they were attempting to deny that they were under the thumb of those who obtained power, and measured their masculinity, through wealth.

**Work, Gender and Race**

In this section, an attempt will be made to show how race, class, and other differences among sailors may have led to different interpretations of masculinity. While this will only be done for this one example, work, the basic thesis of this section,
that societal differences affected individual sailors' perceptions of things, can be extrapolated to other parts of this chapter. Due to time and space constraints, the effort has not been made in each section of this chapter to show race, religion, class, or region of origin may have altered the views of individual sailors from the seemingly homogenous path presented so far, but evidence of such variation do exist. The choice to use work as the vehicle for exploring these differences is intentional. Racists, economic elitists, and others have used often discourses on work, race and class to justify everything from the right to private property to genocide, though rarely with any consideration of the complex social, cultural, economic, and practical issues that create these discourses. By including some of these issues in this section's discussion of differences in conceptions of work, it is hoped that a rational understanding of such issues will emerge.

With the exception of certain elites and those deemed unable by society, work of some form has been an essential fact of life. Be it hunting, subsistence or cash crop agriculture, wage labor, or even slavery, in the vast majority of lifestyles work must be performed in order to obtain the basic necessities of life. Apart from this practical foundation, however, what work symbolizes can differ greatly between groups. Since definitions of masculinity also differed between different cultures and classes, it is reasonable to conclude that the ways in which gender and work were combined may also have had different connotations.

In general, most sailors made a basic connection between working and masculinity based purely on economics and other elements of sailors' masculinity. Work compensated with cash was an essential requirement during this period as
capitalism pushed barter trade and subsistence agriculture out of all but the most remote areas of Britain and America. These wages could then be used to obtain the financial stake required to establish one’s self as a patriarchal head of household, either in the conventional sense or in the temporary manner seen in the previous section. Work also provided the cash needed to support the drinking binges and spending sprees that further enhanced sailors’ aura of masculinity. Finally, work maintained one’s place aboard ship, as a sailor who avoided work placed it onto the shoulders of his companions. Such a man was called a “soger,” noted earlier as a powerful insult, or as Dana claimed, “the worst term of reproach...one who is always trying to get clear of work.” From all of this, it can be seen that in general, the ability and willingness to do one’s work had some clear ties to masculinity for all sailors.

Beyond this baseline, differences can be seen in some of the ways in which different groups of sailors saw the tie between work and masculinity. The African-American cook, for example, found on most American merchantmen during the 1800s, was seen to play a feminine role, and was therefore filling an undesirable position in the minds of white sailors. As seen in the previous chapter, cooks and other African Americans in domestic roles faced some derision for this and were not accepted as masculine equals by many sailors. Ironically, after the 1820s, cooks typically made more money than able seamen. In practical terms, the cook was in a superior position to support either a family or bender, and therefore enhance his masculinity, yet it was a rejected by most white seamen.

128 “Soger” was only used to refer to a man who avoided his fair share of work. An incompetent sailor who still tried to perform was called a “marine.” Dana, Two Years, 163 Fn.
129 Bolster, Black Jacks, 168.
According to Jeffrey Bolster, the situation on land and the demographics of age and race among sailors may provide some clues as to why African Americans were more likely to take such a position. In terms of age, Bolster found African-American sailors were on average older and more likely to be legally married and supporting a family than their Caucasian counterparts. This meant that African-American sailors, including cooks, had a greater motivation to accept a higher-paid post despite supposedly feminine connotations in order to maintain a family. Furthermore, African Americans were far more likely to have been in the food-service industry before shipping out to sea, weakening the cultural connections between cooking and femininity.

In addition, the position of cook was one that maintained a great deal of cultural power, independence, and responsibility. For African Americans ashore, the opportunity for such work ashore that included a wage equal to or above that of whites was rare, if not nonexistent.

Finally, the relative equality of the ship in terms of race, even for a cook or steward, was far better than on land. In terms of masculinity, the lack of a rigid racial hierarchy that forced African Americans to constantly place themselves below all white men made getting aboard a ship far more important than obtaining a “manly” position. Of all these reasons, this is the most telling of the differences between African-American sailors and their Caucasian counterparts. Generations of slavery had created a culture, both in the North and in the South, that expected African Americans to be polite, quiet, and submissive, essentially the opposite of the personalities developed aboard a sailing vessel, except when dealing with officers. According to Bolster, outside of this

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130 Bolster, “Every Inch,” 161.
important division, African-American sailors were free to interact with their white
counterparts as equals, an attitude that often followed them ashore in areas where this
would not result in lynching or jail time. This, for many African Americans, was as
important, if not more important, than simply earning a wage, and it became the
cornerstone of many black sailors’ masculinity, and a far more direct tie to Bourdieu’s
original conception of masculinity as the signifier of dominance, or at least a lack of
submission.

There is no better example of how the sailor persona partially shielded African-
American seaman from race-oriented domination than in Frederick Douglass’ account of
his escape from slavery:

In my clothing I was rigged out in sailor style. I had on a red shirt and a tarpaulin hat,
and a black cravat tied in sailor fashion carelessly and loosely about my neck. My
knowledge of ships and sailor’s talk came much to my assistance, for I knew a ship from
stem to stern, and from keelson to cross-trees, and could talk sailor like an "old salt." I
was well on the way to Havre de Grace before the conductor came into the negro car to
collect tickets and examine the papers of his black passengers...He went on with his
duty--examining several colored passengers before reaching me. He was somewhat
harsh in tone and peremptory in manner until he reached me, when, strange enough, and
to my surprise and relief, his whole manner changed. Seeing that I did not readily
produce my free papers, as the other colored persons in the car had done, he said to me,
in friendly contrast with his bearing toward the others:
"I suppose you have your free papers?"
To which I answered:
"No sir; I never carry my free papers to sea with me."
"But you have something to show that you are a freeman, haven’t you?"
"Yes, sir," I answered; "I have a paper with the American Eagle on it, and that will carry
me around the world."
With this I drew from my deep sailor’s pocket my seaman’s protection, as before
described. The merest glance at the paper satisfied him, and he took my fare and went
on about his business.\footnote{Frederick Douglass, \textit{Life and Times of Frederick Douglass} (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 199.}

Hence, the African-American sailor was given much more freedom and respect than the
typical African American. The fact that Douglass was not scrutinized in the same
manner as his fellow black passengers attests to the role of the sailor identity in allowing
African-American sailors to partially resist the racial domination inherent in American society at that time. For many African-American sailors and landsmen, the freedom to retain their dignity in such situations was far more important to their masculinity than avoiding shipboard jobs tainted by domesticity.

As seen in this short discussion of work and gender, certain aspects of the individual sailor’s view of masculinity were strongly affected by his place in land-based society. Even though the sailor identity negated some of these differences aboard the ship, they still had a powerful effect on the mentalities of sailors by serving as a filter through which their experiences aboard were viewed and understood. The differences in perception that were created by these filters left the façade of sailors’ masculinity even further exposed to the possibility of collapse. The possibility of multiple masculinities, even aboard the same ship and within the same crew, led to tensions like those seen in Mercier’s description of the fight aboard the *Constitution*. These tensions pitted those who wished to maintain the status quo definition of masculinity against those whose opinions differed. These multiple masculinities and the tensions that arose further because of them further betray the theatrical nature of masculinity aboard the ship.

**Conclusion: “An Overstrained Sense of Manliness”**

Sailors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were among the most oppressed groups of free laborers in the English-speaking world. Their domination by their officers, the government, employers and the society that had pushed them into their profession threatened to completely emasculate them if steps were not taken to ease the psychological burden of their never-ending domination. Sailors, inspired in a large part
by the homo-social nature of their culture, sought to deflect this emasculation by adopting a highly charged masculine identity that favored the violent, physical conceptions of masculinity that were readily available to the hardworking seamen. In their attempts to free themselves from domination, at least symbolically, sailors sought to test and display their masculinity through a number of behaviors.

Many of these behaviors addressed directly the ability to project physical violence on other individuals, behaviors that traced their ties to masculinity far back into pre-history. Other behaviors displayed the sailor’s ability to withstand pain and therefore resist physical violence and associated forms of domination. Many common behaviors simply symbolized such toughness through gruff demeanors and the rejection of powerful societal institutions that were seen as both oppressive and feminine at the same time. The rejection of these institutions symbolized toughness in their seeming disregard for authority, their “sacred cows make the best hamburgers” mentality, though they were often little more than empty gestures that only weakened the conscious psychological influence of these authorities while failing to affect their subconscious, legal, and societal power. Adding to the instability of the sailors’ masculinity were the subtle differences between sailors’ conceptions of ties between masculinity and things like work and relationships, due to the racial diversity of the sailors’ world, and presumably due to areas of origin, religious upbringings and other factors.

The masculinity of sailors, though complex and often accepted by sailors and landsmen alike as a reality, was actually little more than a façade in terms of its relation to domination. This masculinity did not truly allow them to dominate others or to avoid domination on anything more than an individual level, and only against individuals of a
similar standing, such as with the two youths described by Dana. It was an act put on to
deny reality, to pretend that they were not submissive in almost every respect, that their
flesh could not be stripped from their backs for the slightest signs of defiance. The
result was what Dana described as an “overstrained sense of manliness.” 132 This
“overstrained” masculinity was symptomatic of a community of men who were terribly
conscious of their own low status and the frailty of the illusion they had created of their
own individual ability to defend against domination. Because of its emphasis on the
individual and on such a limited conception of masculinity, this fragile masculinity did
little or nothing to actually free sailors as a group or as individuals from domination.
This illusion was influential in some ways, however, as it became the basis for almost all
contemporary representations of sailors in the wider culture of the time.

132 Ibid., 224.
No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned.

Every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier, or not having been at sea.

—Samuel Johnson, Boswell’s Life of Johnson

Masculinity was the cornerstone of the system of dominance that extended from ship to shore, acting on and composed of every individual within society. As seen in the previous chapter, sailors, like all members of society, had an innate understanding of the ties between masculinity and dominance. Working from this contextual foundation they crafted a new identity meant to question land-based hierarchies by asserting themselves as physically masculine. Most within land-based society recognized the symbolic power of the sailors’ masculinity and altered it to better fit their worldview. The type of masculinity conceived by sailors was nothing new, indeed other groups in society, particularly among the working class, projected similar masculine characteristics, but few made physical masculinity so essential a part of their identity. Because of their “overstrained sense of masculinity” and the theatrical manner in which it was presented, sailors were an ideal totem for any group or individual seeking to accentuate their own aura of masculinity.

Even individuals like Johnson, who deplored the sea and those who worked upon it, felt it necessary to acknowledge the masculine imagery of the sailor. Often this was done in such a manner as to co-opt the masculinity of seamen while at the same time
condemning the actual sailors who had established the ties between the sea and masculinity. By analyzing common themes in landsmen’s portrayals of sailors in novels, paintings, cartoons, songs, and other media, it is possible to see how landsmen interpreted and exploited perceptions of sailor masculinity. It should be noted that this was not a simple process of sailors creating a new masculinity and landsmen co-opting it. Rather, it was a continuous discourse on masculinity between sailors and landsmen, wherein society’s views of masculinity affected that of sailors, who tailored them to their own uses and reflected them back with an intensity that served to reinforce ideas about physical masculinity on shore.

Sources for this chapter are taken from landsmen’s cultural products, such as novels, pictorials, poems, and ballads of the time. Because of varying degrees of literacy and the cost in time and money required for certain forms of entertainment, the audiences for these sources varied a great deal. In the interest of brevity they will be separated broadly into two categories, elite and popular. For the purposes of this chapter, elite sources will be defined as those whose primary audience and creators came from the middle and upper classes and reflected the points of view of these classes, including novels, paintings, and plays. While none of these cultural products were exclusively the province of the elites, for the most part they reflected elite values.

Novels, for instance, may have been read by individuals of the lower classes and have been occasionally written by “Grub Street hacks” and others whose identity was not strictly among the elites, but for the most part they found their most sympathetic audience among the upper and middle class. For instance, of the more than twenty pre-1850 novels discussed by literary scholar John Peck in Maritime Fiction, only the works
of Herman Melville and James Fenimore Cooper, who were former sailors themselves, have protagonists who shipped before the mast. In both cases, however, the “common seamen” were often scions of the upper or upper-middle classes who are shown in contrast to the common seamen they encounter. The rest are officers whose social background and official status distinguished them from the common sailor, though their authors often play off commonly held conceptions of physical masculinity originally associated with sailors of humbler origins. When common sailors appear in elite cultural products, the portrayal is often negative, though it is almost always negative in a manner that plays off of elements of sailors’ physical masculinity.

As used in this thesis, popular culture refers only to cultural products intended for wide distribution among the working class and the poor, such as songs, illustrations from broadsheets, and similar items. In works of popular culture, such as published songs, periodicals, and cartoons, the common sailor frequently received far more consideration. In these cases, “Jack” takes the forefront and the officers become the colorful background characters and/or foil. Similarly, these sources are far more likely to portray officers and other elites in a negative light while presenting the common sailor in a very sympathetic light. As with elite sources, popular-culture products always highlight elements of the physical masculinity of sailors. An effort has been made to include sources from both elite and popular culture throughout this chapter.

Jack Tar's Body

The way that sailors' bodies are presented in pictorials and text is the clearest signal that sailors' masculinity was recognized ashore. For instance, the illustrator George Cruikshank, who was equally known for his scathing political cartoons and his popular illustrations of the common man, often drew Jack as a stout and physically powerful individual. In *The Sailor's Progress* (1818), a series of images by Cruikshank a muscular sailor is presented in active poses, such as dancing with female companions or boarding a ship. In each illustration, Jack's physique is accentuated by his pose and clothing. In comparison to others within the same drawings, Jack epitomizes physical masculinity. The marine in "In Iron's," from *The Sailor's Progress*, for instance, is peculiarly thin and lacks Jack's muscular mass, while the Judge, Juror's and Plaintiff in "A Witness" from *Greenwich Hospital: Naval Sketches* (1825) are obese and listless compared to the active muscular tars.134

Edgar Allan Poe's description of the sailor Dirk Peters in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1850) also makes the connection between sailors and muscular physiques. Peter's "was one of the most ferocious-looking men I ever beheld," claimed Poe's narrator, "He was short in stature . . . but his limbs were of Herculean mold. His hands, especially, were so enormously thick and broad as hardly to retain human shape."135 Though Poe's work is more grotesque than that of many other authors, it is still a romanticized image of the physical prowess of the sailor and cuts to the heart of the sailor's masculinity.

In terms of domination and power, physical strength is meaningless as a symbol if it does not translate, literally or symbolically, into the ability to deliver physical harm unto others and to withstand physical duress. After having dispatched a mutineer by grabbing him by the neck throwing him overboard, Dirk Peters shoots two more before he dispatches the last two with a stool.\textsuperscript{136} W. Elme’s illustration “A Milling Match Between the Decks” (1812) shows two well-muscled tars, tied to a bench and preparing to box.\textsuperscript{137} The sailors, one black and one white, are physically powerful and perfectly willing to use their power to dominate one another, even at the risk of potential harm to themselves. The jolly atmosphere in the illustration’s background denies the harsh physical conditions under which the sailors had been forced to improve their bodies and the physical dominance of the government and the captains under which they often had no choice but to demur. The strong, fighting tar, though removed from reality, still symbolized masculine strength, resistance to physical domination, and the ability to dominate others. The public persona of the tar exemplified a type of masculinity that all men and women could easily understand.

Through the pens of landsmen, the hardships of Jack’s life also took on a romantic air that promoted rough-and-tumble masculinity.\textsuperscript{138} In James Fenimore Cooper’s \textit{The Water Witch} (1830), sailors live through several storms, harrowing and dangerous chases, numerous battles, and, in the end, a shipwreck, thirst, hunger,

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{138} This also had an effect historiographically. Lemisch and Rediker both argue that this romanticism, particularly when mixed with nationalism, led to a tendency among maritime historians such as Samuel Morrison to ignore the actual oppression of sailors in favor of the “romance of the seas.”
and sharks. The ability of the sailors to withstand these dangers and physical trials heightens the audience's perceptions of sailors' masculinity. In *Arthur Pym*, the narrator lives through numerous tests of fortitude, including extreme thirst and hunger, delirium, raging storms, mutineers, and, of course, a shipwreck. Symbolically, the ability to withstand all this translates into the ability to mentally and physically withstand domination. In another of Cruikshank's *Greenwich Hospital* sketches, "The Point of Honour," a sailor bears himself before his captain to be whipped in order to spare his shipmate from an undeserved punishment. Here his toughness and physique theoretically allow him to withstand attempts at physical domination; he may be whipped, but he will not fear the whipping and so he will not be dominated. In the popular imagination, sailors were tough as well as strong.

Sailors' physical ability to withstand dominance and to dominate others was connected to a spiritual and emotional drive to resist tyranny, even in the face of overwhelming odds. This "plucky" attitude is portrayed frequently in illustrations and novels, and is an innate part of the popular perception of the sailor. Among those who saw the government and the upper classes as oppressive and overbearing, this proved to be a very popular portrayal of Jack. In *The Water Witch* (1829), which was set in the early eighteenth century, Cooper's idealized smuggler/über-sailor, Master Tiller, gaily tweaks the nose of the British government and the novel's protagonist, Captain Ludlow, by leading Ludlow and his men on a merry chase at sea and ashore. 139 Cooper, a former American naval officer writing in the 1820s, used Tiller's resistance to the Navigation Acts and British impressment practices to make symbolic jabs at Britain and oppressive

government policies. Tiller’s refusal to submit to these practices is what makes him the true hero of the book as well as a textbook example of the literary sailor.

In the cartoon titled “The Sailor and the Banker: The Firm in Trouble” (1799), a sailor presents a banker with a draft for twenty dollars and quips, “I say, my tight little fellow — I’ve brought you a Tickler! A draft for Twenty Pounds, that’s all! But don’t be down-hearted — you shan’t stop on my account — I’ll give you two days to consider it.” 140 The banker, who has rarely been seen as a sympathetic character, would customarily be considered to be higher up the social scale than the sailor and therefore in a dominant position. The sailor’s cheeky comments show that he sees himself as equal, however, if not superior to the banker. Stripped of his money, the banker is less masculine than the sailor, who depends on his strength, his toughness, and his indomitable spirit rather than his checkbook to provide his place in the world, and they both know it. Stripped of his wealth, the banker is a failure and the sailor triumphs as the better man. This sort of illustration plays off of and perpetuates the image of the sailor as an enemy of tyranny and the social hierarchy.

As these images show, sailors successfully identified themselves as masculine in such a way that their public image became synonymous with physical power. Once the public made the connection between masculinity and sailors, however, control over their image was largely removed from seamen’s control. The reality of the sailors’ existence was removed from the popular image of “Jack Tar” and replaced with romanticized and fictionalized conceptions of the sailor created to benefit landsmen. By altering the image of the sailor through song, cartoon, novel, and play, individuals and groups ashore

140 Grego, *Humorous Art*, 35.
were able to use his identity to support their own agendas. Masculinity was too
desirable a commodity and “Jack Tar” was too powerful an image for sailors to retain control of him.

**Jolly Jack**

The sailor’s penchant for recreation ashore was as well-publicized as his plucky spirit and toughness, which is reflected in landsmen’s versions of the sailor, particularly in song and illustration. The sailor is presented as a fun-loving caricature of himself, “Jolly Jack,” whose world is an endless bacchanalia. Illustrations such as “Saturday Night at Sea” (c. 1820s) or “Carousing on Board” (1818) by George Cruikshank are both excellent examples of this vogue.\\(^{141}\) In “Saturday Night at Sea,” a group of sailors are gathered around a table, merrily drinking grog and swapping tales. The atmosphere is not one of a quick respite between watches but that of a leisurely evening in a pub. In “Carousing on Board” sailors and their female guests dance, drink, and play music, with a suggestion of more risqué pastimes taking place out of frame. While these scenes are not technically inaccurate, they do leave out the conditions under which Jack sought his entertainment and the crippling harshness of his life outside of these brief moments. Furthermore, these portrayals are extended into other situations, in which Jack’s joviality and carefree ways become tools for dehumanizing him.

Jack’s jolliness was often interpreted as the result of a basic inability to think, particularly in novels, rendering Jack über-masculine in that he lived only for the moment yet subhuman at the same time. In Captain Marryatt’s *Frank Mildmay* (1829),

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141 Ibid., 78, 89. The first piece is not dated but the style of Cruikshank’s drawing seems to indicate a date around this period.
*Arthur Pym* and Tobias Smollett’s *Roderick Random* (1748), common sailors are shown to be incapable of sobriety and decision-making skills outside of the strict and absolute command of a strong officer. In each case, alcohol and Jack’s supposed carefree nature are seen as the reason for strict discipline and constant busywork, rather than strict discipline and constant busywork being the underlying causes of shipboard alcoholism and Jack’s free-wheeling attitude ashore. Though the fictional seamen’s bravery and crude masculine image is accentuated by these episodes, their inability to plan and think in a rational manner make them seem childish and in need of the strong dominance of the state and capitalist managers to keep them safe from themselves.

Just as the fictional Jack was incapable of thought, he was also frequently incapable of feeling grief. The cartoon “The Greenwich Pensioner” (1791) by Cruikshank’s father, Isaac, shows a number of crippled seamen joyfully carousing; carefree and fully compensated by the state for the loss of various limbs, they have no worries outside of running out of beer. In reality, the chances of getting a Greenwich pension were relatively bleak, as were the chances of living through the crude amputation techniques of the time. The merry peg-leg shows up in many of the Cruikshanks’ drawings, effectively marking the peg-leg as an essential part of the landsmen’s perception of the sailor as were grog and striped shirts. The crippled sailor is always cheery and never bitter; he accepts his lot and there is no need to worry about him. While this can be seen as an aspect of masculine control over emotion, it can also be seen as a simple brute’s lack of sentiment. The brute does not care about himself

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142 Except in cases when Jack’s masculinity was co-opted in support of ideologies such as nationalism or romantic love. In these cases Jack’s emotions run deep, yet they are often combined with an acceptance of fate and retain much of the Jolly Jack personality.

the way a “higher” class of man does, so why should the higher class of man feel anything for the brute?

Tobias Smollett creates a similar creature in *Roderick Random* with a seaman, whose anonymity makes him representative of all sailors, who feels absolutely no sorrow for his dead shipmates, casually dumping a body in the cockpit and then sauntering off to take a chew of tobacco. 144 Captain Marryatt portrays a similar lack of emotion in *Frank Mildmay*, whose main character practically revels in seeing his fellows die, a sentiment shared by many of his shipmates. 145 Samuel Johnson published a slightly more nuanced view of sailors’ lack of sentiment in the *Rambler* #47: “It is commonly observed, that among soldiers and seamen, though there is much kindness, there is little grief; they see their friend fall without any of that lamentation which is indulged in security and idleness.” 146 It should be noted that all of these writers were members of the social and economic elite and that their opinions were highly influenced by their own position in society. The research of maritime historian Marcus Rediker provides a different view of this in *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, noting that death and grieving played an important role in the sailors’ worldview and was acted out in a number of rituals and traditions. 147 Death was not to be lightly dealt with because of its familiarity; it was a matter of grave importance because it was always near.

There are several reasons why the happy-go-lucky nature of the sailor would resonate so strongly among landsmen. On a very simple level, the harshness of the

times demanded some joviality in its popular culture, just as Jack’s harsh working
environment made entertainment and good humor a valuable commodity in a
companion. At the same time, landsmen interpreted this joviality as a childish
acceptance of fate and an inhuman lack of compassion. This would allow society to
shed any guilt it had over the mistreatment of the naval and merchant sailors who
guaranteed the United States and Great Britain safety and economic prosperity as well as
reinforced the elite’s sense that they were superior to the lower class, both by birth and
in culture. Barbarous or not, however, sailors’ manliness was far too powerful an icon
for landsmen, even those who considered sailors to be little more than beasts, not to
covet.

**Jack the Patriot**

As mentioned above, landsmen, by romanticizing Jack’s masculine identity,
ignored the brutal facts of Jack’s existence while maintaining the popular image of the
manly sailor. In doing so, they found themselves free to associate Jack and his
masculinity with ideologies that real-life tars were often ambivalent about, most
commonly nationalist causes. The period between 1750 and 1850 were significant years
in the creation of nationalist ideologies in Britain and the United States. In Britain, this
period covers the Seven Years’ War, the loss of the American colonies, the French
Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, a significant portion of the Industrial Revolution, and
all of the resultant demographic and social changes. The frequent wars, as well as the
need to maintain stability amid massive social, economic, and cultural changes, led to a
need to create nationalist sentiment throughout the country. The sailor, who figured
prominently in war and trade, was a natural symbol for the British, and his cultural reservoir of masculinity was soon tapped to help aid the nationalist cause.

In the Charles Johnstone’s satirical novel *Chrysal or The Adventures of a Guinea* (1760), the narrator, a gold piece, describes his time in the possession of numerous owners, including an English sailor. The bellicose mariner, a proper British tar, though fresh from the confines of prison, wants nothing more than to use a recently acquired vessel to become a privateer and devastate French shipping. When the man who paid for the vessel and freed the mariner from his cell begs him not to attack a French merchantman, due to possible danger to the passengers, the sailor reluctantly agrees, but protests by saying, “But then the Honour of Old England; consider that, the honour of Old England.”148 Regardless of the fact that the man is a Moor, and no ally of England, the mariner’s patriotism is so all-consuming that this is the strongest possible argument that he can make.

The Jack Tar presented in songs and cartoons of the period reflect a similarly patriotic fervor among other fictional sailors. A cartoon by James Gilroy titled “National Discourse” (1780) shows a stout British sailor with a cudgel staring down a relatively effete French seaman with a sword. The Frenchman taunts the Englishman by saying, “Ha! Ha! We Beata you!” The English sailor replies “You Lie.”149 The sailor here represents not just British sailors, but Britain itself. The sailor’s gruff attitude and the perceived strength advantage of his body over the Frenchman symbolize an England that remains strong and belligerent regardless of any temporary

149 Grego, *Humorous Art*, 35.
setbacks. In “Jack’s Trump of Defiance”, taken from Cruikshank’s *Naval Sketches*, a British tar steps out in front of a combined mass of officers and sailors, again armed with cudgels, this time against a force of saber-wielding Brazilian cavalry. Jack is again seen as stout and defiant in his posture as he blows a horn into the face of the horsemen, positioning his cudgel at the ready, much to the amusement of his comrades and the confusion of his enemies. Once again the seaman is the embodiment of Britain’s military strength and nationalistic belligerence.

The seaman was a natural symbol for Britain during times of war. He was the first line of defense and offense due to England’s “Blue Water” defense strategy. By projecting naval power, England sought to maintain its sovereignty as well as its economic might. The British seaman, since the time of Drake and the Spanish Armada, had proven himself more than competent for the task, and Britain’s military heroes were as likely to be admirals as they were to be generals. In the words of Admiral Jacky Fisher, the army was just “a projectile to be fired by the navy.” The navy’s strong showings against other European nations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly the victories of Nelson during the Napoleonic wars, cemented the ties between the Royal Navy and British sovereignty.

The use of the British tar as a symbol of national identity also had deeper meaning than just his literal role of defender. The sailor’s masculinity was already established in the popular consciousness, highlighting his toughness, refusal to be dominated, and ability to dominate others. By creating ties between the sailor and

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150 Ibid., 62.
patriotism, British society encouraged all men, regardless of class, to be patriotic in order to increase their own masculinity. These connections between masculinity and patriotism took a personal value and made it a national value. Now all British males also had an assumed stake in nationalist ventures, be they economic, political, or military. Not only did the idea of a British failure risk the loss of their own masculinity, but also any failure on their own part to support Britain would be judged both feminine and seditious.

The same was true in the former British colonies now known as the United States of America. More so than with Britain, the United States was in search of a national identity and national icons. The loose confederation of colonies that had been established after the Revolutionary War was found wanting, and a strong central government was needed, as well as nationalist spirit. Since Americans, like the British, were highly dependent on the ocean for their economic prosperity and military security, the sailor was again a familiar figure whose literal ties to the continuance of the nation made their use as an icon quite effective. The major difference between the two revolved largely around the attempts of Americans to create a unique national image based on their rejection of British “tyranny” as well as love of the motherland.

James Fenimore Cooper is perhaps the most prominent advocate of sailors as an image of American masculinity. Just as he did with Hawkeye in Last of the Mohicans, Cooper created characters of a distinct American type and placed them in the pre-Revolutionary War past. Although Hawkeye, as well as Master Tiller of The Water-Witch and some other American protagonists, were technically British citizens, they retained what Cooper saw as distinctive American characteristics. Hawkeye’s ties to
Native American society, for instance, made him far more American than British, though he supposedly lived decades before “Americans” really existed. Master Tiller is similarly American without being an American. Technically, he is a subject of Queen Anne, but he is born on American soil and refuses to submit to British practices felt to be oppressive by Americans, such as impressment and the Navigation Acts.

Nonetheless, he still desires to battle the French in order to save a British frigate that has been harassing him for weeks. In warning the British of a second attack, Tiller claims, “I could have spared some of the profits from this voyage, to have been on the deck with a dozen of my truest fellows” during the first battle. Cooper portrays this comment as an expression of the ties between masculinity and patriotism. Though not always dealing directly with American citizenship, Cooper’s novels clearly maintain connections between American identity, masculinity, and patriotism.

These supposed bonds between the sailor, masculinity, and patriotism are peculiar when compared to the way sailors themselves addressed issues of nationalism. As noted in the last chapter, common sailors, while not immune to nationalist ideologies, were far more concerned with making it home alive than with patriotism. Deserting, switching sides, co-operating with “enemy” vessels and other distinctly non-patriotic and even treasonous behavior was not uncommon on either side of the Atlantic. For many British sailors, the Royal Navy and the crown were seen as bigger threats to their personal liberty than was any foreign-born “tyranny.”

A final example of the way the sailor’s masculinity was used to boost nationalist pride is seen in the 1781 illustration titled “An English Man-of-War Taking a French Privateer.” In it a British sailor is accompanying a young French woman down
what appears to be a dimly lit street. From their expressions and body language, it is clear that they are attracted to one another, and from the title it is clear that Jack has made, or will soon make, a conquest of both her heart and her bed.\textsuperscript{152} The relationship is described as a male conquest, a rhetorical device meant to escalate the conqueror’s masculinity, a common method of reinforcing male dominance in sexual relations. The nationalist connotations of the title, however, make the connection between patriotism and masculinity clear. Still engaged in war against the French and Americans, masculine Britain will conquer and dominate its feminine enemies. This illustration not only highlights Jack’s role as a nationalist icon, but also as a sensual being, an equally prevalent perception of the sailor.

\textbf{Casanova Jack}

For most seamen, the shore presented a chance for relationships with women that, for all but a select few, were impossible at sea. On leave or between voyages, sailors desperately sought sexual and emotional relationships, and they were perfectly willing to exchange cash for sexual favors and companionship. This type of relationship was not always approved of by mainstream society, particularly once the Victorian period started. For one thing, it was seen as “ill use” of women, and even sailors were quick to note that:

Of all the human race, these poor young creatures are the most pitiable; the ill usage and degradation they are forced to submit to, are indescribable; but from habit they become callous, indifferent as to delicacy of speech and behaviour ... that they seem to retain no quality which properly belongs to woman, but the shape and name.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{152} Commander Charles Napier Robinson, \textit{The British Tar in Fact and Fiction} (London: Harper and Brothers, 1909), 172.

\textsuperscript{153} Robinson, \textit{Jack Nastyface}, 89.
Sailors' relationships were portrayed, however, in a very different manner by most landsmen in their attempts to both celebrate and exploit sailors' masculinity. For many landsmen, it was challenging, if not impossible, to reconcile the idealized masculinity of sailors and the seemingly debauched and mercantile nature of their sexual relationships. To compensate for this, landsmen, and some sailors, cast Jack's relationships in a soft, romantic light. Unlike patriotism, the myth of sailors' as romantic lovers was not uniform. Many popular sources continue to portray sailors' relationships as fleeting and shallow, yet even they always maintain a romanticized vision of Jack's masculine appeal to women.

The mariner of literature is nearly always involved in a romance, usually reflecting the tradition of chivalric love. Often these mariners are of the upper classes and they are almost always officers. Their romantic interests are long term and, more frequently than not, chaste and committed in nature. The Water Witch provides two of these relationships, the first being between Captain Ludlow of the Royal Navy and Alida, the niece and charge of a wealthy New Yorker. The relationship, though largely undertaken in secret and against the will of her guardian, is maintained within the bounds of pre-Victorian good taste. The two are not sexually linked, though in love, and exchange somewhat droll love letters to each other as their most frequent method of discourse. When Ludlow suspects that she has run off with a notorious smuggler, he pursues, yet continues to trust in her love and respectability. In the end, he is rewarded with the good news that smuggler was actually her female cousin in drag and that nothing unbecoming had happened. She was still madly in love with him, for although poor, he was brave, lively, loyal, and all of the other things a seaman should be. Her
cousin, the ward of the real smuggler, later refuses marriage to a rich landsman in favor of that of her protector, Master Tiller, because her expected standards of masculinity are so high that only a seaman can live up to them. Their relationship is also chaste, at least until they exchange vows at the end of the novel.

In other novels seamen are less chaste or loyal, yet still very romantically oriented individuals. In *The Adventures of Roderick Random* by Tobias Smollett, the main character has several love affairs, but throughout the novel he is driven by his desire to be with his one true love, Narcissa. She is also in love with him, but circumstances prevent them from being together until a convenient plot device draws everything to a close in the end. Similarly, in Captain Marryatt’s *Frank Mildmay or The Naval Officer*, the main character is torn between two different loves, that of a well-born woman tricked into becoming a traveling actress and the daughter of one of his father’s wealthy friends. The character, though somewhat dissolute and morally questionable, easily attracts both women to him with his robust sailor masculinity and in his own way is loyal to them in memory if not always in deed. The overwhelming theme in these novels, as far as relationships go, is that the mariner, in this case an officer, is both innately desirable to women and, within reasonable boundaries, sexually and emotionally monogamous.

Another common way of presenting Jack as a loyal lover is seen in the many paintings and engravings that show a sailor and his mate parting before a voyage and reuniting afterward. John Simon, for instance, did this in 1737 with “The Sailor’s Farewell” and “The Sailor’s Happy Return,” as did J. Booth in 1744 with “The Sailor’s Farewell” and “The Sailor’s Return.” Other artists who used this motif or a variation of
it include C. Mosely in 1743, R. Pollard in 1785, H. Hudson in 1789, and R. Cooper in 1814.  

The repetition of this theme, though artistically unoriginal, is significant in showing how deep the iconography of a deep and abiding love between a sailor and his mate was implanted in the popular image of the sailor. Not only is the sailor in love, he is loyal and true, as is his mate. Often these illustrations were accompanied by poems that drove the point home even further. R. Pollard’s 1785 “William and Mary” shows a sailor parting from his lover and saying to her:

The topsails shiver in the wind,
The ship she’s bound to sea,
But yet my heart, my soul, my mind,
Are, Mary, moored with thee.  

In the cartoons and songs of the period, the sailor’s love life is seen in a somewhat different light. An emphasis on fidelity is less prevalent, and sailors’ relationships are often seen as being of a temporary and “cruder” nature. The illustration “The Signal for an Engagement,” by J. Fairburn (1813), shows a sailor romancing women “At Home” and “Abroad.” In one frame the sailor is enticing an Englishwoman with a purse full of prize money, while in the other he is using a pocket watch to earn the attentions of a native woman of indiscernible tropical origin. Jack’s fidelity is nonexistent, as is the overly romantic sentiment presented in the “Farewell and Return” motif. Nonetheless, Jack is still presented as an attractive figure, and the ladies’ body postures indicate interest in more than just his material goods.  

Jack’s masculine appeal is on full display in his imposing stature, strong limbs and confident, almost cocky, attitude.

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155 Ibid., 112.  
156 Ibid., 478.
In many illustrations, Jack is shown dancing with women aboard ship, most likely prostitutes. The commercial nature of these relationships is not emphasized, however, so much as Jack's agile dancing and the women's admiration of him.\textsuperscript{157} These portrayals of sailors as romantically "loose" all come from popular sources such as pamphlets, cartoons, and folk songs, while portrayals of sailors as romantically loyal are often from products intended for upper- and middle-class consumption, such as novels, and paintings. The differences in content correspond well to changes in perceptions of sex and relationships between the upper and middle classes.

As Lawrence Stone has argued in \textit{The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800}, the eighteenth century was a period of serious change in conceptions about marriage and family. During this period, the idea of marriage for romantic love became popularized among the elite and the bourgeois, emphasizing a personal connection built on an extended period of courting. Sex and lust were acknowledged to play a role privately, but the public face of love was relatively chaste, perhaps as a clinging influence of the chivalric novel and the continual revivals of Protestant Christian morality. Lust was something that ruined marriages, not an essential ingredient for a happy one. Much of this was the result of the emergence of the nuclear family as the standard social unit, the rise of female literacy and the use of printing technology to produce novels that glamorized the connection between marriage and romantic, chaste love.\textsuperscript{158} It would make sense that during this period sources that were closely associated with the middle and upper classes, such as paintings and novels, would privilege

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 66, 81, 88.
romantic love and ignore or belittle lust. Among the working-class, relationships maintained a more practical nature and were less affected by romanticized notions of love and sexual chastity.

The marital and sexual norms of American and British society do not, however, explain why women are always portrayed as attracted to sailors. While there was no doubt some attractiveness about young sailors, particularly in their well-groomed shore gear, their reputation in literature and illustration is that of a weapon of mass seduction. Rarely are seamen rejected and frequently they are pursued, regardless of familial wishes of the woman, as in The Water-Witch, or the harsh realities of marrying into naval life. The bride of a mariner, be he an officer or a common seaman, faced monetary uncertainty, extended separations, a high likelihood of early widowhood, and the constant dread of not knowing if her husband still lives, still loves her, or, in the case of the common seamen, was still a free man. Nonetheless, most of the authors, balladeers, and artists discussed above celebrated the seaman as a highly desirable sexual partner. In order to understand why men felt the need to equate physical masculinity with desirability, one must again return to the concept of domination.

Returning to Bourdieu's original theme of masculine dominance over women, this particular masculinity can be seen as the construct of symbols of violence and of violent actions. These maintain men's dominance over women by threatening them with physical violence if submission is not complete and total. The web of signs that construct masculinity and femininity are so ingrained within the individual that women frequently become "willing" participants in their own domination. As Bourdieu puts it:

Masculine Domination finds one of its strongest supports in the misrecognition which results from the application to the dominant of categories engendered in the very
relationship of domination and which can lead to the extreme form of *amor fati*, love of the dominant and of his domination, a *libido domantis* (desire for the dominant) which implies renunciation of personal exercise of *libido dominandi* (the desire to dominate). 159

Women become as indoctrinated as men into the idea that they should be dominated that they become attracted to those who would most dominate them, those society has defined as most masculine. This surely accounts for some of the real and perceived attractiveness of sailors.

The accounts of actual sailors discussed in the last chapter do not, however, reveal that they were able to regularly obtain and maintain emotional relationships with women based on pure attraction or love. John Nicol is the most glaring example of how women were not “naturally drawn” to the masculinity of sailors or likely to fall as easily or as deeply in love with sailors as many of the women presented above and in other fictional sources. Nicol fell madly in love with his “wife” aboard the *Lady Julian* and vowed to return to her and his son as soon as possible; she married another man the day after Nicol left port. The male authorship of many of landsmen’s sources may explain why it is that sailors’ masculinity made them so attractive to fictional women. As a corollary to Bourdieu’s comments on the dominated’s desire for the dominant, it also seems reasonable to expect that the dominant come to expect that the dominated will desire them. The masculine worldview is built around the idea that masculinity is domination and that domination will lead to sexual relations with women. To create a masculine ideal that did not attract women would seem absurd as well as threatening to the patriarchal system that demanded that women not just be dominated, but that they learn to like it.

159 Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 80.
Jack the Martyr

Like all great melodramatic figures, Jack the masculine lover and fighter of tyranny also made a great martyr. Though he was often seen as an opponent of tyranny and hierarchies, these were often battles he lost, particularly at the hands of the press gang and violent officers. Portrayals of sailors as victims, albeit masculine victims, were some of the most powerful cultural images of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the surface, this seems to work against the masculine seaman archetype, but a deeper analysis will show that the power of the victimized sailor image depends on Jack's masculinity as much as, if not more than, any of the other portrayals mentioned.

Jack being physically torn from the arms of his wife at the hands of the press gang is nearly as ubiquitous a product of British visual culture as "Farewell and Return" pieces. The illustration titled "A Press Gang" by Thomas Rowlandson (1820) is highly representative of the genre. The gang, a group of cudgel-bearing ruffians, drags a sailor away from his prostrate wife as other women console her. Jack is trying to fight them off, but to no avail. His fate, like that of another sailor in the background, is to be led off to the waiting ships.\textsuperscript{160} In other pieces, the theme remains the same and contains at least one of the following clichés: game but overpowered Jack, the savageness of the gang, the ship looming in the horizon, and a weeping lover being separated from her sailor, for all intents and purposes a widow in waiting.\textsuperscript{161} The sheer number of these press gang scenes indicates a thriving market for gritty portrayals of wrongs performed against sailors. Some popular sources portrayed a wider range of Jack's woes. The pamphlet

\textsuperscript{160} Greco, \textit{Humorous Art}, 30.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 25, 26, 28, 32; Hutchinson, \textit{The Press Gang Afloat and Ashore}, Frontispiece, 80, 116, 306.
titled *The Wooden Wall's* by Ned Ward addressed the violent nature of the Royal Navy. The reliability of Ward’s takes on impressment, discipline, pay, victualling, and naval warfare are still argued by historians today by those who view sailors as victims of oppression, such as Rediker, and Royal Navy apologists, but the existence of his work does indicate something of a larger market for tales of mariners’ woes.\(^{162}\)

In most novels, impressment was not as prominent an issue as harsh treatment by superior officers. Impressment would not have been an issue for most novels’ protagonists since officers and landsmen were not legitimate targets for the gang. Still, it does show up briefly in *The Water-Witch*, probably in response to lingering resentment over the War of 1812, and it plays a somewhat peculiar role in *Roderick Random*. The main character, a gentleman down on his luck, tries to get a position as a surgeon’s mate, but to no avail. Walking down the street, he is accosted by the gang and pressed into service, fortunately aboard a ship in need of a surgeon’s mate. As the protagonist was a non-sailor and a man of some means, this is highly unlikely and is more indicative of the tendency of elite literature to replace “Jack” with a gentleman than of actual practice.

After a few months aboard ship, the main character is placed in stocks on deck and left exposed to harsh sunlight, the dangers of battle and a fierce gale. His offense is that he shamed his superior, the ship’s inept surgeon, by saving a man’s leg when the surgeon swore it needed to be amputated. The surgeon was a crony of the captain, a drunken despot who was soon convinced that Random and another surgeon’s mate were nothing more than mutinous dogs plotting his death. As a surgeon’s mate, Random

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\(^{162}\) For more on Ward, see Rediker, *Devil and the Deep* or Rodger, *The Wooden World.*
would be considered a warrant officer and probably would not have faced such
punishment without some evidence against him. Facts aside, the violent and arbitrary
nature of maritime life proved to be an excellent forge upon which Random can pound
the lubberly weakness out of his frame. Impressment, though brutal, is portrayed as
relatively benign in that it puts Roderick exactly where he wants to be, serving on a ship
as a surgeon's mate.

British theatre was also quite likely to represent impressment in a somewhat
positive light, likely due to censorship policies and dependence on elite patronage. In
Enter the Press Gang, a study of impressment in British literature, Daniel Ennis argues
that these factors led most playwrights to portray impressed sailors as either childishly
accepting of the government’s policies or as rabble in need of the strict discipline of the
Navy, and either way no tears are shed for the impressed man. Ennis cites Frederick
Pilon’s Illumination (1779) and Henry Carey’s Nancy (1739) as examples of the latter
and William Congreve’s Love for Love (1695) and Richard Cumberland’s The Sailor’s
Daughter (1804) as examples of the former. Impressment in all of these is supported as
a necessary institution, and its negative effects on sailors is negated by a combination of
the Jolly Jack portrayal and playing up fears of the “mob,” the masses of urban England.
Government censors would obviously support such a view because the government
benefited most from the massive, cheap, maritime labor pool that impressment
guaranteed. Upper- and middle-class patrons of the theatre also found comfort in such
presentations as they helped negate the social implications of common seamen’s
masculinity by denigrating them as simple fools or ruffians and reinforced their beliefs
in their own superiority.
With the exception of these class issues, all of these sources that deal with impressment do reflect some of the harsh realities of the sailors' world more than most portrayals. As in cases where Jack's life is completely distorted, the reasons why these semi-truthful images are common should be examined, as well as why other physically oppressive practices used on sailors are not more widely publicized. Why these images are popular has a lot to do with the idea of testing the limits of masculinity. The concept of "Jack the victim" plays just as strongly on assumptions about masculinity as any of the other representations of sailors mentioned above. Illustrations of Jack being torn from his wife by the press gang are the clearest examples of this. Jack's masculinity is based on a number of things, but his defiance of physical domination ashore is perhaps the most essential. In these images, his strength and pluck have not left him but the numbers are simply against him. Despite his masculine prowess, he is dominated, emasculated in front of his mate, the individual he can least afford to be lessened in front of for fear of losing her to a more masculine male. The possibility that a man, regardless of individual strength, could be dragged down in the street by the sheer weight of his attackers speaks directly to men's fears that they can never be manly enough, that there is always the chance of being dominated. At the same time, the "gameness" of the sailor allows him to retain some of his masculinity: though battered, it can be reclaimed. There is no shame in falling to superior numbers, as long he does not submit to them.

The British government's role in the drama of impressment also plays a role in the images' popularity. The government, like the press gang, was a force too strong for the individual to fight. In urban Britain of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this was particularly true, with its draconian legal code and the state's increasing role in its
citizens’ daily lives through education, medicine, and other domestic programs. These programs, which Michel Foucault has labeled discipline mechanisms, train the individual to carry out the will of the government. Though government attempts to control its population were nothing new, the invasive nature of these policies strengthened the government’s stranglehold on society. It seemed then, as it does now, that no amount of physical strength, political might, economic prosperity or status could allow the individual to defy the state when push came to shove. The failure of the sailor to defy government policies served as a constant reminder of the emasculating potential of the crown; thus, Jack became a handy icon for those who sought to protest the government’s increasing might.

There were certain acceptable boundaries within which most landsmen’s portrayals of Jack as a victim were allowed to fall, and showing the murderously brutal discipline aboard ship seem to have gone beyond those beyond those limits. In seaman’s accounts, flogging, “starting,” and other forms of physical abuse by officers play a significant role in their descriptions of daily life. Dana’s account of a flogging and the disastrous effect it had on morale is one of the most memorable parts of Two Years, and Jack Nastyface dedicates the entire last chapter of his book to the brutality of naval discipline. In landsmen’s tales of the sea, however, discipline is dealt with in passing, watered down or ignored completely. “A Point of Honour” from George Cruikshank’s Greenwich Hospital Sketches (1825) shows a man strapped down and about to be flogged as another man steps forward to clear the accused and claim the punishment as his own. The accompanying text explains the captain was so touched by this show of courage that he let both men off with a warning. While the illustration
shows a glimpse of the emasculating potential of the cat-o’-nine-tails, it is really a celebration of Jack’s courage and never reaches a violent and emasculating conclusion.\textsuperscript{163}

In \textit{Roderick Random}, the main character is pilloried on the deck and exposed to the elements. While this was a painful and somewhat humiliating punishment, it was nothing compared to being stripped to the waist, tied down and whipped with the cat. Roderick is able to retain his defiant attitude, but for a sailor who has received or witnessed a flogging for something as simple as speaking out, submission became an emasculating reality. On a daily basis, the sailor was forced to accept the orders and thrashings of his superiors docilely or risk a flogging. While impressment could be presented as a one-time event from which sailors, and the audience, could emerge with their masculinity intact, this docile submission to physical domination was far too emasculating to be reconciled with images of Jack as an icon of “toughness” and masculinity. While male readers were interested in seeing ways that masculinity could be challenged, they were not terribly interested in situations where absolute submission was the only practical option. Seeing the pluck of the über-masculine sailor become extinguished would raise far too many questions about the resilience of their own masculinity.

\textbf{Gentleman Jack?}

For the middle and upper classes, the masculinity of sailors caused something of a conundrum. On the one hand, Jack’s physical masculinity was very attractive and was

\textsuperscript{163} Greco, \textit{Humorous Art}, 67.
one of the few things that the upper classes felt that they lacked and the lower classes had. On the other hand, sailors and the rest of the working class were seen as crude, violent, and generally uncivilized. For many, sailors were seen as the epitome of these things, with their peculiar dress, cursing, heavy drinking, and licentious behavior. Take, for instance, the following statement by a middle-class investigator of London’s poor in 1851:

The faces of the sailors were vacant, stupid, and beery. I could not help thinking one man I saw at the Prussian Eagle a perfect Caliban in his way. There was an expression of owlish cunning about his heavy-looking features that, uniting with the drunken leer sitting on his huge mouth, made him look but a very indifferent monster. 164

Once again, the common sailor was seen as not just a member of a lower class but as a beast, emphasizing his supposed lack of culture and refinement, yet dangerous to his master, or at least his master’s sense of superiority, through his simple brute strength. Because of this, a method had to be found in which landsmen were able to co-opt the physical masculinity of seamen while still maintaining a distinct separation between themselves and these “Calibans.”

As noted above, portrayals of sailors varied a great deal depending on the medium he was presented in and the intended audience. Items intended for elite consumption, like novels, and paintings, often showed sailors who reflected elite values, while pamphlets, magazines, and ballads intended for wider consumption often showed Jack as one of the masses, sharing their taste, values and behavioral norms. A deeper look at novels written about mariners, all of whom depended heavily on the connection between sailors and masculinity, shows that the “sailor” not only reflects elite values but also more often than not is a member of the elite.

164 Mayhew, London Labour, 229.
In *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, the main character is a down-on-his-luck member of the gentry who puts to sea as a surgeon’s mate. His interactions are entirely with the officer corps, except when performing his duty, and only one common seaman is ever mentioned by name. When Roderick makes it ashore after a shipwreck, he is jumped by a seaman during a duel with another officer and left “exposed to the rapine of an inhuman crew.” Though Smollett is exploiting the common sailor’s masculinity by relating it to his protagonist, he is explicitly removing the common sailor from the heroic aspects of the narrative. He uses the physical danger and stress of the sailors’ world to create a “tough” masculine hero, as well as the sailors’ connection to and use of physical violence to display dominance, but he does not see any reason for his protagonist to interact with them any more than necessary.

Poe’s *Arthur Gordon Pym* is another example of the removal of Jack from the masculine narrative of the sailor. The protagonist is taken from one position of extreme danger to the next. He is nearly lost at sea in a skiff, run down by a larger vessel, stuck without food or water for days on end in a box between decks and then faced with mutineers, shipwreck, savage islanders, and whatever other maritime hardships Poe could throw at him. All of these themes of danger increase the protagonist’s manly worth in ways associated with sailors. At the same time, the narrator is seen as very distinct from the common sailors. The only sailor with whom he interacts is Peters, whose physique may have identified him as a figure of brute strength and raw masculinity, but as a grotesque figure too. Poe describes his hands as strong, but “so enormously thick and broad as hardly to retain human shape.” His head “was equally

deformed, being of immense size, with an indentation in the crown, (like that on the head of most negroes).”\textsuperscript{166} He is murderous, though allied with the narrator, and willing, almost eagerly, dispatches his shipmates with his bare hands.

The only other sailor given any significant description is the “black cook,” who is the most bloodthirsty of the mutineers. Never given a name, he is only “the black cook,” “a perfect demon,” who gleefully slaughters his shipmates for no apparent reason. In Poe’s eyes, he has no reason nor any need for it, he is black and he is a sailor; he is a naturally savage individual. Peters is also portrayed as racially outside of the norm, being the son of “an Indian woman” and a white fur trader. The way race is used to portray these two individuals as degenerate extends to all sailors in Poe’s imagination. They are strong, but crude and backward. Here the noticeable degree of racial equality seen aboard ship is an indication not of progress but of regression into brutality. Poe’s genteel roots and Southern ties fed his fear that extending equality to non-whites and the lower class would lead to rebellion and slaughter. This is particularly driven by Southern fears of slave rebellions, which led to an increased reliance on racial stereotyping as a justification for slavery and other forms of oppression. These views are further supported by the intellectual climate of the times, with even such books as the 1798 \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica} declaring that, among individuals of African ancestry, “vices, the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race: idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, profanity, debauchery, nastiness. . . . [They] are said to have extinguished the principles of natural law, and to have

\textsuperscript{166} Poe, \textit{Arthur Gordon Pym}, 51.
silenced the reproofs of conscience.” 167 Similar views were also presented by such Enlightenment-era “progressives” as the Scottish philosopher David Hume, the German moral philosopher Immanuel Kant, and American President Thomas Jefferson. 168 Such stereotypes easily transferred themselves to class, making Poe’s imagery of barbaric non-whites slaughtering their officers a condemnation not only of non-whites, but also of the low-class individuals associated with them, specifically sailors.

Sailors are also seen as dangerously and fearfully superstitious; rather than using superstition as a way to maintain a sense of control over their own lives, it controls their lives. Pym, his dog, his companion Augustus, and Peters are able to defeat nine fully armed mutineers by frightening them with ghost stories and Pym dressed as a deceased shipmate. Poe’s sailors are craven beasts whose superstitions allow them to be easily overcome by the intelligence of the white middle class and the harnessed might of Peters and the dog. 169

The work of Poe and Smollett indicates the prevailing strength of the connections between masculinity and the sailor identity; actual sailors could be entirely excluded and replaced with faux sailors who instantly assumed the masculine aura of those they displace simply by going to sea. While it can be argued that the reason these novels replaced ordinary seamen with members of the middle and upper classes is a simple attempt to relate the protagonist to the audience, this reasoning ignores the powerful influence of masculinity and domination as it relates to class identity. The societal and economic hierarchies ashore, which pushed sailors to overdevelop and

168 Ibid., 629, 637, 657.
169 Poe, Arthur Gordon Pym, 78.
publicize their masculine qualities, are reinforced by these tales of middle- and upper-class individuals overcoming the supposed physical dominance of the lower classes.

As Elliot Gorn discusses in *The Manly Art*, many members of the upper and middle classes feared the possibility of physical altercations with the lower classes. Boxing instructors took advantage of these fears by advertising lessons as a way to allow "gentlemen to chastise the 'insolent,' repel the assaults of 'ruffians,' and defend himself from 'blackguards.'" The leisurely nature of middle- and upper-class lifestyles created a perception of physical weakness among the genteel, who were seen to lack the physical and mental toughness that the harsh conditions and physical labor had granted the lower classes, particularly sailors, boxers, and other representatives of masculinity.

What this indicates is a middle- and upper-class fear of being physically dominated by those who were dominated in all other respects. This simply could not be. A novel that celebrated the masculinity of a common sailor, a member of the lower orders, one of the lowest members of the lowest orders in the eyes of many like Johnson, would not just be hard to connect with an elite audience, but it would be downright threatening. The sailors' masculinity, which was intended to compensate for their own domination, made them a threat to the masculinity of the upper classes. Using the tools available to them, such as literacy and publishing, the upper class turned this around.

Just as upper-class individuals became ardent supporters and participants of boxing, like Lord Byron, in order to avoid physical domination by the common people, Poe, Smollett, and others used fictional middle- and upper-class sailors to ease fears that the lower classes were somehow "naturally" physically dominant. These novels, which

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removed the class taint of actual sailors from the masculine imagery of the mariner, effectively portrayed the middle and upper classes as dominant in every possible way, shape, or form, and therefore eased their fears about masculinity.

Conclusion: Jack Runnymede

In his tale of the sea entitled *Jack Runnymede: The Man who Blessed his Stars* that he was a Briton, Douglas Jerold, a writer and co-founder of the then-middle-class, radical, satirical, periodical *Punch*, managed to combine all of the elements discussed above into a character that fits the landsman’s conception of sailors while remaining as far from the realities of the sailors’ world as possible. Jack Runnymede is a landsmen of some means, a British citizen eligible for the vote before the reform act of 1832. After being falsely arrested for political reasons, he is released and takes to the streets to air his grievances over his arrest when he is set upon by the press gang. He gamely attempts to defend himself, both physically and vocally, but to little avail due to the sheer numbers of the gang and the cold, indifferent attitude of the naval officer in charge. He accepts his life at sea, acquires great wealth as a purser, and returns home to his wife a success. Upon his return, he defends impressment, although it was a practice that had robbed him of his freedom. When talking to a politician opposed to the practice, Runnymede responds, “You don’t have my vote — sweep us from the world as a naval power by doing away with impressment! — No, sir, not while I can lift my voice, will I consent to this.”\(^{171}\)

\(^{171}\) Greco, *Humorous Art*, 37.
Runnymede is all of the things that make a seaman masculine in both the popular and elite conception of things: He is a fighter against tyranny, a defender of rights, physically capable of defending himself; he is a lover; he is a victim of impressment that refuses to be dominated; and he is a patriot through and through. At the same time, he is everything but a common sailor, even if his name is Jack. He is a member of the elite classes, and as such is separated from the brutish tars in the minds of his readers. He rises to purser, a position that requires wealth and connections, a position no common seaman, particularly one who begun his career so late, could dream of pursuing. Finally, he continues to vocally support impressment, even after falling victim to it, and after the initial impressment, he never makes a legitimate attempt to free himself. The accounts of Nicols, Nastyface, and Leech, as well as the records of the Royal Navy, show a remarkably less dogmatic support of impressment as well as a proclivity toward desertion and other unpatriotic acts. The tale of Jack Runnymede still resonates with landsmen, however, who saw in it the image of Jack that they wanted to see and therefore the one that they promoted.

By removing actual sailors from the tales of sailors they told, landsmen were able to co-opt the powerful masculinity symbolized by sailors. Originally, sailors crafted this masculinity to compensate for the vicious physical, economic, and social domination they faced at the hands of government and elites ashore, and the ship’s officers at sea. This masculine resistance was recognized by landsmen and celebrated in their cultural works, yet by altering the image of seamen to better fit the desires of those ashore, landsmen eventually removed the actual seaman from the conception of seaman’s masculinity. While the seaman’s masculinity was appropriated, the seaman
himself was denigrated as nothing more than a simple, jolly brute. In essence, the seaman lost control of his own image, and, in the hands of landsmen, it was stripped of its original context and exploited in whatever manner landsmen decided it should be. Ironically, it was used to claim that the masculinity of elite landsmen was more than the equal that of the sailor, who was portrayed as little better than a hulking savage with the mind of an infant. As shall be seen in the next chapter, this would prove quite detrimental to Jack in his dealings with individuals ashore, as would Jack's tendency to care more about maintaining his masculinity than improving his lot in life.
A Failure of Masculinity

Now gather round you sailor boys, and listen to my plea, and
When you've heard my tale you'll pity me
For I was a real damned fool in the port of Liverpool
The first time that I came home from the sea
We paid off at the home from the port of Sierra Leone and
Four pounds ten a month that was my pay
With a pocket full of tin I was very soon taken in by a
Girl with the name of Maggie May

Oh well I do remember when I first met Maggie May
She was cruising up and down old Canning Place
She'd a figure so divine, like a frigate of the line
So me being a sailor, I gave chase
Next morning when I awoke I was flat and stoney broke
No jacket, trousers, waistcoat I could find
—Maggie Mae, *Traditional Sea Chantey*

By emphasizing their masculine characteristics, seamen were able to force landsmen to acknowledge them as equals or even superiors in terms of physical strength and "toughness." Landsmen no sooner recognized the power of the imagery of seamen’s masculinity before they found ways to subvert that imagery. Landsmen, particularly among the elite, used their vast cultural resources to reimagine the seaman, removing the elements that they found distasteful, namely the idea of an individual of lower class as their masculine superior, and claimed the façade of sailor masculinity as their own. Taken at face value, this cultural process had little effect on the sailors’ actual existence. Edgar Allan Poe pretending that he, through his character Arthur Pym, was as tough and capable as any seaman left no obvious impression on the common seaman’s daily life. Poe’s rambling tales of woe did not have a direct affect on the
sailor’s wages, his victuals, his chances of surviving a voyage, or his chances of being impressed, but this does not mean that the conceptions of sailors that drove and were driven by cultural products such as *Arthur Pym* did not affect seamen.

The manner in which landsmen perceived and portrayed seamen was essential in shaping public opinion, which in turn shaped laws whose impact on sailors was anything but negligible. At the same time, the steps sailors took to make themselves more masculine wound up being as detrimental to sailors as any laws passed by land-based society. In the end, Jack’s masculinity, rather than freeing him from domination, became yet another force used to control Jack, forcing him even further down the social and economic hierarchies of the time.

To examine all of the ways that conceptions of sailors’ masculinity impacted their lives would be far too expansive in scope to fit into a single chapter. In general, conceptions of gender are so ingrained in society that they are an essential part of any individual’s conceptions of their identity. Every action, aboard ship or ashore, could contain some gendered significance. To cover all of the ways, even in the shallowest fashion, that gender affected the everyday lives of sailors would be nearly impossible. Instead, an in-depth examination of three subjects will be presented, one exploring how sailors’ actions to escalate their masculinity affected their lives, one showing how landsmen’s perceptions of that masculinity also left a tangible impact, and a final section examining the way conceptions of masculinity affected one particular group of sailors.

As discussed in the first chapter, the use of alcohol and carefree spending habits were two ways sailors expressed their masculinity ashore. Sailors’ use of alcohol combined physical endurance, fraternity and risky behavior in a manner that many
young men have historically considered masculine. Sailors’ spending habits ashore also tied into their masculinity because money was so essential a part of the hierarchal system that dominated sailors. By freely discarding money, sailors showed a blatant disregard for the values of the land-based society that sought to dominate him economically; the sailor was not just discarding money, he was attempting to discard his ties to the society that put so much significance on wealth. The combination of these two masculine attributes would lead to a number of personal, economic, and health problems for sailors and those who were closest to them.

Landsmen’s treatment of sailors was strongly affected by the ways in which they viewed sailors’ masculinity. An examination of landsmen’s actions, in support of or in defiance of government policies that singled out sailors, proves that landsmen’s interpretations of sailors’ masculinity did indeed have a tangible effect on the lives of the latter. Resistance to the impressment of sailors in port cities and coastal areas correlated with the existence of demographic bases that were most likely to associate sailors’ masculinity with defiance of the government and the established social hierarchy. Landsmen whose social and economic position were dependent on maintaining the status quo, however, were more likely to support impressment in both their cultural products, such as novels and plays, and through legislation. Other forms of legislation pertaining to sailors also corresponded with standard portrayals of sailors as patriots, childlike buffoons, or menacing brutes.

Finally, this chapter will explore how African-American seamen were affected by their attempts to accentuate their masculinity and landsmen’s views of this masculinity. As seen in Chapter Two, racial, social, or other differences among sailors
colored their perceptions of masculinity. Similarly, these differences also affected the way in which sailors' lives were affected by their masculinity, as they now had to deal with the full force of society's prejudices, which were often restrained on ship. Faced with even more dominance ashore than the typical landsmen, African-American seamen faced a very different set of challenges ashore and were relatively more successful at evading dominance through the sea than white sailors. Landsmen's conceptions of African-American sailors granted them freedoms of movement and economic opportunities largely unavailable to the average free black person and practically unattainable to slaves. This freedom was a direct challenge to the white ruling class of the Southern United States and its racial arguments for slavery. The independent masculinity of free black sailors made them a target of oppressive strategies that attempted to eradicate them from Southern ports through restrictive legislation and quasi-legal kidnapping.

**Rum, Silver, and Sailors’ Women**

From a biological, historical, and legal standpoint, alcohol is a very curious drug whose biological relationship with man is full of contradictions. While basically a poison, it is also one of only two liquids human bodies are able to digest in large quantities, the other being water. Alcohol also has had a number of ritualistic, cultural, and even medicinal uses, both in the modern day and throughout the history of civilization. There are traces of brewing as far back as ancient Mesopotamia, for instance, and the Code of Hammurabi even dealt explicitly with the production of alcohol. While rarely banned completely, with the notable of exception of Islamic
culture, alcohol abuse and the resulting costs in terms of health, broken relationships, and disturbances to the public peace are an inherent part of its consumption. As an addictive substance that impairs judgment, alcohol abuse creates a dependency that leaves its victims surly and unable to function completely when sober and impaired and unable to function fully when drunk.

Sailors, though no doubt ignorant of alcohol’s history, were well versed in its uses and effects. In Royal Navy vessels during the Napoleonic wars, a gallon of beer a day was the standard issue, substituted by a half-pint of rum when the beer ran out, the equivalent of approximately ten standard 12-ounce cans of beer or eight shots of rum, respectively.\footnote{Masefield, \textit{Sea Life in Nelson's Time}, 101.} This ration had three important applications: It provided calories, it covered the putrid taste of the water, and it kept the crew happy and mildly inebriated throughout the workday. The daily consumption of this amount of liquor would today be considered alcoholism, but for the sailor it was their daily \textit{ration}. Real drinking, the type of drinking that was done on shore or during periods of celebration, involved much more alcohol, often taken in week- or monthlong binges. Heavy, extended use of alcohol has been linked to decreased mental capacity, liver damage, ulcers and the weakening of the immune system, all of which would have been common among sailors due to their high intake.\footnote{Erich Goode, \textit{Drugs in American Society: Second Edition} (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 58-67.} This was certain to have left some traces in seamen’s health, particularly combined with dehydration, poor nutrition, exhaustion, frequent exposure to disease, and other health problems that they faced.

Aside from their health, sailors’ lives were affected in other ways by chronic alcoholism, particularly aboard ship. While alcohol was rationed, there were always
opportunities for obtaining more drink. Rations could be saved up for a blowout, supplies smuggled from shore, extra rations bought from the occasional teetotaler. At sea, this sort of drunkenness could lead to disaster if left unchecked, and officers were quick to punish offenders. Samuel Leech describes one such incident aboard the HMS Macedonian when “A poor fellow had fallen into the very sailor-like offence of getting drunk. For this the Captain sentenced him to the punishment of four dozen lashes.”174 Forty-eight lashes were enough to leave a man broken and bloody, beaten in spirit as well as in the flesh.

This was not a peculiar event as drunkenness was one of the most common of naval crimes and flogging one of the most common punishments. As reported in an 1841 Seaman’s Friend newsletter published in Honolulu, a “Seaman writing from aboard the HMS Carrysfort,” claimed that, “19 case [sic] out of twenty of all the punishments I have seen during a period of 18 years in the Navy, may be attributed to Drink.” Drunkenness, though often sought as a cure for the harsh life of the sailor, was more likely than not to add to the harshness of life at sea, through its detriments to basic health as well as by increasing the likelihood of punishment.

When combined with a proclivity toward squandering money, drinking was sure to keep the sailor impoverished. Left to their own devices, many sailors were fully capable of blowing a year’s wages in a few weeks ashore, leaving them poor, homeless and back at the docks looking for another vessel to ship out on. Upon deserting the Royal Navy, Samuel Leech spent in two weeks all of the money he had managed to save

174 Leech, A Voice, 24.
and was soon looking for work. Often other sailors encouraged such behavior through peer pressure, turning self-destructive behavior into a bonding ritual, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Henry Mercier recalled that his shipmate Bill Garnet often found himself drinking and carousing in order to maintain his standing with his mates, even when his intentions were otherwise. Although he intended to remain ashore and visit “down East,” he first decided to “have a little bit of a spree in Boston with some of my topmates before I started.” This caused him to lose all of his money, leaving him no option except to sign up for another three-year hitch. In a yarn that Mercier remembered hearing aboard the Constitution, Garnet recalled having done the exact same thing years before, finding himself broke and adrift in Europe soon after the conclusion of a cruise.

Often the sailor had considerable help spending his money. Not only was spending and drinking encouraged by other sailors, but landlords, landladies, prostitutes, alehouse owners, and others were also fond of helping sailors lighten the heavy burden of a full purse. Leech recalled that after the successful capture of his ship, the HMS Macedonian, the American crew of the Chesapeake was treated especially well, not because of their role in a great nationalist victory, but rather their incoming prize money. “But for that — THE PRIZE MONEY,” reported Leech, “poor Jack’s credit and favor would, as usual, have been below par.”

175 Ibid., 108.
176 Mercier, Man-of-War, 5.
177 Ibid., 40.
178 Leech, A Voice, 105.
While landsmen in general were eager to empty Jack’s pockets, landlords and prostitutes were particularly practiced in fleecing sailors. Mercier’s telling of his 1839 voyage aboard the Constitution begins with his landlord informing him that “my money was all gone! — Showing me at the same time a small bill for twenty or twenty-five dollars, which he said I was indebted to him.” The landlord and another man who worked as a gofer for sailors at the boarding house promptly sent Mercier to the docks in search of work, making sure that they each got their chunk of the signing bonus. 179 This was not an uncommon practice. Around the turn of the eighteenth century, Ned Ward reported in The London Spy that he had encountered a landlady in the Wapping district of London who referred to her sailor tenants as her sons, even as she ran up their bills and as her daughter, the sailor’s “sister Betty” exchanged sexual favors for cash “presents.” 180 The landlady would welcome one “son” with open arms as he returned from sea flush with cash and turn him out of the house as soon as the cash was gone, maintaining a rotating clientele of her maritime “children.”

As the activities of the landlady’s daughter hint, the prostitutes with whom sailors frequently set up temporary households were as well versed in the art of taking Jack’s wages as any landlord. In the fourth volume of Henry Mayhew’s London Labour and the London Poor, Bracebridge Hemyng, one of Mayhew’s contributors, interviewed a German prostitute working in England. She was with an English sailor in a dancehall and explained her profession like so:

I am here to-night in this house of dancing with a sailor English, and I have known him two week. .... I knew him before, one years ago and a half. He always lives with me

179 Mercier, Man-of-War, xxi.
when he come on shore. He is nice man and give me all his money when he land always. I take all his money while he with me, and not spend it quick as some of your English women do... Suppose he have twenty-four pound when he leave his ship, and he stay six week on land, he will spend with me fifteen or twenty, and he will give me what left when he leave me... I know very many sailors--six, eight, ten, oh! more than that. They are my husbands. I am not married, of course not, but they think me their wife while they are on shore. I do not care much for any of them; I have a lover of my own, he is waiter in a lodging and coffee house. 181

Sailors established these relationships in order to fulfill their need for physical and emotional companionship, as well as to fulfill their own image of masculinity that required the subservience of women according to the dominant patriarchal order of the time. The result of this was that these relationships became a substantial drain on their financial resources, keeping large pools of poor, unemployed sailors available and driving down wages.

Sailors were also a target for less-honest land’s folk, who were willing to take sailors’ wages from them with guile or violence. John Binny, another of Mayhew’s contributors, insinuated that many of the prostitutes who catered to sailors were more properly thieves than prostitutes. The better class of these were only occasionally thieves, who “do not generally steal money or watches when they are well paid, and but few steal the sailor’s clothes,” while others would ally with a male accomplice or “fancy man” and set out to rob sailors by force. Binny reports the standard modus operandi of these women:

They pick up a sailor, take him into some dark by-street as if for the purpose of prostitution, get all the money they can from him, and seldom allow carnal connexion[sic]. If possible, so soon as they have effected their purpose, they run away; this is termed ‘bilking.’ 182

Jacob Nagle also provides several examples of the crimes which landsmen committed against sailors, depending on sailors’ drunkenness and carelessness with

182 Ibid., 365.
money. On two occasions, Nagle’s shipmates met women while drinking, who invited
them to their homes, plied them with more drink and robbed them while they slept.
Either Nagle’s chose especially gullible companions or sailors were commonly preyed
upon in such a manner. In another instance, a landlord attempted to defraud Nagle and
was only thwarted through a legal battle brought on by Nagle. In the final instance,
Nagle became involved in a real estate scheme in which a man who had an unpaid lease
on a cottage rented it to Nagle and stole his advance payment. In each case, Nagle
managed to regain some of the lost funds, but for a sailor he was peculiarly careful with
money, and, being the son of a sheriff, he was more versed in the law than the typical
sailor.183 From his accounts, it becomes clear that the sailor was seen as an easy target
of theft, and from Ward and Mayhew’s reports as well as Mercier’s writing, it is easy to
see why. Sailors’ drinking and willingness to trust others with money are in a large part
responsible for the rapid loss of funds that often forced them back to sea.

The effects of sailors’ binge alcoholism were still felt ashore, even when sailors
returned to sea and forced minimum of sobriety. Women who married sailors often
married into the sailor’s in-port lifestyle, and that often meant exposure to heavy
drinking. Hemyng recorded the case of a woman named China Emma, the daughter of a
drunk, the widow of a sailor, and a suicidal alcoholic. Exacerbating the familiar pattern
in which the children of alcoholics are prone to follow in their parents’ footsteps, was
Emma’s marriage to a sailor. His financial support, as well as her increased exposure to
drinking sprees, helped push Emma further down her father’s drunken path.

183 Dann, Nagle Journal, 72, 154, 248, 262.
When her husband died, she, like many other women widowed or left by sailor husbands, turned to prostitution/concubinage. She became attached to a “Chinaman called Appoo,” who regularly sent her money from abroad as well as supported her when ashore and occasionally attempted to sober her up through various means. The combination of alcoholism and the hard life that many sailors’ women lived eventually wore Emma down. At the time of Hemyng’s meeting with her, she had attempted suicide three times. She was unsuccessful because, in her own words, “I’ve no luck; I never had since I was a child.”  

Given her lifestyle and Hemyng’s assumption that she was diseased, the likelihood of her luck changing in a few years was rather good: She would soon be dead. While its unlikely that the woman’s life would have been a happy or sober one had she never married a sailor, her association with sailors and their alcoholic binges only served to exacerbate her problems.

According to a sociological study of New York prostitutes performed by Dr. William Sanger in 1858, the fate of women married to sailors was often similar to that of China Emma. Of 490 married prostitutes interviewed by Sanger (from a sample of two thousand, married or single), 39 became prostitutes because their husband went to sea. This number does not include the number whose husbands were sailors and had left them, had died at sea, had submitted their wives to “ill-usage” or were simply unable or unwilling to support their wives or children. One woman who Sanger interviewed revealed that she had married a sailor at seventeen with whom she had three children. “We lived very comfortably,” the woman recalled, “till my last child was born, and then

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he began to drink very hard, and did not support me, and I have not heard any thing about him for six months.” Unable to support herself and her children on the wages of a washer-woman, she turned to prostitution as her only option. This option was often a fatal one. Sanger calculated the average lifespan of the lower classes of prostitutes to be approximately four years, a figure that historian David Cordingly has corroborated through other sources.  

Sailors’ relationships with women, as shown above and in the first chapter, were often of a commercial nature. Though these relationships were intended to increase a sailor’s sense of masculinity through the most basic of patriarchal structures, in the long run these relationships were often left them feeling both used and emasculated. Many women who associated with sailors, such as the German prostitute interviewed by Hemyng or the Wapping landlady described by Ward, accepted this and were keen to exploit the free-spending ways of sailors. For many women who were accustomed to dealing with sailors, the idea of remaining loyal to one was simply impractical. There was no guarantee of when, or even if, a sailor might return due to death, impressment, or simple wanderlust. Furthermore, a permanent relationship with a sailor would force her to be dependent on a largely unstable source of supplemental income, whereas cohabiting with a succession of sailors assured a steady cash flow. For some sailors, whose conceptions of masculinity included their ability to attract women and maintain proprietorship of “their” women, this was a hard concept to accept and often led to heartbreak and financial loss.

186 Ibid., 508-509.
187 Ibid., 484-488; Cordingly, Women Sailors, 21.
Richard Henry Dana recalled that his ship’s carpenter was dejected at not hearing from his new wife after more than a year at sea. Attempting to console him in typical sailor fashion, the ship’s sailmaker informed him that he “was a bloody fool to give up his grub for any woman’s daughter.” Sails spoke from experience, having been married once before after being paid off from a four-year voyage. He rented out several rooms and furnished them, leaving his wife to reside in relative comfort with the remainder of his wages and receiving half-pay from his next voyage. He returned to find her “off like Bob’s horse, with nobody to pay the reckoning,’ furniture gone, flag-bottomed chairs and all — and with it his ‘long togs,’ the half-pay, his beaver hat, and his white linen hats.”188

John Nicol, while sailing to Australia aboard the convict transport *Lady Julian*, also learned the hard way that his masculine sailor charm was not as desirable to women as he thought. Nicol, then 34 years old, fell in love with Sarah Whitelam, a 17-year-old convicted thief, soon after she was placed aboard the ship. Two years and one child later, they parted in Australia. Nicol unsuccessfully spent the next several years trying to make his way back there; Whitelam married a fellow convict the day after the *Lady Julian* sailed out of Sydney Harbor. She saw her relationship with Nicol as a temporary one, which is what she expected from a sailor. His vision of their relationship was far different, though as a sailor he should have better understood how unlikely that was.189 Sailors’ temporary relationships, meant to increase their sense of masculinity through a façade of traditional patriarchy, eventually led to one of the most emasculating possibilities within the traditional patriarchal viewpoint, cuckoldry, the loss of the ability

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188 Dana, *Two Years*, 336.
189 Nicol, *John Nicol*, 125-144.
to control women’s reproduction to another man. No doubt there were many other
sailors whose “wives” unfaithfulness or mercantile nature left them feeling as castrated
as Nicol, Sails and Chips.

Sailors lack of monetary restraint and their tendencies toward alcoholism were
initially intended to increase their masculinity by privileging physical “toughness” over
economic interests. This was intended as a measure to deny their dominance at the
hands of landsmen by constructing a social hierarchy that favored their physical-oriented
masculinity over wealth and social standing. While marginally successful in obtaining
for themselves a reputation for toughness, the tangible benefits of this strategy never
materialized. Instead, sailors’ behavior endangered their health and left them unable to
accumulate capital, keeping them at the bottom of a social order that increasingly
favored wealth over any other measure of manhood. Try as they might to reorder the
social scale, the sailor, once stripped of his funds, was rendered nearly impotent in this
system and at the complete mercy of the maritime labor market.

Impressment and the Law

More than any other practice, impressment illustrates how landsmen’s
conceptions of sailors’ masculinity affected seamen on a regular basis. For British
merchant sailors between 1750 and the outlawing of impressment in 1833, the press
gang was a near-constant threat. During war or peace, the Royal Navy could pull British
seamen off the street or a ship and force them into the navy for an indefinite period at a
pittance of a wage. Even for sailors already aboard Royal Navy ships, impressment had
a negative impact their lives. Fear of desertion or mutiny by impressed men kept
discipline rigid throughout the navy during the frequent periods of warfare, when the
numbers of impressed sailors could easily surpass the number of true volunteers. Even
American sailors had reasons to fear the draft. Before the Revolutionary War they, as
British subjects, were considered fair game for the press. Even after the war, many
American sailors continued to be impressed by the British at sea or in British ports, an
illegal practice that eventually sparked the War of 1812.

Many landsmen offered tacit support of the practice of impressment, even though
by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries conceptions of personal rights
among the British were highly developed as a result of the Enlightenment and the
peculiarities of British history. Movements based on these ideas brought about the
abolition of slavery, as well as successful attempts to increase the power of Parliament
and weaken the monarchy, all of which were ideologically based on the idea of the
natural rights of man, but practically speaking, they were also based on complex
changes in economics and the nature of power in Britain. Similarly, nothing was done
to end the practice of impressment until naval commanders began to complain of the
poor quality of recruits the press gangs were procuring for them and merchants began to
complain about the loss of profits arising from the practice.190

This was possible among the upper classes partly because of presentations of
sailors as mindless brutes, which reinforced existing stereotypes and offered a way to
reconcile support of impressment and Enlightenment-influenced beliefs in the rights of
the free-born Englishman. For these elite individuals, who by definition retained much
of England and America’s social, economic, and cultural power, sailors’ attempts to

190 Hutchinson, The Press Gang, 311.
assert their own masculinity was an act of defiance that needed to be stamped out. Impressment, with its emasculating relentlessness, used physical violence, the cornerstone of the sailors' masculinity, to return him to a position of absolute submission to the social order, restoring things to their rightful place and keeping the navy manned to boot.

Among the disenfranchised of British society, those who were most likely to sympathize with sailors and consume cultural products that vilified impressment such as Rowlandson's illustration "A Press Gang," action was often taken in opposition to the practice. In 1747, a crowd of more than a thousand individuals, which began as a smaller mob of 300 seamen, seized a number of officers from the HMS Lark and took control of the piers to protest the impressment of several Bostonians. The crowd was composed largely of laborers, who, like seamen, were faced with social, economic, and legal dominance by the government and the wealthy elites. Other notable mob actions, often involving female relatives and lovers of sailors, also fought off the press and freed sailors in Whitby in 1793 and Chester in 1803. In some areas that were known for their hostility to the government, such as the coastal areas in Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, the press gang was completely unable to pursue sailors because of local resistance. The Orkney Isles and the Cornish coast were particularly dangerous for the press gang. As William Hutchinson put it, "this remote part of the kingdom was forbidden ground whereon no gangsman's life was worth a moment's purchase." 191 In these areas, local sailors' personal connections were an important contributor to resistance, as was a

191 Ibid., 157
general dislike of governmental policies that disenfranchised many within British society.\textsuperscript{192}

Sailors avoiding the press received other methods of support from landsmen, though often for a fee. Networks of thieves, forgers, and crooked clerks met a vigorous demand for false protections and after the Revolutionary War, false proofs of American citizenship that in theory would protect sailors from the gang. Other landsmen aided in the hiding of seamen from the gang, particularly during “hot presses” when the gang was most active. This required not just the explicit co-operation of individuals on whose property sailors hid, but also the tacit approval of communities who refused to betray the hiding places. On one occasion in 1740, a hot press was unable to find a single sailor in the whole of London, though when the gang was called off sixteen thousand sailors were claimed to have magically reappeared in the city. This is particularly surprising considering the bounty that snitches were paid for captured seamen.\textsuperscript{193}

Perhaps more than any other practice, impressment shows how seamen’s lives were impacted by landsmen’s portrayals of him, which in turn depended on their own place in the social scale. For the upper and middle classes, seamen’s masculinity was seen as a threat to the social order. Culturally, the elites followed a two-pronged attack on sailors, as seen in the previous chapter, attacking him as a brute while simultaneously co-opting his masculinity. Impressment provided a more tangible solution to the threat of seamen’s superior physical masculinity by yanking them off of the street and placing them in the custody of the Royal Navy, protecting the nation at a minimum cost. These classes tended to present sailors as crude, childlike and patriotic — in other words,

\textsuperscript{193} Hutchinson, \textit{The Press Gang}, 68, 156.
someone who would benefit from impressment, making this violation of English liberty palatable and allowing the elites to justify their support of the gang. The childlike sailor needed the discipline of the navy, his taint needed to be removed from society, and since he loved his country, he really should not mind being sent to sea. For those in the lower echelons of society, impressment was seen as yet another tool used to dominate all within the working class, not just sailors. Impressment was portrayed as an evil and heinous practice and was resisted by these non-sailors through violence and trickery.

Impressment was not the only government practice that specifically targeted seamen and which was influenced by cultural expectations. Admiralty law has long had a reputation for its strictness, but it can be argued the nature of life at sea and the importance of discipline as a safety measure factor heavily into why these laws were so harsh. Laws regulating seaman’s actions in port, however, are often equally harsh and they lack the pretext of being necessary for safety that apologists for admiralty law often fall back on. In “Jack Tar in the Streets,” Jesse Lemisch summarizes a number of these laws from the colonial period. There were laws from Virginia, South Carolina, and New York that allowed for the whipping of disobedient seamen, laws that banned seamen from traveling on land without notices of discharge from their last job, and one law, hauntingly similar to laws regarding slavery, that empowered “‘every free white person’ to catch runaway seamen.” In 1840s Hawai‘i a curfew was in place for seamen that stated, “At half past seven o’clock in the evening a gun shall be fired from the port,

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when all boats and seamen shall return to their ships; the whole must return . . . (at 8 o’clock) all seamen (remaining on shore) will be seized.”

These laws reflect societies whose elites considered sailors to be dangerous to the social order. Their masculinity and their frequent challenges to the dominant definitions of masculinity within society, based on patriarchy, wealth, and social class, were correctly interpreted as attempts to escape from the emasculating dominance of government and the elites. While these laws could be defended as necessary because sailors’ unruly behavior was harmful to themselves and others, the nature of the laws argues against this explanation. The laws regulate sailors, not their actions. These particular laws do not restrict the sale of alcohol, regulate the hours of taverns or in other ways regulate behavior; they single out sailors as a class and rob them of rights landsmen took for granted. These laws are about increasing society’s domination of sailors and emasculating them, returning them to their “proper” place within the social order. As Lemisch argues, these laws were the logical legal result of the paternalistic attitude of landmen that sailors’ were dangerous, yet childlike and in need of strict guidance. This paternalism was yet another way to dominate sailors, to firmly return them to the subservient position of slaves, women, and children that they attempted to break out of with their shows of masculinity.

African-American Sailors

African-American sailors ashore often faced particularly harsh regulations that lacked even the façade of paternalistic concern and simply buried them under a
mountain of hate and fear. As noted in the first chapter, African-American seamen found
the masculinity of their profession to be especially appealing. The sea offered them fair
wages, a degree of equality at sea that was unattainable on land, and an atmosphere that
rewarded rather than punished displays of masculine prowess and expressions of
independence, at least when outside of the view of officers. For the white elite of the
antebellum South, this was a dangerous combination. Fear of slave rebellions sparked
by the liberation of Haiti were ever present in the minds of whites living in the
slaveholding South, manifesting itself in cultural products like Poe’s *Arthur Pym* and
legal restrictions on free blacks. In the words of Jeffery Bolster, they were expected to
remain “submissive and dependent — essentially ‘slaves without masters.’” Free black
sailors simply did not fit anywhere into this picture; with their customary expectations of
equality and masculine demeanor, they were a visible and legitimate threat to the
dominant racial ideologies of white Southerners.

As fears of slave rebellions increased in during the middle of the nineteenth
century, white lawmakers in the South placed a variety of restrictions on the movements
of black sailors. After an 1829 incendiary abolitionist pamphlet titled *Appeal to the
Colored Citizens of the World* was distributed in Georgia by Northern free black sailors,
the state passed a number of restrictive laws that forbade contact between free black
sailors and slaves and threatened any African-American sailor with arrest should they
leave their vessel in port. Soon Alabama, South Carolina, and the Gulf states followed
suit.

Black sailors also faced unofficial means of coercion meant to keep them in
check, such as governmentally aided and endorsed kidnapping and questionable arrests.

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Bolster estimates that at least 10,000 black seamen were arrested and jailed in the Southern United States during the Antebellum period for the simple crime of being black and free. Ship captains often took advantage of these laws by forcing black sailors to sign new contracts after one-half of a round-trip voyage to the South. The new contract would force the sailors to work for substantially lower wages — or risk being sent ashore. Still, many African-American sailors continued to accept Southern voyages simply because that was where the work was.

African-American sailors were able to use the masculine identity of their profession to resist a certain degree of domination within society. Economically, they were better off than many other free slaves and they were able to translate the masculinity of the sailor's profession into a begrudging respect ashore that was denied most free blacks. Sometimes this has concrete benefits, as seen in the freedom many sailors had to travel and to simply live without the need to submit to the dominant white hierarchy. Recognition of this by Southern whites, unfortunately, led to efforts to restrict the rights of free black sailors and to step up the domination of these individuals to prevent them from inspiring other free blacks and slave to stand up to the dominance of the existing social order. Free black sailors' masculinity was a direct threat to this order, and the emasculation of the free black sailor through regulations, jailing, kidnapping, and enslavement became standard procedures. Even without this antebellum backlash, free black sailors' use of the seaman's reputation for masculinity to resist domination was only marginally successful at best. Even though they were able to achieve a higher level of equality than many other free blacks, they were still only allowed to reach as
high as the social and economic standing of the white sailor, who was hardly free from
social, legal, and economic domination.

**Conclusion: Sailors Never Read Connell**

Sailors, like many other males of low status, felt that by increasing their
masculinity they would better their place in the world, essentially negating the effects of
their domination by the elites of Britain and America. This was based on the long-standing ties between masculinity and the ability to dominate others and to avoid domination. To be dominated meant to lose one’s masculinity, and therefore it made sense to the sailors that to become more masculine would move one higher up the social and cultural scale, effectively ending their domination. This approach was destined to fail for three simple reasons: the failure of sailors to recognize the constructed nature of gender, the inability to differentiate between a signifier, masculinity, and a signified, domination, and the strictly inter-personal utility of the physical violence upon which their masculinity was based.

Sailors were not the only ones who failed to fully understand the complex relationship between masculinity and domination. This is, of course, the whole point of the patriarchal system according to Bourdieu: that as long as people equated the two in their minds, those seen as masculine, really all males, would be seen as dominant by those who lacked masculinity, particularly women. In reality, their masculinity was simply the imagery of power, the appearance of domination, and no amount of simulated masculinity could ever cover up an individual’s dominated status in society. Regardless of how many supposedly masculine traits a man had, his status within society would
only change if he managed to use them to actually avoid domination or to dominate others. Otherwise his masculinity was little more than an illusion, a hodgepodge façade that had little effect on his life except the cost needed to maintain it, and such was the case for most sailors.

There are several ways in which increasing one’s masculinity could lead to a change in one’s societal status. Take, for instance, some of the traits sailors adopted as part of their physical masculinity, particularly strength, the capability for violence, and toughness. By acquiring these traits, a sailor could indeed dominate other individuals or defend himself from domination based purely on interpersonal violence. Similarly, if a sailor was to increase his perceived masculinity by adopting behaviors that hinted at physical strength and toughness rather than actually developing these qualities, he may be able to bluff his way through similar situations. On the surface, it would seem that by assuming a masculine persona, sailors could hope to end their domination at the hands of their officers and other elites.

What sailors failed to recognize, however, was that there were many different types of masculinity, each relating to a different type of domination, each relating to a different type of power. This is not to say they did not understand different types of power or the types of domination associated with each. Their experiences at sea and on land would have presented them with a wealth of knowledge on the various forms of power that had been used to dominate them, from their father’s beatings, their mother’s chastisements, their employer’s exploitation of laws, their officers’ commands, and the blood-soaked cat in the hands of a boatswain’s mate. The variety of ways an individual could be dominated was something sailors knew all too well. What sailors failed to
understand was that each type of power, each method of domination, corresponded to a different type of masculinity. Economic domination created a masculinity based on wealth, social domination created a masculinity based on status, and physical domination created a masculinity based on physical violence.

Furthermore, they failed to realize that some types of domination, and the masculinities associated with them, were only useful on an interpersonal level, while others were able to operate on a societal level. Physical domination, for instance, was only capable of being used for a short period of time by an individual or small group on another individual or small group over a very limited range. Economic domination on the other hand was able to affect a large number of people over a long period of time and across great distances. In most societies, multiple types of domination could be combined into a powerful system of domination, such as the one used by society against the sailors.

In the face of this sort of system, an individual or group whose only weapon was physical violence would stand little or no chance. Since sailors did not understand the constructed nature of masculinity, they felt assured that their masculinity, being the one true masculinity, would aid them in their individual efforts to overcome their domination. They were wrong. In essence, sailors’ emphasis on a personal, physical masculinity hampered the creation of a group political consciousness in correlation with their cultural sense of community. Such a consciousness would require sailors to organize in such a way that the desire to enhance their personal masculinity would need to be put aside in order to achieve shared goals, something that would only happen on the rarest of occasions.
Sailors’ physical masculinity demanded that they act as individuals and in their individual interests, not as a group for the interest of the group. To successfully combat their domination as a group, sailors would need to embrace a new masculinity, one better suited to organizing and acting on a larger scale, to fighting wide-spread economic and social domination rather than just individual physical domination. For sailors the necessary change in conceptions of gender would not only be culturally unacceptable, it would also remove the psychological pressure valve that allowed them to deal with their constant economic and social domination. As long as sailors maintained physical masculinity as a central element of their community, they would be unable to improve their communal status, but would be able to deny the reality of their domination based on their high levels of manliness.

In addition, many of the behaviors sailors used to accentuate their manly image were based more on vague societal connections to masculinity than to any actual power that masculinity was intended to reflect. This basic failure to understand the difference between a signifier, masculinity, and a signified, domination, resulted in sailors pursuing a number of traits that weakened their actual ability to resist the dominance of the elites while creating a façade of masculinity. This, too, stems from the inability to recognize the constructed nature of masculinity. If they understood this concept, sailors would have been better prepared to pick and choose which aspects of masculinity would best aid their cause.
A Successful Masculinity?

In April of 1797, with a French invasion force believed to be gathered in Brest and the specter of a domestic, Jacobin-inspired revolution on the minds of the British establishment, the officers of the Channel Fleet, Britain's primary defense against foreign incursion, noticed worrisome signs of discontent emerging from the forecastle. A petition the men had sent to the Admiralty had not been answered and the men were growing increasingly disgruntled, murmuring among themselves. Several ships in the navy had mutinied independently, and the authority of the officers was frequently questioned. Sometimes the officers may have even heard the faint whisper of the most feared word in the Royal Navy's vocabulary: mutiny.

Perhaps no term was as powerful as "mutiny," both among the officers and the crew. For the officers, mutiny meant a loss of control over those they had long oppressed, the shame of failure, and the very real possibility of their own death. For seamen, mutiny meant something else entirely. On the one hand it symbolized freedom, but it also stunk of the taint of the gallows. The infamous Bligh mutiny, for instance, had resulted in the very public hanging of three men who had not even participated in the mutiny, or whose participation was questionable, yet whose failure to act against the mutineers left them guilty enough for Admiralty law. Any hints of a planned mutiny aboard naval vessels were quickly stifled with the cat, as the officers often felt it best to err on the side of tyranny than face the loss of their command, and potentially their heads. As whispers of mutiny arose from below decks in April of 1797, all who heard that word felt its full weight. When the fleet was ordered to sea and the men refused to
comply, everyone involved, from the lowliest mutineer to the First Lord of the
Admiralty, would feel that weight increase exponentially as the full realization of what
had occurred set in: The Channel Fleet had mutinied.

The mutiny was a peculiar one in almost every aspect. Most mutinies were
desperate acts, poorly planned and hastily carried out through the hatred of a few core
mutineers against a generally disliked officer, such as on the Bounty. This was
something far different, in scope and in execution. The mutineers were organized, not
just on one boat, but across an entire fleet. Each ship appointed delegates who met and
discussed their situation in an orderly fashion. Violence was not used to obtain control
of the majority of the ships, rather each man, including the marines, simply refused to
obey the orders of his officers. Eventually the officers were asked to leave their ships by
the council of delegates, and with few exceptions they were allowed to retreat
unmolested. In the end, the Admiralty gave in to the seamen’s demands, agreeing to pay
their back wages, increase rates, and, most importantly, a royal pardon for all involved.
The key to the mutiny’s power was discipline, not the standard navy discipline of the
lash, but a new discipline of organization, self-denial, and submission of the individual
to a common cause. To the Admiralty and other British elites this new discipline was
far more of a threat than the seamen’s crude, physical masculinity had ever been.196

Much of the discipline involved in this mutiny can be seen as an effect of the
Royal Navy’s emergency Manning procedures. The rapid growth of the navy in
response to the French Revolution resulted in a need to implement a bounty system in
addition to impressment. Counties were given a quota of men to be sent into the navy as

1992), 43-56.
“volunteers,” introducing a number of individuals into the sailors’ ranks that normally
would not have been found on a ship. Among these men were a number of individuals
who had been exposed to the type of organization and self-discipline that won the day
for the sailors. A number of the mutineers belonged to groups such as the London
Corresponding Society, which was discussed in some depth in E.P. Thompson’s The
Making of the British Working Class. The members of these groups and others in the
working class developed a culture centered around values that have often been
associated with the bourgeois of the period: sobriety, polite discourse, and fraternal
loyalty. The bourgeois’s near hegemonic control of academia and society since that
period may have effectively erased such working-class cultures from the popular
memory and much of the historiography, but the work of historians such as Thompson
have brought them back into the record.

The ideas about male gender embraced by these men were noticeably different
from that of the common sailor, though many sailors came from the same working-class
backgrounds. On land, cultural influences such as religion, published works, and the
responsibilities of families provided a far different environment for young males and
adults than the sea did. The Methodist Church and other elements of society encouraged
sobriety, industry, and economy, virtues not often seen among sailors, and through these
teachings links emerged between a man’s masculinity to his self-control. The Methodist
Church’s grassroots-oriented organizations also proved to be an important training
ground for later organizations created with more secular goals in mind. Thomas Paine,
William Cobbett, and other radical authors added a political dimension to gender, using

their rhetoric to create a tie between participation in the political process and the evaluation of male worth. 198 Finally, the increased likelihood of a conventional marriage and fatherhood made the economic ability to support a family, though not necessarily as a single-earner, an essential part of what it meant to be a man. This system of male value offered a number of benefits over that of the sailors, particularly when it comes to ending one’s domination as a group.

Where sailors’ masculinity privileged drunken excess, effectively preventing them from being taken as a serious threat, the self-denial of the working-class radicals allowed them to save money and brain cells in an effort to better themselves materially as well as increase their political clout. This clout was increased manifold through the pooling of funds and resources for political action, something that many of these individuals did. Furthermore, these groups and the culture that evolved alongside them helped to develop a distinct working-class consciousness that was noticeably lacking among sailors except during brief demonstrations of solidarity such as the Spithead mutiny.

Although the political actions of these groups were often seen as seditious or treasonous, in many ways they were more about maintaining a place within the patriarchal hierarchy than dismantling it. A certain amount of loyalty to the crown and the nation still remained, as in the case of the Spithead mutineers, who cheered along the royal barge of the Princess Royal’s betrothed, the Prince of Wurtemburg, even in the midst of tense negotiations with the admiralty and promised to end the mutiny should France’s fleet threaten the British Isles. The mutineers realized that by displaying their

198 Ibid., 401.
loyalty along with their demands they could have their demands met while allowing the
government to save face.

The ringleaders of the Nore mutiny, which occurred within months of the
conclusion of the Spithead mutiny, did not understand the importance of such shows of
loyalty and as a result doomed themselves to failure. The leader of that mutiny, former
midshipman and failed businessman Peter Parker, who had enlisted to free himself from
debtor’s prison, later blamed the failure on “the busy body of the lower classes, for they
are cowardly, selfish, and ungrateful.” 199 The true culprit may have been Parker’s
grandiose plans, which ignored the need for such organizations to rebel against the
establishment without actually revolting. In order to force the Admiralty into further
concessions, Parker ordered the Nore mutineers to threaten to blockade London. Such
openly revolutionary actions may have been effective in other situations, such as France
or the United States, but the degree to which elements of society other than the first two
estates had a stake in British society, such an overt act of violence against the state was
not likely to find a consensus among the mutineers, let alone spark a general uprising.
Lacking these two essential elements, the Nore mutiny was doomed.

Not only was a certain amount of kow-towing to the establishment a prudent
strategy, but it also reflected the goals of a number of working-class “radicals.” These
men had an investment in the established political system, which they wished to have a
greater say in, but which they did not want to see completely dismantled. Their
organizations, causes, and conceptions of gender were tailored to access the various
hierarchies of power and to alter it to their needs. The absolute destruction of the

199 Ibid., 167.
establishment would render much of their own power moot. Also, as husbands and fathers, they had an investment in maintaining the patriarchal order, which the government, the church, and the male-dominant nuclear family represented.

Through their various organizations, petitions, demonstrations, and illicit actions, working-class radicals were able to wage battle against the government and economic elites. Though not always successful, they were able to make their voices heard and to influence the government in ways that previous generations of working individuals, lacking their organization, sense of purpose, and a culture that nurtured such activities, were largely incapable of. With this new culture came a new understanding of masculinity that valued industry, political rights, sobriety, organization, economic prosperity, and a certain amount of submission to the patriarchal hierarchy that they sought to climb. Even more successful were the bourgeois, who were able to use their growing numbers and economic power to dominate British culture up until the mid-twentieth century. The model of manly virtue that both groups espoused could certainly be considered more successful than that of the common sailors, who, with the brief exception of the Spithead mutiny, persisted in maintaining a culture based on their own physical masculinity, which only served to reinforce their own exploitation. At the same time, however, if the last thirty years of gender studies have proven anything, then no set conception of masculinity could ever be considered truly successful.

Following Bourdieu's logic, if masculinity is based on the idea of male dominance, then all things that are masculine are considered positive while all that is considered feminine is negative. While this means that men are encouraged to embrace things like sobriety, industry, and political rights as part of their masculine identity, it
also means that women are expected to be incapable of achieving or appreciating many of the things labeled as masculine. In many situations, women were, and often still are, denied access to forms of political, economic, and cultural power. In the last forty years, numerous feminist academics have made careers analyzing the ways in which this masculinity has negatively impacted women and minorities, and yet there is still no foreseeable end to the research or the patriarchy that inspired it. Men were also judged strictly by these gender standards that present them with more opportunities, but also with more pressure to perform.

Homosexuals, women’s suffragists, and anyone else who has failed to live up to these gender roles have been and continue to be subjected to numerous types of censure including verbal chastisement, imprisonment, and even murder. Not only have individuals suffered, but so has society in general. The exclusion of women from positions of power and responsibility has halved the available brain pool and held back social, cultural, and intellectual progress. Furthermore, the continued traces of physical masculinity that remain continue to promote violence and the domination of others as a culturally acceptable pursuit. Taking these factors in to consideration, it becomes obvious that the type of masculinity that emerged in the post-Enlightenment period was only successful within a very narrow scope. It allowed males within the working class and the bourgeois to obtain more political freedom, but at the cost of retaining a patriarchal system that continued to limit British and American society until the current day.
The Death of John Nicol

When John Nicol first became acquainted with John Howell, the man originally who transcribed, edited and published his tale, Nicol, like many old sailors, was impoverished and alone, wandering the streets of Edinburgh, “with an apron tied around his waist, in which he carried a few very small pieces of coal he had picked up in his wanderings through the streets.”\textsuperscript{200} The physical strength that maintained him as a sailor was long-gone, what little money he had managed to save at the end of his career, as aging seamen were occasionally prone to do, was spent on a cooper’s shop and a home for himself and his new wife. These were both lost when he had to flee into the countryside to avoid impressment after the onset of the War of 1812, and Nicol spent the last years of his working life breaking rocks in a quarry.

After his wife died, Nicol was left without any family and with little to show for his years at sea except a head full of tales and the last vestiges of his masculine pride. He headed to London with the very last of his funds to apply for a pension based on his time in the Royal Navy. Nicol, like many other men forced into the service, was denied; the Navy that had taken so many years of his life now had nothing to give him in return. Penniless and without children or other family members to support him, broken by his years at sea, Nicol found himself destitute, but not broken. He lived off of burnt-bread, coffee and potatoes, refusing to beg out of fear of endangering his masculinity, which after so many years he still considered his most important possession.

Compared to many sailors, John Nicol was actually quite lucky. He had lived to the age of seventy while so many of his colleagues had died in battle or by disease,
starvation or violence in the street. His career had left him physically whole, without the missing hands, legs, or eyes that marred the figures of many sailors, or the crippling alcoholism that frequently sent Jack to an early grave. Perhaps luckiest of all, Nicol made the acquaintance of John Howell. The earnings from their collaborative work allowed Nicol to die in modest comfort, with a full belly and a bed to lie in. As a sailor, he had achieved the masculine standard he had idolized as a child, but found that masculinity offered no rewards other than itself.

*Macho, macho man
I've got to be, a macho man
Macho, macho man (yeah, yeah)*

—Macho Man, *Performed by The Village People*
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Race at Sea


Gender and Sailors


Whaling


Maritime Literature


Literary Criticism


Pictorials


Miscellaneous


