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Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:04] Hello. My name is Julie Kuchepatov, and I'm the host of this podcast, The Conch. We are trekking along on our journey with this podcast talking about seafood and the ocean. And most importantly, we're showcasing some of the incredible people working in the seafood sector, sharing their journeys, examining the challenges they face and the triumphs they've achieved. Today I am so excited to have two guests joining us, Kamille Harris and Jasmine Hardy, known by their social media handle as Black Girls and Oysters. Welcome and thank you, Kamille and Jasmine for joining me today on The Conch. Let's do this.

Kamille Harris [00:00:38] Happy to be here.

Jasmine Hardy [00:00:39] Thank you so much for having us.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:41] I'm really excited. So, I asked you earlier. So, you are both in Atlanta, right?

Kamille Harris [00:00:46] Correct.

Jasmine Hardy [00:00:47] We are.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:48] So I've been to Atlanta I think once, and I went to this restaurant called the Kimball House. Is that like a super popular restaurant in terms of oysters and things like that?

Kamille Harris [00:00:56] It is. I think it's one of the best places, probably, to get fresh, quality raw oysters in Atlanta, which can be a little bit challenging.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:05] Oh.

Kamille Harris [00:01:06] Yeah, it kind of caught us by surprise. We anticipated like a plethora of options. And there are options. I want to make it clear there are options, but I think finding consistency in the quality of the seafood is where things start to get a little murky.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:22] Okay. We're going to talk about that more in a second because I mean that's something I have never heard like that you might have a problem finding a good quality oyster or seafood in general in your neck of the woods. So I want to talk about that in a second. But first, Black Girls and Oysters. So, I understand that your journey in oysters is relatively new. So, I'd love to hear about how your obsession, if we can call it that, started.

Kamille Harris [00:01:44] Jasmine if you if you'd like to take it away.

Jasmine Hardy [00:01:46] I'll start with the beginning. So, for Kamille's birthday a few years back, we decided to take a little trip to Charleston, and I'm like a, try something once, and if I like it, I'll continue to try it. And so, we were in Charleston, and I had never had oysters, so I was like, I'm going to try an oyster. I'm going to try a raw oyster, but I wasn't doing it alone. So, I was like, Kamille, you're going to have to try it with me. And luckily, she's easily influenced by me. And so, we tried our first oyster together. Looking back on pictures - terrible, terrible oysters. And I'm glad that they weren't terrible to the

point where I never wanted to try them again or we wouldn't be here. But we've had such better oysters since then, and so that was my first time having raw oyster. I believe Kamille has had oysters in different forms. So that was my first time having an oyster period. And so, Kam, you can fill in the gaps there.

Kamille Harris [00:02:41] That is correct. I had a char-grilled oyster in New Orleans prior to that, but it was just a try and that was it. It didn't go anywhere. I was kind of like, oh cool, I'll do this again because seafood is really popular in my family. We love crabs, love clams, mussels. So, the texture and all that wasn't really new to me, but for whatever reason, it just didn't evolve into anything until the trip to Charleston.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:03:05] That's awesome. So that just moment where you said, let's do it, let's do it together and try it. Do you remember you said they were kind of sketchy looking, not sketchy, but they, they weren't great looking visually, as you recall? Do you remember what they were and what were they dressed with or they just full on just straight up oyster.

Jasmine Hardy [00:03:22] This is how inexperienced we were. They were just straight up oyster. They came out on ice cubes, and we asked. We asked the waitress. Yeah, exactly. We asked the waitress like details, and she was like, honestly, I don't eat oysters, so I don't know. And for anyone else, that might have been a red flag, but we didn't know any better. So we were like, okay, we're just going to go with it. Now moving forward, we definitely always ask, where is this oyster from? Do you have a ticket card that can tell us when it was harvested? And we'll go places and they're like, oh, they're just oysters. And we're like, oh, are they from Oyster Land? And they're like, no, where are these oysters from? And they're just like, oh, it just says oyster. It's like, no, they do not just say oyster. Like, come on.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:04] Yeah. Well, what you're referring to is called traceability, right? And that is super important to be able to trace the origin of your seafood. I mean, I can't stress that enough.

Jasmine Hardy [00:04:13] Definitely.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:13] That's so important to know where your seafood comes from. So, do you have a favorite origin of oyster? Like what kind of oysters do you prefer? Do you like the small ones or the big ones, or is it just runs the gamut?

Kamille Harris [00:04:27] I am a sucker for like a medium cute oyster. I love a PEI oyster. While we were in New Orleans, we actually learned that I don't know if there's any science behind this per se, but we were at Sidecar Oyster Bar in New Orleans, and we were with Lindsay, who's a professional shucker out there, and she was telling us that people tend to favor oysters from regions where they're either from or familiar. And so, I'm an East Coast girl. I'm from Philly. And so, after we talked oysters and I said, you know, oh, I love, like, a northeast high salinity oyster, she was kind of like, oh, yeah like that tracks and Jasmine will probably share about her love for West Coast oysters. So, it just got it aligned. But yes, that's my preference. Definitely northeast high salinity.

Jasmine Hardy [00:05:19] I prefer a smaller oyster. I do love high salinity, but I am a sucker for Kumamoto. And funny that you say that because I am from the west coast. I'm originally from LA, so yes, it does track. Yeah. I love a nice petite oyster with a nice finish. Something very clean. My favorite.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:43] Jasmine, I'm going to agree with you because I love Kumamotos. I love all that that you just mentioned. And I had never heard that theory either. So, I think it tracks because I like those kind of oysters as well. Maybe it's just what you're used to, but you guys started eating oysters at the same time, so I don't know. That's a good theory. And maybe we can ask someone to verify that or proof it or check it or whatever it's called. So, I've followed your IG account, Black Girls and Oysters, for a really long time, and I absolutely love it. And I know you're active on TikTok as well. So how did you decide to launch a social media presence with a focus on oyster appreciation? How did that come about? Like what was your discussion about that?

Jasmine Hardy [00:06:23] To be honest, it was an impulsive decision. I don't even know if I thought about it for 48 hours. So, we were living in Memphis at the time, and we were celebrating like our first nice dinner in Memphis. I was there for training requirements for school, just for a year so very limited time in Memphis. But we ended up falling in love with it, and we just so happened to order oysters at this restaurant called 117 Prime. And I was taking a picture for Instagram, and I was like. I want to share this with people who like care. Like I want, I want people to appreciate how beautiful this oyster is and how good it is. I want to tell people about it, but who's going to care about that? So, within days, I was on Canva creating social media posts, coming up with color schemes, doing some research on colors, thinking about what I wanted to see, what other people might want to see. And I just was looking for somewhere where I could post about oysters and people who also like oysters would appreciate it and enjoy it, and we could have conversations about it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:07:25] I love that. This has really opened some doors, I imagine, for you. Is that right?

Kamille Harris [00:07:31] That is correct. We are getting a lot of requests for a lot of different things that I didn't think people would be interested in, quite honestly. People have messaged us asking for merch, t shirts, shuckers, anything, aprons, gloves. We've had people reach out asking about like happy hours when we mention that we're traveling somewhere and people will mention us or message us and say, hey, come hang out. It has really grown and I'm excited for what it can become. And it's exciting to know that thus far, people have been so supportive because I truly did not think that anyone was going to care about my oysters from dinner.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:08:08] I love that, and I mean, this is, this is this podcast is a really good example of that. I mean, you're doing amazing things, and I know you have a professional careers outside of this Instagram and social media, and we're going to talk about that. But we wouldn't be talking right now if I didn't find you on Instagram and just follow you. And your posts are so great. Of course, people care. I mean, people want to see you and see what you're doing, and so do you have merch?

Jasmine Hardy [00:08:33] No. Oh, we have stickers.

Jasmine Hardy [00:08:37] Yeah, stickers. We have stickers.

Jasmine Hardy [00:08:38] And we have pins that we give out when we go to restaurants or go to oyster festivals. We wore t shirts that I impulsively made before an oyster festival last year, and a couple people have reached out, like, where can I get a t-shirt? And I'm like, oh my gosh, you like this t-shirt? Oh, you want to wear the t-shirt?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:08:54] And I sense a store. I sense a store may be in your future. What's your favorite? You mentioned you've mentioned festivals a few times. How many festivals do you go to a year roughly, do you think? And what's your favorite one?

Jasmine Hardy [00:09:06] I can answer this. So far, we've done 4 or 5 in Atlanta and hands down my favorite is Landlocked. I think Landlocked is, from my experience, top of the food chain for oyster festivals that we've been to. I don't think any other oyster festival is on the level of them at all. I would love to go to other festivals outside of Atlanta but seeing this is this started in the middle of the pandemic, there was not a lot of traveling, so I feel like in the future we're probably going to start popping up in different places and I would love to see how it's going to compare.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:09:40] That's great. So, I followed your stories at Landlocked last year, and I think I even messaged you. I was like, I have major FOMO because I've never been to that, and I thought it looked so fun.

Jasmine Hardy [00:09:51] It is. And this year I want to say they sold out in like, oh, 10 seconds. We were trying to get all of our followers there and we were like, you know this, if you're in Atlanta, this is, and you love oysters this is definitely the festival that you need to go to. I don't care if you missed any festival this year, like you should hit Landlocked. And if tickets went on sale at 10:00, they were sold out by like 10:01.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:10:16] What? Okay, I guess I won't go this year. Well, when is it? It's in the fall, usually, right? Like late fall.

Kamille Harris [00:10:21] October 20th, because it's homecoming weekend. Remember, I think we have a scheduling conflict.

Jasmine Hardy [00:10:28] Yeah. We're debating, like, coming home early, like flying, just so we can go.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:10:33] So you can hit so you can hit the festival. Okay, well, we'll put a link to Landlocked in the show notes. So, you know, as we were just talking about, your social media presence has kind of exploded, and you're doing a great job of showing your experiences and sharing those with people that care about it. And the seafood sector is notoriously and painfully slow with the uptake of social media. And so, I would love to hear if you had some industry leaders in the room, how would you explain to them the importance and the power of social media to spread positivity about seafood to the world?

Kamille Harris [00:11:07] Honestly, sometimes I find myself struggling with maintaining a social media presence. Being that it's started as this, like sort of impulsive thing that I did, I was like, oh, you know, like 40 followers or something like that. I didn't anticipate the traction that we've gotten so far, and it's made me realize the power that now is social media. And while word of mouth is still very important, people want to be able to see and they want to know what to expect when they go somewhere. I have like mixed thoughts on social media. It's obviously a very powerful tool using it for the right reasons. But it also, I think sometimes it's easy to get caught up in the gimmicks of the visuals of things, and I worry about in an effort to gain a lot of social media followers, I want just restaurants to keep the focus on, of course, the quality of the food and the quality of the service, because that's what's going to keep things afloat. You can put flowers out, you know, on the ceiling as much as you want, but and it's great if somewhere it's like a vibe, if you will. But I so I

think that's the danger of the social media. Is the focusing too much on what something might look like rather than what it actually is?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:12:19] Yeah. No, I agree with you there. But I think the seafood industry itself, yeah, maybe they've got the quality and, you know, they're selling seafood and all that stuff, but they just don't even appreciate the fact that we need more people to eat seafood.

Kamille Harris [00:12:29] Yes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:12:30] And we need to use all those tools, social media included, to get the word out. Because I've mentioned this before, it's seafood is losing the battle for the center of the plate. By the way, I didn't make that up. But people go to the grocery store, or the restaurant and they say, where's this oyster from? And they're like, I don't know. I don't eat oysters, I don't know, I mean, what kind of answer is that? That's a horrible answer, first of all. Second of all, people are going to say, okay, then I'll have the chicken, or I'll have the beef. So, like, yes, I get you with a mixed kind of thoughts about that, but I do think that the seafood industry has done such a poor job of getting out the message around the health benefits of seafood, and why it's so great and why it's delicious and we need to do better.

Kamille Harris [00:13:09] I agree, I do agree, I think it may have some things to do with access in some ways, since I think people who are from coastal areas are much more familiar with seafood. You know, they're used to having it when you live on the coast. Well, for me personally, I think I feel more comfortable purchasing seafood. I feel more comfortable going to restaurants that center seafood. Even moving here, we're kind of like, yeah, sure, Georgia has access to waters and things like that but with Jasmine being from L.A., me being from Philly, we're used to being driving distance to the beach. We're used to all of that. So, I think the seafood industry also feels like this hidden thing, you know what I mean? Like, it feels like this mystery industry that we haven't really unearthed from a social media point of view yet. I think people haven't realized how many stories aren't being told that are connected to aquaculture.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:13:58] It is a mystery, and we're going to talk about that in a little bit, too. And I think because, like you said, not everyone has easily accessible seafood at their disposal or even easy access to the water, right? So, to like, you know, say, oh, there's things down there that I can eat that are actually delicious. So, I think you're right. And I think in terms of the industry being under a shroud of secrecy, that's absolutely true. And it's, that's on purpose because so much of the seafood that we're importing into the US, which, you know, in some statistics, is like 90% of the seafood that we eat, these supply chains are so long and complicated and opaque, and because there's a lot of shady stuff happening, but that's a topic for another podcast. So, I want to get back to your Instagram because again, you give a lot of great information about what you look for or try to avoid when eating oysters. I was hoping you could share with our listeners a couple key things that we should know about oysters when we're ordering them or looking to try them.

Jasmine Hardy [00:14:58] My first would definitely be just how they look. I am big on presentation visually. If a tray of oysters come out and they just don't look appealing, the water looks cloudy. If that oyster looks mangled, I'm not touching it. I'm not going to eat it if it looked like it was in battle. That's the first one for me. Second would be smell. I think something that's very important with seafood is like, you can tell. If it smells fishy, more than likely, it's probably not as fresh as it should be. And I have no problem sending

oysters back. When it comes to an oyster, I don't even think I want to chance it. So, I'm always like, do you think you could reshuck this for me? Or if I could get another one? We've never gotten any pushback. They're always like, yeah, no problem. So even if it's just one oyster, I'm getting it re-shucked.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:15:46] That was going to be my next question, because I've seen you on Instagram talking about, you're going to send this back because of this reason, you've never got pushback?

Jasmine Hardy [00:15:53] No, I actually sent an oyster back last week, and they shucked one oyster for me, and she had no problem. And honestly, it wasn't like a super terrible looking oyster, but I could tell that it just needed to be reshucked. And so, they did it with no problem.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:16:09] That there's a lack of real trained professionals now to shuck oysters like in restaurants. Is that do you find that to be the case?

Jasmine Hardy [00:16:16] Yeah. It's bad. It's pretty bad.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:16:20] Well, that's why we're thankful that we have someone like Julie Qiu who's out there trying to train these oyster professionals, right?

Kamille Harris [00:16:25] Yes, absolutely. And we got to meet Julie, actually at Landlocked last year. And she was such a joy. And it is very needed. I'm just seeing more oysters and I'm seeing more restaurants incorporate oysters into their menus. And I do find myself a little curious sometimes, like, who's responsible for tracing these oysters? Who's responsible for sourcing them? Who's responsible for, like, training people how to shuck? Or is this one of the servers who was available this day? And so now they're shucking oysters in the back. But I don't know what to expect sometimes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:17:01] Yeah, I know that's a really, that's a really good point. And we mentioned Julie Qiu and she's been on this program before. And it occurred to me that when you're shucking an oyster at a restaurant, you're a seafood processor, and there are people that have worked at that profession for like 25 years or 30 years or whatever, you know? So it really is a skill that you need to learn. And you can't just throw the poor server in there and say, hey, shuck this oyster. I honest, I'm going to be honest, I don't know how to shuck oysters. That's one of the things on my list to learn. And it's never too late to learn.

Jasmine Hardy [00:17:28] We can send you a sucker if you'd like.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:17:31] I'd love it. Oh my gosh, yes, I'd love it. And coincidentally, I also wanted to mention that I met Julie Qiu for the first time at Kimball's in Atlanta. Like, we didn't know each other before that, but we ended up meeting there in person. We were at a conference, and it actually was when the Hurricane Irma was going through. And so, we ended up meeting there. It was such a coincidence.

Jasmine Hardy [00:17:51] That's really cool.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:17:52] Yeah. It was it was amazing. So, do you have any plans to grow Black Girls and Oysters outside of social media?

Kamille Harris [00:17:59] I think Jasmine's our visionary, to be quite honest. And I think my job is like executing in the middle. So, take it away.

Jasmine Hardy [00:18:09] Visionary. I think we do. I think collectively Kamille and I are always bouncing ideas like, okay, I also I'm always like throwing out ideas and I'm like, what do you think about this? And she's like, yeah, go for it. I, my work outside of Black Girls and Oysters has to do with creative. So, my brain's always spinning. So, I'm always thinking about how we can expand outside of social media when it comes to, of course, you know, meetups and we want to do oyster tours.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:18:39] Yes.

Jasmine Hardy [00:18:40] We would love to do oyster tours. We've had people ask us. We've connected with some farms also, just kind of throwing the idea out there, putting our foot in the water to see. And then ultimately, I think me and Kamille want to like settle down on the coast and maybe have our own oyster farm. I think that would be like the coolest thing ever.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:18:58] Oh, yes, that would be amazing. So, have you toured oyster farms before? Are there some around you at all within traveling distance?

Jasmine Hardy [00:19:06] So within traveling distance, we got invited to Murder Point, Shiny Dimes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:19:14] Love that name.

Jasmine Hardy [00:19:16] That's actually Brian from Kimball House.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:19:18] Oh, that's so funny.

Jasmine Hardy [00:19:19] Yeah. And E.O. McIntosh, those would be the closest that we've actually talked about going to the farm. Like, really going out and getting our feet wet, going out on the boat and really seeing the process. So, it's on our list of things to do. And it's definitely very high on the list.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:19:39] Well, we will definitely follow that and any plans that future plans you have for Black Girls and Oysters because I think that's amazing. And we've had several women who are involved in one way or another in oysters. So, Libby Davis from Lady Shuckers and Taja Simms-Harper, who actually planted her own farm in Maine last summer. Maine is like a hotbed of activity. So, I don't know if you're interested in Maine, but that's someplace you should definitely check out.

Kamille Harris [00:20:05] Maine is definitely on the list, and so is Mass, PEI. There's like a conference that they do in September that I was actually just looking at last night, and we haven't even talked about this. So, she's just doing this for the first time right now.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:18] Breaking news.

Kamille Harris [00:20:19] Breaking news, I think we're going to go to Canada. So, I would love to, to try it again. So, so that's in September. If or for anyone listening who may be interested and I'm definitely interested and there's a bunch of other events as well, I think Lady Oyster hosts a retreat in Maine.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:35] Yes.

Kamille Harris [00:20:36] And so that's on our bucket list at some point. Yeah.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:39] Awesome. Well, like I said, I mean, I'm in Oregon and, you know, we've got the whole Pacific Northwest out here. So also, definitely welcome to come out here and check it out. I know you like those oysters. I'm going to switch gears a little bit here. So, in order to prepare for this podcast, I was listening to your podcast with the one and only Oyster Ninja Gardner Douglas. And you talk about why representation matters and your social media presence, again, is a good example of this. So, could you give us a little more insight into the importance of representation and Black Girls and Oysters in general?

Kamille Harris [00:21:13] Absolutely. In creating Black Girls and Oysters and establishing a social media presence, so I've done some research of my own, and I honestly was very ignorant about any of stereotypes associated with oysters or anything of the sort before jasmine encouraged me to try them. But there was this sort of stereotype that I thought that they were for the elite. Let me be very clear oysters are expensive, so if you're going out to restaurants and ordering lots like they are pretty pricey. So, I kind of get the relationship between those things. But in my research, I realized that oysters actually were something that poor people ate. And there was transition at some point where they became of elite status and things of that sort. And so, I realized that there's even in my own experience, there's just so much that I didn't know. And I think it's important to show people and amplify that these stereotypes are myths. And when it comes to the history, even of of aquaculture and watermen, Black people are often left out of the story. Like many other industries, there's a lot of whitewashing, there's a lot of rewriting of history. Black farmers, not only oyster farmers, but farmers in general, have dealt with a lot of discrimination and a lot of policies and things that prohibited growth that didn't allow them to advance where land was confiscated. So, I think it's important for us to keep a visual out there that there is a lot of diversity in the seafood industry, in aquaculture, and if there is a stereotype that someone feels like, oh, oysters aren't really like my thing, or they're, you know what I mean? That they're this white people thing. I just want people to know that that's a myth. It's just not true.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:23:02] Yeah. Thank you. That was great. I think you're doing a great job of showing that that is absolutely not true. And keep, keep doing that because I think it's really inspiring. It's inspiring to me. And I think it's inspiring to a ton of other people. I'm sure. We had Tanasia Swift from the Billion Oyster Project on the program. I'll link it in the show notes. And she did a great job of explaining, like, you know, in New York City, like literally everyone ate oysters, and it wasn't that expensive rich white person food. It was like everyone was eating oysters and is actually a staple, a dietary staple of the Indigenous folks, the Black folks, you know, really, everyone in New York City was eating these oysters. And it's it was such a great story.

Kamille Harris [00:23:43] I'd love to check that out. The Billion Oyster I think they do a festival also. That's on my list also.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:23:51] That should be on your list. Jasmine, you mentioned that you're in the creative field, and I know you both have careers and professions outside of the social media presence. So, I'd love to hear about what do you do for your day jobs?

Jasmine Hardy [00:24:02] I work in the entertainment industry. I am basically producing, writing and production coordinating. I have a background in news, so I like the last 4 or 5 years I've been in the new sector of entertainment. So, CNN, Black News Channel, and a couple of other networks. I am currently freelancing, and I have a show that's premiering in two days that I worked on a couple of months ago. I'm just kind of all over in the entertainment space. So, producing, writing, creative direction, all of the above.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:39] Okay, so, Kamille, what about you? What's your day job?

Kamille Harris [00:24:42] I'm a mental health professional. Right now, I am doing some contract work and lots of psychological assessments and evaluations. So, most of my clients come from family services actually. I have a history and doing a lot of therapy, college counseling in particular. I love college students. They're very energetic. They're such a bright group. It's just such a fun time of life, but also very stressful. But I've really enjoyed working with college students, so this new job is a bit of a transition for me in some ways, but that's kind of what I'm doing now. Lots of report writing, probably a little bit more writing than I'm used to since like graduating and everything. But that is me.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:25:21] As a mental health professional, I have to ask you this question. So, bringing it back to seafood. I think a lot of people shy away from eating seafood, especially oysters, due to like, maybe even a psychological reason, you know, maybe they haven't tasted, but they're like, no way can I eat that because I don't know what it is. Or it's like texture thing. Like, am I wrong? Or what do you think about this as a as an expert?

Kamille Harris [00:25:43] There is definitely some aversion. I'm not a seafood sort of food and psych expert per se. But we've asked a lot of people, and when people say, oh, I don't eat oysters. And I think even the first time we had raw oysters, I think the waitress even said, you know, I don't, I don't eat them, I don't know. And I think we might have even asked like, why? And it was no real explain, like, oh, it's just sort of like, I don't really know what it is. I don't really know where it comes from. When we talk to friends and family who don't eat oyster, that's typically the response, is I'm not sure about the texture or I've tried, and I don't like them because of the texture. And then when people find out that they're alive, people are also kind of freaked out about that.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:26:25] Yeah.

Kamille Harris [00:26:26] That's yeah. People don't don't like the idea of that. Like, oh my gosh, is it going to, is it going to run out of my mouth, like it's going to crawl away at once it like comes to the table. Is it going to like move or something? So, I do think definitely there, the mystery of it, the texture. Some people have even said it's like slimy to them. So, I definitely think there are some like psychological barriers to people giving it a go.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:26:53] Yeah. And I think that kind of ties back into the conversation we were having about messaging about seafood. It's like we have to overcome that messaging. And then that might help us overcome these psychological, like these illogical psychological feelings towards seafood. I think that's really super interesting. So, something to think about, something to think about. I'm going to switch gears here a little bit. So. As you know, SAGE, Seafood and Gender Equality, is about building gender equality in the seafood sector, in the industry. So, I was hoping that you could share 1 or 2 aspects of the seafood sector or the sector that you work in, entertainment is a good example. Academia is another example relevant to you. The medical profession also

relevant. So just maybe not necessarily seafood sector, but the sectors that you all work in and their culture that may contribute to these inequalities. And what are some of the things that we can do to lessen these? I realize this is a big question.

Kamille Harris [00:27:47] I'll go first. So, what comes to mind for me is good old patriarchy and a lot of gender roles. And I think even at a very young age, unless your family is connected to aquaculture in some way, I honestly don't really ever hear people talk about even steering women in particular into the seafood industry, marine biology being, you know, things connected. I mean, even when you think about up in the restaurant sector of chefs. We were watching Top Chef one day or something, and one of the contestants just happened to say, like, cooking is supposed to be this woman thing, like it's supposed to be women's job. But when you go into these restaurants, the executive chefs are always men. And it was just kind of like, I never thought about that. Like I had never really thought about that. And so, I think the seed a lot of times probably just doesn't get planted. And so, and what we get as a result of that is inequality in all aspects of the seafood world, even down to like oyster farming and being on the boats and being on the water and in lot of people's minds, that's not something that's appropriate, like for girls to be doing, which is completely ridiculous. But people think that. And when don't you grow up seeing women in these industries, oyster farming and things of that sort, I think it can feel like for a lot of young girls maybe like, that's not something I should be doing or I should, you know, go into this other industry. And then I don't want to go down the rabbit hole, but then I'm also thinking about, like, you know, how do we teach people about earning a living? And what do we really know about earning a living through oyster farming or being an aquaculture industry? I think that's also like a mystery in some ways. So those are just kind of my like, my thoughts on the matter.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:29:42] Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. Jasmine, do you have any thoughts to add?

Jasmine Hardy [00:29:47] I definitely agree with everything that Kamille said. I will say it is really nice, like we've connected with so many women, that I do feel like it is kind of on the verge of changing and starting to see people that look like us. I really appreciate Imani with Minorities in Aquaculture. We've met so many women through her internship program, and it's just kind of cool that connect. And so, I think there is going to be a change. But like everything, you know, women, women are behind everything. And we're never the face of it really, unless it's like something bad. But but I agree with everything that Kamille was saying. But I do think we are on the verge of seeing something different. I think women, we use our brains and we're always coming up with ideas and it's just kind of inevitable.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:30:41] Yeah, I love that, and I totally agree with you. And shout out to Imani because she's definitely one of the leaders using her brain in ways that are amazing and awesome and so cool for, you know, these opportunities that she's creating through MIA, it's just great. And she's a definite friend and a friend of the friend of SAGE and partner and all that. So, shout out. So how can SAGE continue to support you as a woman in seafood or as women in seafood rather?

Kamille Harris [00:31:12] Community is really important in this industry, and I think that connection and networking is really pivotal to not only just maintaining a social media presence but getting the word out and getting people to know who you really are and what you're passionate about. And so, I think that SAGE is doing a great job of maintaining a presence and amplifying the mission and amplifying what's important, and centering women, centering equality, centering, centering faces and voices that are often kind of like

thrown to the wayside, I think is a great way to make sure that we are seen, and that women's points of views are heard. And I think SAGE is actually doing a really great job of amplifying those voices. Inclusivity is really important. People can tell, I think, when you're not true to something. And so, I think SAGE is just doing a really great job of making sure that women are not getting lost. As when we think about the seafood industry, and we think about the impact that women are making and the importance of the things that women contribute. So, I think just continuing to do the work that you all are already doing is, I think really great.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:26] Well, those are very kind words. Thank you. Thank you so much I really touched honestly, I love it. I love to hear that. So, Jasmine, do you have anything to add or is that.

Jasmine Hardy [00:32:36] I think she said it beautifully, actually, a great job.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:38] She did, she really did. I'm very touched. Thank you. Thank you so much. We'll also continue to find new and exciting ways to uplift and amplify each other and continue to give voice to those who struggle to find a platform. So, on that note again, you know, we're about uplifting and amplifying diverse voices in the seafood sector and this podcast is one of the main ways we're doing this. So, you also uplift and amplify many who are working in the oyster businesses and the restaurants. And you highlight all these great, cool events and happenings. And so, you're doing the same thing on your social media. So, I'd love to give you this opportunity to uplift someone or someones. So, who would you like to uplift and why?

Jasmine Hardy [00:33:20] All right. So, I would love to shout out Maurice and Sapelo Solo and they are focused on preserving the saltwater Geechee culture at Sapelo Island in Georgia. And so, he's been featured, he's been featured as a part of the new Georgia Coast campaign, which was a big deal last year. And so we met him at our first Landlocked, and we met him at Shell Fest. And what he's doing with Sapelo Island and trying to preserve the Geechee culture and just keeping it alive and using his voice, I think is really important. I think, a lot of people don't know oyster history and how it dates back to African American culture and Black people and so I think he's been trying to do and, you know, saving and preserving the culture is really important. So that would be someone that I think should be shouted out. I believe that's answering the question.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:17] That's great. And yes, shout out to Maurice and we will definitely link that effort in the show notes for sure, because I want to read more about that as well. So, thank you so much. So, we're at the end of our conversation. I want to thank you both, Jasmine and Kamille for coming on the show. It's so great to meet you, and I want to just share that your social media presence is really important, and I love it, I really do, and I think it's so well done and just keep it up. I know you have complicated thoughts about it, but I think it's turning into these beautiful things that I know you're going to continue and grow in the future. So, thanks again for coming on.

Jasmine Hardy [00:34:52] Thank you so much for having us.

Kamille Harris [00:34:55] Thank you so much for having us. And that's really, really great to hear. Thank you so much.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:59] Thank you for tuning into The Conch podcast. It would be amazing if you could take just two seconds to leave a review and share this podcast with your ocean loving friends. Thank you.

Crystal Sanders-Alvarado [00:35:12] The podcast is a program of Seafood and Gender Equality or SAGE. Audio production, engineering, editing, mixing, and sound design by Crystal Sanders-Alvarado for Seaworthy. The theme song "Dilation" is written and performed by Satan's Pilgrims. Funding for The Conch podcast is generously provided by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and Builders Initiative.