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THE SOCIAL CIRCLE OF CATFISHERMEN:
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF FISHING

by

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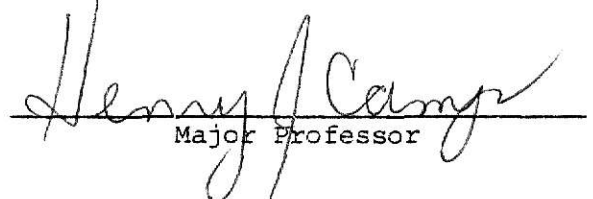
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NOTE

The use of the terms 'fisherman', 'fishermen', and 'outdoorsmen' is not intended to ignore the fact that women also participate in fishing and other outdoor activities. Rather, they are intended to be used merely as common terms to facilitate the flow of the paper and the conveyance of the contents therein.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Despite fishing's popularity both as a leisure and sport activity, the world of the recreational fisherman has only recently begun to be investigated by sociologists. While there are literally thousands of studies on various species of fish, there are relatively few studies on the angler. Thomas Dailey (1977) lists only 103 social and behavioral studies on the participants of recreational fishing in his annotated bibliography on the subject. This bibliography encompasses nearly all of the studies of recreational fishermen up to 1974. These studies primarily reflect quantified, descriptive accounts of the characteristics and motives of the fishermen in relation to recreational management. More recently, articles and papers have begun to define areas of further needed research.

Objectives

Many of the studies of fishermen and their recreational activity have attempted to assist recreational resource managers. The majority were aimed at gathering data on socioeconomic characteristics of anglers, what fishermen do, and motivations for the activity. These were often conducted by recreationalists and resource extension agents. Sociologists and other behavioral scientists occasionally conducted research on fishermen, but generally failed to go beyond socioeconomic activities, and motivational consideration. While these studies have provided useful information, certain misconceptions have developed. One major

misconception is that all fishermen constitute a homogeneous group. Another is the treatment of leisure as a residual activity which is left over after more important obligations are fulfilled (Bryan, 1976: 87). In addition, there is an increasing need for social science research which goes beyond the traditional emphasis of fishing research. "This development is a result of relatively recent recognition by fish and wildlife managers that many crucial issues take the form of 'people problems'" (Bryan, 1976: 83). The problems include the "...regulation and enhancement of wildlife resources for human benefits" (Hendee and Schoenfeld, 1973: 8). Also, "...out-of-control technology and growth have severely damaged outdoor recreation resources and make wise management of existing resources difficult" (Bryan, 1976: 83). Problems also exist on the management level.

In sport fishery management, as in many other endeavors, we possess a technical and economic capacity which drastically outpaces our social wisdom. We respond to what we perceive as a recreational need of society with a management program which changes the character of sport fishing. This change has an impact upon the desires and needs of the public which in turn influence future management. And so we track through history, trying to manage our resources to match social trends in the attempt. The chain process which sets the destiny of sport fishing is largely out of control (McFadden, 1969: 140).

The object of this research is not to directly confront any of the current issues in recreational management. Rather, an attempt is made to develop a base to assist future research aimed at solving current problems. This base can be accomplished by offering improvements and refinements of current approaches and typologies and by developing a framework to gain an understanding of the subjective world of fishermen. This will be accomplished by an extensive review of the literature to

provide specific areas of consideration and by examining these areas using a qualitative study of local catfish fishermen.

A second objective of the research is of a more esoteric nature. The subgroup of catfishermen is a subgroup that exists in society about which very little is known. The uniqueness of the subgroup in the world of fishing make the subgroup worth knowing about. In addition, the development of a framework for investigating such a subgroup can contribute to the area of qualitative sociology by providing a framework to investigate other subgroups in society.

The subgroup of catfish fishermen provide a unique approach to traditional studies of fishermen. In the history of the sport, the influence of European traditions have had a profound impact on fishing. Under the feudal system, hunting and fishing privileges were reserved for members of nobility (ORRRC, 1962: 7). The development of the sport centered around trout in Europe, and later, bass, when the species was discovered in America. The various writers of the 15th through 18th centuries (e.g., Isaak Walton, Charles Cotton, George Washington Bethune, and Thaddeus Norris) predominantly emphasized trout fishing and, to some extent, bass fishing (Waterman, 1975: 60-69). The art of angling in America got its background in Europe where English writers "...endeavored to make it a gentleman's sport" (Waterman, 1975: 60-61).

The cultural influence of the elites in fishing is still common in today's fishing. This cultural perspective has traditionally treated catfishes as an inferior species of fish primarily because of its feeding habits (i.e., a bottom feeder). The following poem from England exemplifies a typical cultural perception of catfish.

Oh, do not bring the Catfish here!
 The Catfish is a name I fear.
 Oh, spare each stream and spring,
 The Kennet swift, the Wandle clear,
 The lake, the loch, the broad, the mere,
 From that detested thing!

The Catfish is a hideous beast,
 A bottom-feeder that doth feast
 Upon unholy bait;
 He's no addition to your meal,
 He's rather richer than the eel;
 and ranker than the skate.

His face is broad, and flat, and glum;
 He's like some monstrous miller's thumb;
 Behold him the grayling flee,
 The trout take refuge in the sea,
 The gudgeons go on guard.

He grows into a startling size;
 The British matron 't' would surprise
 And raise her burning blush
 To see white catfish as large as man,
 Through what the bards call "water wan,"
 Come with an ugly rush!

They say the Catfish climbs the trees,
 And robs the roosts, and down the breeze
 Prolongs his catterwaul.
 Oh, leave him in his western flood
 Where the Mississippi churns the mud;
 Don't bring him here at all!

(Anonymous, 1940: 6)

Thus, the study of catfish fishermen offers a potential contrast to studies on trout and bass anglers. Further, the catfish is indigenous to Kansas and has a history of being a popular game fish in the state. By studying a non-traditional subgroup, a wide range of other possible subgroups who potentially have impacts on recreational management may be studied in the future. This would further add to the field of recreation.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As previously noted, Dailey (1977) provides an extensive bibliography of the social and behavioral studies of fishing. Primary emphases of these studies have been on the socioeconomic characteristics of fishermen, what fishermen do, and motivational aspects of anglers. These have been adequately discussed in previous articles, thus only brief discussions of them will be made here.

Socioeconomic Characteristics

In an attempt to assist recreational management and planning agencies understand the needs of the fishing clientele, various data-based profiles of fishermen have been conducted. The profile includes age, sex, employment status, occupation, income, marital status, residence, etc. (e.g., see Addis, 1976; Bevins, et al., 1968; Braaten, 1970; Kirkpatrick, 1963; Nobe and Gilbert, 1970; Sofranko and Nolan, 1972; and Spaulding, 1970). The general socioeconomic characteristics of fishermen have been summarized by various studies. A general profile of the angler show that they are disproportionately males who are married, slightly higher educated, and in the early forties age category. They predominately have rural or small town backgrounds and began fishing as a youth.

The Fishing Activity

Recreational fishing generates a huge income for fishing related businesses. Approximately \$5 billion was spent on the sport by some 33

million fishermen. The average fisherman will spend approximately \$6.30 per day on fishing and will average 20 days of fishing per year. As Bryan further summarizes:

Most fishing is done in the warmer months during weekends, a relatively small percentage of the anglers catch a large proportion of the fish, the most successful fishermen fish more days and stay out longer when they do fish, the average length of trip ranges from four to five hours, and some anglers travel great distances in pursuit of the sport (Bryan, 1976: 84).

Why Fishermen Fish

Other fishing studies have examined the social-psychological aspects of the fisherman. This includes the motivations which underlies the fishing activity. Of course, the primary reason for fishing is to catch fish. The "euphoria" and "tension release" emotional states associated with catching a fish has been developed by Spaulding (1970b). However, findings suggest that in addition to catching fish, reasons such as temporary escape, isolation, peace and quiet, and experiencing natural settings are important motivations for fishing. Kirkpatrick (1966) has even attempted to apply Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the activity. The motivations have been combined with other factors to gain a perspective on the satisfaction of the fishing experience (e.g., see Aukerman, 1975; Ballas, et al., 1974; Hampton and Lackey, 1975; and Moeller and Engelken, 1972).

Critique of Past Research

While these studies on fishermen and their activity have provided a good base to form a profile, certain misconceptions on the subject have resulted. Most of the studies in Dailey's bibliography tend to treat fishermen as a homogeneous group of recreationalists. Data for

almost all the studies have come from surveys, questionnaires, formal interviews, and other quantifiable methodologies. As is the case with this general type of methodology, information from a sample is generalized to the larger population. However, in the area of fishing, this methodology has tended to obfuscate the variation and subgroups of fishermen. This is largely a result of a lack of theoretical frameworks and typologies for identifying different types of fishermen. New definitions, new theoretical frameworks, different methodological approaches, and further refinements of current research are presently needed to advance the 'sociology of fishing.'

Most of these criticisms of the literature have been noted by Hobson Bryan. Bryan has been the most prolific writer on the 'sociology of fishing' and should be considered one of the leading authorities in the area. He states:

The overview of findings reveals mostly a descriptive profile of fishermen. But the whys of angling behavior remain largely unanswered and the variations among individual sportsmen largely unexplored. Consequently, the social sciences have not been brought to bear effectively on the people problems of fisheries management in fresh and saltwater settings. Several factors are responsible. They fall under these headings: conceptual frameworks, premises, methods, perspectives, and mobilization of effort (Bryan, 1976: 85).

Recent research has largely been directed at developing a 'social science' impact on the 'whys of angling.' By focusing upon specialized, diverse subgroups of fishermen (e.g., trout and bass fishermen), Bryan has begun to develop a conceptual framework to classify the varieties of fishermen and has begun to dispel the notion that fishermen are a homogeneous group (Bryan, 1974a, 1974b, 1976, 1977 and 1979). In addition, Bryan stresses the importance of participant observation as a first-stage methodology.

In the early stages of developing a body of knowledge, additional insight and sensitivities gleaned from first-hand experience with the subject can be valuable. Moral: the sociologist who happens to be a fisherman might be preferred to one who isn't! (Bryan, 1976: 88).

The use of participant observation methods in recreational research has been advocated for at least ten years. Campbell (1970) noted several advantages of participant observation. McCall and Simmons (1961) describe participant observation techniques as including interaction with subjects in the field, direct observation of relevant events, formal and informal interviewing, and an open-end in the direction of the study. "These techniques provide the type of qualitative information which can produce an inclusive view of recreation as a process, as well as qualitative data in support of the study's objective" (Campbell, 1970: 227).

Recent Approaches

Some researchers in the field are beginning to develop the identified areas of concern. Adams (1979) introduces a framework, canonical analysis, for identifying fishermen. This is based on a micro approach which attempts to divide the recreational fishing market on the basis of demographic characteristics of fishermen and the types of fishing experience desired. While this approach may be useful in distinguishing individual fishermen characteristics, the 2,578 mailed questionnaires used to gather the data does little to distinguish possible subgroups of fishermen. The data is reduced in such a way as to obscure this distinction if an effort was made to make such a distinction. The apparent lack of participant observation techniques may account for the oversight. Although there are noted limitations on canonical analysis,

Adams does provide a passable framework for future research.

Hendee, (et al., 1975) has developed a participant observation study of recreational sport fishing in various 'wilderness' areas of Washington. Various socioeconomic characteristics and motivational factors were studied, and many previous quantitative findings on characteristics and motivations were supported. In addition, territoriality and conversations between anglers were observed. These areas offer further criteria from which fishermen may be categorized. While the study did not distinguish subgroups of fishermen, the use of participant observation methods was established as a viable approach to research in fishing.

The primary contributor to exploring the areas of concern identified by Bryan has been Bryan himself. Bryan has addressed many of the issues lacking in the sociology of fishing. He has shown that fishermen are not a homogeneous group, developed a typology based on recreational specialization, advocated and utilized participant observation techniques and research conducted by sociologist/fishermen, and emphasized areas for further research. However, there are some weaknesses in Bryan's efforts which can be addressed by the study of catfish anglers.

Bryan (1974a, 1974b) identifies two diverse subgroups of fishermen: professional bass fishermen and specialized trout fishermen. Tournament bass fishermen have developed fishing into a formalized sport complete with clubs having formal memberships, federations or leagues of state affiliated clubs, rules of competitions and tournament circuits complete with cash prizes. The season culminates with a 'super bowl' or 'world series' of bass fishing in which top bass fishermen are flown to a secret lake to determine the "King of Bass Fishermen" (Bryan, 1974b: 21). Like other sport celebrities, 'master' bass fishermen engage in formal and

informal advertising of various types of equipment ranging from fishing tackle to specialized bass boats. This has a tremendous impact on aspiring fishermen. "A corollary to the growth in tournament fishing has been the use of more and more specialized and refined equipment defined by the 'pros' as absolutely necessary if one is to be a serious bass fisherman" (Bryan, 1974b: 21). The tournament bass fishermen constitute a highly specialized subgroup of fishermen. In addition, the professional influence on other bass fishermen causes those amateurs to be specialized and more diverse than the 'average' fisherman.

The subgroup of trout fishermen is also addressed by Bryan. Trout fishermen have previously been identified as a possible subgroup (James, 1971; McFadden, et al., 1964; and Smith and Kavanaugh, 1969). However, Bryan (1974a) suggests that the subgroup of specialized trout fishermen may be distinct enough to be considered as a subculture of the larger society of sportsmen. According to Bryan, specialized trout fishermen constitute "...a group that has developed its own set of beliefs, values, customs, and practices that its members share but that are different from those prevailing in the large society of sportsmen" (1974a: 2). Association with the subculture is gained by those sportsmen who have "...gone through a series of stages in their fishing careers and outdoor experience of a necessary and sufficient nature" (1974a: 4).

Bryan builds upon the 'series of stages' in a fishing career to establish a typology of fishermen based on degree of specialization. The typology is centered around the term 'recreational specialization.' This refers to a "...continuum of behavior from the general to the particular, reflected by equipment and skills used in the sport and activity

setting preferences" (Bryan, 1977: 175). The continuum of fishermen found by Bryan are:

1. Occasional Fishermen - those who fish infrequently because they are new to the activity and have not established it as a regular part of their leisure, or because it simply has not become a major interest.
2. Generalists - fishermen who have established the sport as a regular leisure activity and use a variety of techniques.
3. Technique Specialists - anglers who specialize in a particular method, largely to the exclusion of other techniques.
4. Technique-Setting-Specialists - highly committed anglers who specialize in method and have distinct preferences for specific water types on which to practice the activity (Bryan, 1977: 178).

Bryan's emphasis upon the 'subculture' of trout fishermen and ensuing typology based on observations of that subgroup is based upon a fishing elitist perspective. Trout and bass fishing is generally considered to require tremendous skill in techniques. While these groups of fishermen indicate that fishermen are not a homogeneous group of sportsmen, there is an implicit tendency to relegate other 'lesser' types of fishing and fishing subgroups as unimportant or homogeneous. The following quotes cited by Bryan serve to illustrate the point.

Since the kindergarten of angling is still fishing with a pole and worm, and serious anglers generally agree that the progressive education of an angler culminates in stream fishing with a fly, it is only natural that the highest reaches of the literature should be concerned chiefly with this form of fishing (Gingrich, 1965: 481) (quoted in Bryan, 1974b: 2).

And as the fish come to the spring creek through preference, most of them descendants of those that have turned from the broad river, so do the fishermen come to such a shrine, speaking eagerly to those of their kind, having less to say to cruder fishermen -- Charles F. Waterman -- (quoted in Bryan, 1974b: 1).

The preoccupation with elite fishing also influences the typology of recreational specialization. The typology is predominately based on the premise of a series of progressive specialization in one's angling career. For Bryan, this progression culminates in the specialized technique of fly-fishing in a limestone spring stream (e.g., "Specialist fishermen by definition, prefer fly-fishing tackle" Bryan, 1977: 178). While this may be true for trout fishermen, this technique may not be utilized by those fishing for a different species of fish. The bass fishing specialist uses a variety of spin-casting techniques with various lures while the channel cat specialist may utilize a variety of special 'stink baits.' The method or technique which denotes a specialist has a direct connection with the species of fish which is the quarry of the subgroup.

Bryan (1974a) uses the term 'subculture' to describe the subgroup of trout fishermen. Although the term is relatively clear in the context in which it is used (i.e., the analogy comparing the world of sportsmen with the general society in which the subgroup of trout fishermen constitute a subculture in the world of sportsmen), there is potential for confusion and misunderstanding associated with this use. The term is misleading out of the context of the sportsmen's world. Studies in the areas of deviant behavior (Irwin, 1970), poverty (Waxman, 1977), and class (Mayer and Buckley, 1970) advocate a stricter use of the term than that used by Bryan.

For Irwin, the subgroups' systematic behavior will have no meaning outside its subcultural context. A comprehension and appreciation of the values, beliefs, and symbolic systems of the members of a subculture is a prerequisite to understanding behavior. In addition, the development

of a subculture requires that a group of individuals remain in interaction and/or communication over an extended period of time, thus enabling a re-organization of their beliefs, values, and symbolic systems around the particular circumstances of their common relationships. Such re-organization requires a protracted time period of interaction, a strong commitment to the group, a general congruence of the individual member's values and beliefs, and distinct qualities in the activities and interests of the group (Paraphrased from Irwin, 1970: 109-111).

Waxman (1977: 45-67) provides a thorough discussion of past and present uses of the term 'subculture.' He defines subculture as:

...the culture of a subgroup within a larger society which may be distinguished from that larger society and the other groups of which it is composed on the basis of that subgroup's characteristic patterns of behavior, lifestyle, attitudes, and values (Waxman, 1977: 49).

Similarly, Mayer and Buckley state:

We here use the concept of subculture to refer to a complex of interrelated learned beliefs, attitudes, values, and patterns of behavior common to a grouping within the larger society. These traits become generalized in symbols and thoughtways forming an ethos that reflects and is reflected by the details of group life. Most important, such traits are seized upon by other subgroups as bases for perceiving and acting toward members of the subculture, as determining their standing in the community, or as means to "hang people on their own peg." Some of the many class differences in subcultural "life style" recorded by research include differences in respect to type of residence, leisure and recreation, family life and ritual, church preference, sex mores and behavior, fashions, musical taste, drinking habits, and types of deviant behavior (Mayer and Buckley, 1970: 55).

The recent literature on subcultures is essentially advocating a strict and more precise use of the term than previously used. A subgroup of fishermen may have a unique set of behaviors, attitudes, values, etc., when compared to other fishermen; however, the generally diverse

backgrounds of the subgroup would probably render a diverse set of behavior, attitudes, values, etc., in comparison to the total society. That is, the subgroup may have similar attitudes toward fishing which may be distinct from fishermen in general, but they may have different ethnic backgrounds, political attitudes, religious philosophies, moral values, etc. Bryan does not show that the attitudes and values of the trout fishing subgroup transcends into the larger social milieu. Thus, the use of the term is technically incorrect and has potential for misunderstanding and confusion.

However, a subgroup of fishermen might be better understood if distinctions are made using some set of criteria. Since the term 'sub-culture' potentially illicit misconceptions, a different term would be useful. Georg Simmel's concept of the social circle provides a broad enough term from which to describe a subgroup such as fishermen. According to Simmel, "...each individual establishes for himself contacts with persons who...are related to him by virtue of an actual similarity of talents, inclinations, activities, and so on" (Simmel, 1955: 128). In addition, "...practical considerations bind together like individuals, who are otherwise affiliated with quite alien and unrelated groups" (Simmel, 1955: 128). The concept of the social circle is broad and flexible. It is broad enough to encompass individuals of the same gender while being flexible to also describe a family as a social circle, trade unions as social circles, and subgroups as social circles.

The flexibility of the social circle allows modifications to be made to make its meaning more precise in certain instances. The social circle can be thought of as a behavior system with a variety of elements.

However, the concept is flexible enough such that not all social circles contain the same elements. By defining criteria of elements in a specific social circle, the concept can have some continuity with other studies.

In the case of subgroups of fishermen, the subgroup can be distinguished as a behavior system consisting of a set of criteria. A.B. Hollingshead (1939) identifies three general criteria for distinguishing the general characteristics of a specific behavior system:

...(1) a group of specialists recognized by society, as well as by themselves - who possess an identifiable complex of common culture values, communication devices (argot or other symbols), techniques, and appropriate behavior patterns; (2) the acquisition by initiates of the body of esoteric knowledge and appropriate behavior patterns before the novices are accepted by the initiated; (3) appropriate sanctions applied by the membership to control members in their relations with one another and with the larger society, and to control nonmembers in their relations with members" (Hollingshead, 1939: 816-817).

Thus, while the concept of a social circle has relevance in a wide variety of situations, its meaning can be more rigidly defined for the particular subgroup under consideration. This allows the meaning to be defined from the onset and be devoid of misconceptions associated with other terms.

Conceptual Framework

Bryan and other researchers have noted a need to understand the subjective aspects the fishing activity has for its participants. This social-psychological aspect goes beyond the motivational 'whys' of the activity and delves into the subjective meanings the activity holds for its participants. In order to gain a better understanding of this subjective world, a framework which addresses the meaning the activity

has for its participants is needed. One possible approach is to adapt the legitimation process described by Berger and Luckmann (1966: 92-128). Although the legitimation process described by Berger and Luckmann pertains to a whole society, analogies can be made to apply to a social circle which contains the elements described by Hollingshead.

Berger and Luckmann describe legitimation as a process of explaining and justifying the experiences of everyday life. In a society, legitimation serves to integrate these new experiences and give meaning to them based upon previous experiences and meanings. These experiences and meanings become institutionalized by society through the legitimation process. This in turn gives a basis for action on the part of the individual. Legitimation makes "objectively available" and "subjectively plausible" these new experiences. It serves to integrate them into the institutionalized order. This occurs for all of the individual's experiences in society and is naturally quite complex.

Berger and Luckmann identify four levels of legitimation ranging from a simple base for legitimation to a very complex basis of legitimation. These levels, which will be discussed later, are applicable to a certain degree to the social circle as previously identified. Legitimation in this sense serves to enhance the meaning the activity has for the individual. Thus, by looking at the legitimation levels for the larger society and applying them to the activities of a specific social circle, one can grasp the meaning the activity has for its members.

Berger and Luckmann identify four levels of legitimation: incipient, theoretical propositions in a rudimentary form, explicit theories, and the symbolic universe. These levels provide different bases from which to assign meaning to the activity and new experiences

in the activity as well as integrate the meanings to form a base of possible action. Incipient legitimation is the simplest basis of legitimation and consists of a "...system of linguistic objectification of human experiences..." (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 94). The verbal expression of an experience gives meaning to that experience. Linguistic objectification allows those who have had similar experiences to more adequately express these experiences to others which serves to legitimize the experience. "For example, the transmission of a kinship [or fishing] vocabulary ipso facto legitimate the kinship [or fishing] structure" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 94). In this sense, a social circle's common language, argot, and other communication symbols serves as a "...foundation of self-evident 'knowledge' on which all subsequent theories must rest" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 94).

Elementary explanatory schemes such as legends, folk tales, proverbs, and other folklore provide the second level or basis of legitimation within a society and social circle. This gives further meaning to the activity and experiences within the activity by providing "...explanatory schemes relating sets of objective meanings...[which] are highly pragmatic [and] directly relate to concrete actions" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 94). For example, Kansas fishermen have proverbs which give the best conditions for catching fish. One variation of a common proverb is:

Wind in west, fishing best;
Wind in east, fishing least.
(Koch, 1980: 404).

This simple explanation may be used to provide meaning for why the fish aren't biting (i.e., the wind is in the east), or for why one is having good luck (i.e., the wind is in the west). This may or may not determine whether one will go fishing under certain weather conditions.

The third level of legitimation contains explicit theories for conduct and action. This provides "...comprehensive frames of reference for the respective sectors of institutionalized conduct" (1966: 94). Rules of behavior and prescribed pragmatic methods of doing an activity represent explicit theories. In addition, transmission of these explicit theories to others is often facilitated through specialists. Professional bass fishermen who show specific fishing techniques on television programs or commercials represent a prime example of full-time legitimaters transmitting explicit techniques of fishing.

The fourth level of legitimation is the symbolic universe. Berger and Luckmann state:

These are bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality. ...Now, all the sectors of the institutional order are integrated in an all-embracing frame of reference, which now constitutes a universe in the literal sense of the world, because all human experience can now be conceived of as taking place within it" (1966: 96).

As noted in the discussion of subcultures and social circles, a social circle is a behavior system which influences only a portion of one's experience (e.g., fishing) and has little influence if any, on other experiences. Since the symbolic universe includes all human experience, the analogy with a social circle does not hold for this fourth basis of legitimation. However, one may conceive of a symbolic universe analogy for groups fitting the description of a subculture provided by Irwin, Waxman, and Mayer and Buckley.

This conceptual framework potentially provides an approach for gaining insight into the meaning of the activity and those experiences within the activity. The analogy to a social circle with the characteristics described by Hollingshead allows for an investigation of those

characteristics in the context of the legitimation bases for the central activity. The social circle of catfish fishermen can be described in terms of linguistic objectifications, folklore, and explicit theories which in turn allows for greater insight into the subjective experiences of the subgroup.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As previously noted, Bryan cites a lack of participant observation techniques as a critique of recent fishing studies. Thus, participant observation was a major consideration in the development of this research. With respect to Gold's (1958: 217-223) typology of participant observation (i.e., complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, and complete observer), all four roles of participant observation were used during the course of the field work. The complete participant role is compatible with Bryan's "sociologist who happens to be a fisherman" and was used throughout the study. This is to say that this researcher was not a novice fisherman. The complete observer role was also utilized throughout the study. Fishermen were observed from a variety of settings (e.g., in bars and cafes catering to local sportsmen, from a hill or road overlooking a river bank or lake, from a parked car, etc.).

Various local fishing areas were frequented under the guise of the four participant observation roles during spring, summer, and fall of 1979 as well as the spring of 1980. A participant-as-observer role was utilized in the early stages of the research. During fishing outings, the researcher was identified as a student developing a potential study on area fishermen. Informal conversations ranging from one or two minutes to over two hours were conducted. This technique combined with the complete participant role provided first-hand experience and knowledge of the catfishing activity in the area as well as providing familiarity with fishing techniques, argot, and attitudes of fishermen.

The observer-as-participant role was also used. In this role, the researcher was identified as a researcher and interacted with participants without making a pretense of being a participant. This was used for interviewing the regional Kansas Fish and Game Protector and in interviewing local baitshop owners. This provided information from those who have close contacts with many of the catfish fishermen. This information was combined with information gained from other participant observation techniques to develop an in-depth interview guide to follow up initial observations (see Appendix A for interview guides). The in-depth interviews were also conducted from an observer-as-participant role. Catfish fishermen were approached and asked to participate in the study as they were fishing. Thus the sample was not random, although anglers were approached at three different settings: a lake, a river bank, and the tubes at a nearby dam. A total of 28 catfish anglers were interviewed.

The objectives of this research and the conceptual framework can best be approached through participant observation as well as other methodological techniques. The precedent for employing a variety of methods is well established.

Some years ago Martin Trow suggested in "Comment on Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison" (Human Organization, vol. 16 (fall 1957), pp. 33-35) that sociologists should be done with their arguments defending one method over another. No single method is uniformly superior; each has its own special strengths and weaknesses. It is time for sociologists to recognize this fact and to move on to a position that permits them to approach their problems with all relevant and appropriate methods, to move on to the strategy of methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978: 339).

Thus, a variety of methods was utilized to gather data on the social circle of catfish anglers.

In order to gain initial contact with Kansas fishing, an historical perspective was utilized. This involved examining back issues of Kansas Fish and Game, the official publication of the Kansas Fish and Game Commission since 1939. The various articles and photographs gave an indication of fishing trends and techniques. The general popularity of the catfish species and preliminary indications of the existence of a subgroup of catfish fishermen were revealed. Most issues regularly published photographs of fishermen and their catches. Approximately 60% of all photographs depicting fishermen were of those who had caught catfish. Many involved very large catfish (25 to 60 pounds). Since 1960, approximately 30% of all articles on fishing were dealing with catfish.

Additional information on catfishing was gained through a multitude of mass media sources. Fishing magazines have traditionally been a source of information on fishermen in general. Despite the catfish's lowly status, a few articles on the species appeared in national magazines. Local newspaper sporting articles provided another source of information. In addition, stories about fishing for catfish were found in collections of fishing stories (e.g., Webber, 1945; Gartner, 1945). These mass media sources supported many of the items gained through participant observation. The initial observation of the existence of a subgroup of catfish fishermen was supported by an article by Byron Dalrymple. He wrote:

Twenty years ago when I first started practicing to become a Texan, it was obvious right off that I had a lot to learn about the local fishing. The fact was brought dramatically home to me by a yellow-catfish addict - one of a little publicized, far-flung clan who believe this is our greatest freshwater gamefish - with whom I shared a stream and an eye-popping experience during one of my first forays (emphasis added; 1978: 74).

Throughout the range of the yellow catfish, the small but avid group of sport fishing enthusiasts who consider this an authentic big-game fish have little interest in any other freshwater species (1978: 76).

Other observations supported by Dalrymple will be presented throughout the paper as examples.

The various methodological techniques utilized and the results as exemplified in the previous paragraph illustrate the use of triangulation.

Triangulation, or the use of multiple methods, is a plan of action that will raise sociologists above the personalistic biases that stem from single methodologies. By combining methods and investigators in the same study, observers can partially overcome the deficiencies that flow from one investigator and/or one method (Denzin, 1979: 300).

As conceived by Denzin, participant observation simultaneously employs respondent and informant interviewing, document analysis, direct participation and observation, and introspection (1970: 185-186, 297).

Denzin identifies four types of triangulation: data, methodological, investigator and theory (1970: 301).

This research employed data triangulation in which the research explicitly searched "...for as many different data sources as possible which bear upon the events under analysis" (1970: 301). As previously noted, there were basically seven data sources used in this research:

- 1) complete participation in the fishing activity;
- 2) general conversations with those engaged in fishing;
- 3) informal and in-depth interviews with the informants;
- 4) conversations and interviews with a Kansas Fish and Game Protector and local baitshop owners;
- 5) complete observation of the fishing activity;
- 6) an extensive review of Kansas Fish and Game; and
- 7) various mass media sources dealing with catfish anglers.

The use of triangulation facilitated the application of the concept of internal validity (Denzin, 1970: 201-205).

Internal validity sensitizes the observer to the biasing and distorting effects of the following intrinsic factors: historical factors, subject maturation, subject bias, subject mortality, reactive effects of the observer,...and peculiar aspects of the situation in which the observations were conducted (Denzin, 1970: 202).

Historical factors, as a dimension of internal validity, was examined through books and magazines. Articles were used to validate or otherwise confirm data obtained through observation and interviews.

A degree of subject maturation occurred in that some of the individuals providing information became more than respondents. This was particularly true of the flathead fisherman. With regard to Denzin's definition of informant, such individuals became informants. Informants, as opposed to respondents,

...ideally trust the investigator; freely give information about their problems and frankly attempt to explain their own motivations; demonstrate that they will not jeopardize the study; accept information given them by the investigator; provide information and aid that could jeopardize their own careers (1970: 202).

This became the situation of a few individuals cooperating in this study. Some offered to take the researcher on all-night fishing excursions when "the real big ones are caught." One even invited the researcher home for dinner.

Since the respondents were not being drawn in a random fashion, subject bias may have been present. However, diverse social backgrounds represented, informants being drawn from separate fishing settings. It is difficult to determine the extent of subject bias because of the relative lack of information on the catfish angler subgroup. However, it appeared that an unusually large number of retirees, students, and military personnel were active in the activity.

Among the 28 respondents involved, some subject mortality was

experienced. Some subjects were never seen again. However, those comprising the social circle of yellow catfish anglers (this distinction will be classified later) remained available throughout the study.

There were relatively few reactive effects of the observer noticed throughout the research. Fishing is a very common activity and interaction is a common part of the activity. There were no non-responses recorded for any of the 28 respondents during the interviews. Serving as a further check on the validity of the informants was the consistency between their responses and behaviors observed and documented in media sources and from interviews with baitshop owners and the fish and game protector.

Finally, in turning to the situations, i.e., settings, in which observations were gathered, the settings coincided with the seven data sources employed in the research. These observational environments have already been discussed in some detail previously. Some of the respondents were interviewed in groups. However, there was much consensus in the informants' responses, both in a group and individual setting, thus indicating the lack or presence of 'group influence' did not affect the data reported.

Thus, while triangulation approaches the elimination of biases resulting from single dimension (data source, method, and observer) studies, internal validity sensitizes the observer to certain biasing and distorting effects resulting from factors intrinsic in participant observation studies.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Typology of Catfish Fishermen

Data from the in-depth interviews revealed distinct subgroups of catfish anglers who could be categorized according to Bryan's typology.

Using Bryan's typology, the 28 catfish anglers can be classified as:

1) Generalists - fishermen who have established fishing as a regular leisure activity and fish for a variety of fish, including catfish, and use a variety of methods; 2) Species Specialists - anglers who specialize in fishing for a particular species, catfish, largely to the exclusion of other species. A variety of techniques may be used to catch the fish; or 3) Technique-Species-Setting Specialists - highly committed anglers who specialize for a specific species, big catfish (ie.e., flatheads) or channel catfish, using special equipment, a special technique, and fishing in specific water conditions. Since the study focused upon only catfish anglers, no 'occasional fishermen' were interviewed. However, this type of fisherman was observed as part of the general fishing milieu throughout the field study.

The following table indicates the number of anglers in each category of Bryan's typology. In addition, general characteristics of the respondents in each category is given. Since the interview guide did not actively pursue precise socioeconomic characteristics, this type of information is noticeably vague. However, certain trends were apparent.

Typology of Catfishermen Respondents

	Number	
Generalists	8	Tended to be college students or military personnel. Relatively younger than other respondents. 7 males, 1 female.
Species Specialist	5	Tended to be 'native Kansans' in the 25 to 40 age group. 4 males and 1 female.
Technique-Species-Setting Specialists (channel catfish)	9	Tended to be older 'native Kansans' with a greater indication of rural, outdoor backgrounds. 7 males, 2 females.
Technique-Species Setting Specialists (flathead catfish)	6	All of these informants were retired and had a predominate rural background. 6 males.

Two types of technique-species-setting specialists were discovered in the study. One group centered around the flathead or yellow catfish species of catfish (pylodictus olivaris), while the other group centered around the channel catfish (ictalurus punctatus). Although these two subgroups have certain similarities, the research concentrated upon the subgroup angling for flatheads since many of the media sources utilized had this species as their focus. This facilitated the data triangulation methodology. Thus, this subgroup will be analyzed with respect to the social circle and legitimation framework. The remaining respondents were primarily used for certain comparisons and were largely disregarded for description.

The technique-species-setting specialists concentrating on the

flathead catfish is a group of highly committed anglers. The flathead, also known as yellow cat, mud cat, shovelhead cat, Mississippi cat, Morgan cat, opelousas, and goujon, can often grow to weigh over 100 pounds. Newspaper reports from the later 1850s and 1860s tell of catfish as large as 160 pounds, with several over 100 pounds, caught in Kansas (Anonymous, 1944: 4). At one point, the Kaw river in Kansas was said to be "...unsafe for the navigation of large class catfish this season" (Anonymous, 1944: 4). Although many of these large catfish were netted by commercial fishermen, the current record for the flathead is 106 pounds using a trotline method. The rod and line record for the flathead is 79½ pounds.

An average flathead caught by the specialists is 40 to 60 pounds. Going after a fish this size requires special equipment, special skill, and occurs in a relatively special water type. The equipment generally consists of a huge rod, ranging to nine feet long, and a large heavy duty reel, usually open face. The hook used is much larger than the average hook and is tied to a line which has a minimum of 25 to 30 pound test. Dalrymple's following observation further illustrates the point.

Presently a well-weathered lean old gent came down the bank carrying an outsized bait bucket and a rod that was big and heavy enough to stave off an attack by an irate longhorn bull. ...He freed a hook of gaff proportions from a rod guide, and peeled off a length of line as stout as a lariat (Dalrymple, 1978: 74).

The anglers of these large fish use as bait, fish that many people would eat.

Meanwhile he amusedly watched me land a 4-inch long-eared sunfish.

He said, "Catchin' bait, son?"

I murmured that I was after a mess of panfish to eat.

"Eat! God, boy, that 'un ain't even big enough fer bait." He bent and hauled in his live-bucket; rummaged in it. "Look here."

He had in his hand a live green sunfish that I guessed at close to a pound. (Dalrymple, 1978: 74).

The huge flathead are normally found in fairly specific settings. River channels just below a dam or natural impass are common areas for the flathead. In addition, large flatheads may be found in deep holes along a river, especially if there is a log jam or some other cover near the hole. It takes a great deal of knowledge to find these holes and the channels, as well as a certain amount of skill to get the bait in the right spot.

He carefully inserted the huge hook under the back fin, adjusted his heavy sinker, and with unbelievable finesse tossed the rig precisely to the edge of a jam of huge cypress drift logs adjacent to, but not directly in, a curl of swift current at the edge of the deep, quiet hole (Dalrymple, 1978: 74).

These characteristics were found among the specialist social circle of catfish fishermen. Interviews and observations revealed the specialists preferred waters which provided a habitat for large flatheads and a use of specialized equipment. Huge rod and reel equipment was evident and test line up to 108 pounds was reportedly used.

The blue catfish species (ictalurus furcatus) may be occasionally substituted for the flathead. The blue catfish can also range up to 100 pounds. However, in Kansas, 10 to 30 pounds are normal. Occasionally, the channel cat or bullheads (ictalurus nebalosus or ictalurus melas) will be the quarry of the flathead specialists. However, these fish do not have the size of the flathead and thus requires different equipment. All of these catfish species are commonly sought by the species specialist type of angler. This type of angler will try to land any type of

catfish but usually lacks the equipment and skill to land anything over 10 to 15 pounds. In addition, when other species of fish are 'running' (e.g., when crappie or bass are spawning), the species specialist will probably be diverted from catfishing. The technique-species-setting specialist might occasionally do so, but it is rare.

Other technique-species-setting specialists concentrate upon the channel cat. Since the channel cat is a popular fish for the species specialist anglers, it is difficult to distinguish between the two. However, a number of channel cat fishermen have methods and fish in certain water types that increase the probability of catching the channel cat. The method usually centers on some type of stink bait which ranges from shad sides to special homemade baits. The underwater channels of a river, stream or lake are the common water settings of these anglers. These anglers may be distinguished from species specialists by their skill in catching large numbers of channel cats and by their attitudes toward fishing. Most of these anglers observed had been fishing for many years and were rather set in their ways when it came to fishing for channel cats. They had prescribed rules for when to use a certain kind of bait during a certain season (e.g., shad sides and guts during early spring, cheese and doughballs during the summer months). Like flathead specialists, the channel cat specialist will occasionally fish for other types of catfish or other species of fish.

The Social Circle of Flathead Fishermen

All of the respondents may be said to be in a loose knit social circle of anglers who fish for various types of catfish. There are some similarity of styles, attitudes and experiences common to most catfish

anglers. However, as one becomes more specialized, the experiences and meanings become specialized. That is, an individual's experiences and meanings attached to an activity are different if one is specialized in the activity. Thus, the species specialists have a more specialized range of experience than fishing generalists. Technique-species-setting specialists have an even stronger bond of common experiences and attitudes. This 'inner' circle of catfish anglers (i.e., flathead anglers) will be developed with respect to the social circle using Hollingshead's criteria and the meaning of the activity as shown through the legitimation framework. However, some details of this inner circle may also apply to channel cat specialists, species specialists, and generalists by virtue of belonging to the large circle of catfish anglers.

The social circle of flathead catfishermen contains certain elements of Hollingshead's behavior system framework and the Berger and Luckmann legitimation structure. These two ideas are interrelated in the context of the social circle of flathead anglers. Hollingshead's first criteria concerns primary distinguishing characteristics of the subgroup. This includes values, behaviors and communication devices which are identifiable as unique to the social circle. Berger and Luckmann's incipient legitimation level, or language base is closely related to the first criteria. The second criteria discussed by Hollingshead is socialization and aquisition of the body of esoteric knowledge by the initiates. Berger and Luckmann's theoretical legitimation level coincides with the second criteria although the knowledge possessed by the anglers is not theoretical in a sociological or scientific sense. Rather, the 'theory' is a set of knowledge and techniques which the social circle has developed to maximize success in the angling experience.

Finally, Hollingshead discusses appropriate sanctions applied by the social circle. In this instance, the structure of the group is unstructured and the primary means of applying sanctions is through the use of legends and other folkloristic items. Thus, Berger and Luckmann's second level of legitimation primarily relates to the sanctions imposed by the social circle. The social circle of the flathead catfishermen will be described with respect to the preceding proposed format.

Primary Distinguishing Characteristics

One primary criteria for describing the social circle of flathead anglers is "...a group of specialists recognized by society, as well as by themselves - who possess an identifiable complex of common culture values, communication devices (argot or other symbols), techniques and appropriate behavior patterns..." (Hollingshead, 1939: 816). Interviews with baitshop owners, informal conversations with various fishermen, and contents of mass media articles revealed such a group of specialists recognizable to the larger society. Baitshop owners all reported that a few area fishermen only fished for the flatheads. These fishermen were said to be distinct from other fishermen in their attitudes and behavior patterns. One owner stated, "They are all a bunch of diehards... more dedicated than other fishermen...some even fish during the winter". Another stated, "They are the most patient fishermen I've seen...they also tend to be 'loners.'" Still another added, "They are more involved with the entire scene...they can relax in solitude and rest and think because they aren't constantly working the line [spincasting, etc]."

Further indication of recognizable specialists are found in Dalrymple's previously cited quotations and the following.

Throughout the range of the yellow catfish, the small but avid group of sport fishing enthusaists who consider this an authentic big-game fish have little interest in any other freshwater species. They incessantly scan their favorite waters to locate potential lairs of outsized specimens, and will spend endless days without any action at all in order to sink a hook into a cat to break their own or somebody else's record. They are also convinced that the yellow cat is not only the gamest but the 'best eatin' fish on earth (1978: 76).

In-depth interviews supported the observations of distinctions and general attitudes. Most informants felt that flathead fishermen were more dedicated and patient than other fishermen. Fishing for flatheads was considered to be more relaxing. Comments like, "you just bait up, throw it out, relax and take in the outdoors," or "you can get 'all laid back' because you aren't constantly working the jigs or lures" were often heard.

In addition to the behavior patterns of being more relaxed and dedicated anglers, there were also certain common values held by the subgroup. Informants expressed a common dislike of illegal fishing methods often used to catch the big catfish. Snaggers were uniformly mentioned as being detrimental to catfishing. It was reported that this illegal activity became such a problem that the state has threatened to close certain fishing areas. Also, the informants mentioned a dislike of what one labeled as "fishing from a five-gallon bucket". This involved numerous fishermen fishing for trout as this species was being released by fish and game personnel. The lack of sport and the waste of funds were reasons for the dislike.

The subgroup uniformly dismissed fishing for other species of fish, indicating a common value of fishing only for flatheads. "I wouldn't waste the time fishing for those damn crappie except to use as bait", or

something similar was often heard. One informant said, "Walking clear around a pond or lake, fishing here and there is not my idea of fishing ...that's not fishing...I don't know what it is except a waste of time."

The social circle indicated other values. They prize their solitude and usually hate to fish in a crowd. Although the 'tubes' area was a popular fishing spot for big flatheads, it was also very crowded during the weekends. Thus, many of the members fished the area during the week and went elsewhere during the weekend. They also mentioned a dislike for loud parties which often disrupted overnight fishing trips. This dislike was increased when things began to be tossed into the water. In addition, a value against pollution was expressed by the subgroup.

Fishing presented many positive values for the social circle. The informants felt fishing was an excellent activity for keeping young people out of trouble. One informant said, "Although I've got a lot of money invested in my equipment, it doesn't take much money to get into fishing and it gives them something to do to keep them out of trouble". Three of the five informants felt fishing was invaluable because it gave them an activity in which they could interact with their grandchildren. Another informant said, "I can't wait for my grandson to get a little older so I can take him fishing".

Part of the criteria of a social circle as described by Hollingshead is special communication devices or argot. Much of the argot used by the social circle is common to most fishermen. Terms describing equipment are generally standard among fishermen. However, some terms are more common among flathead fishermen. The term 'on the drag' is often used to describe a flathead who has taken the bait and begun to move,

hence pulling line out of the reel. 'Tugs' or 'hits' are terms often used to describe the experience of the flathead's initial attack on the bait. Two informants mentioned the term 'singing' which occurs as the line is tense when a flathead is tugging on one end and the fisherman is tugging at the other end. The tension creates a twanging noise from the line.

These examples of argot and the common English language provide the first level of meaning in the legitimation framework of Berger and Luckmann. These terms allow fishermen to relate and understand common experiences and provide a base for more theoretical types of information.

Socialization and Knowledge/Techniques

Another characteristic described by Hollingshead is the socialization process for new members. Specifically, Hollingshead states that a characteristic of a behavior system includes "...the acquisition by initiates of the body of esoteric knowledge and appropriate behavior patterns before the novices are accepted by the initiated" (Hollingshead, 1939: 816-817). The socialization process of the subgroup usually followed a similar pattern. Most of the respondents stated that they began fishing as a youth with close friends or relatives. Many began their fishing careers fishing the rivers where the big flatheads are common. Most of them had rural backgrounds and had little time for fishing once they started working. The work was often so strenuous that when time for fishing was found, they took a more relaxed attitude toward the activity. In addition, many of the types of equipment for bass and trout fishing were unavailable to them. The respondents usually took up fishing for any type of fish then progressed to catfish until

specializing in flatheads. Early socialization was through friends and relatives. Later, as specialization occurred, ties with other specialists were established to gain further knowledge on the activity.

Specialization was enhanced by early experiences with the flathead. One individual stated,

When I was about 20, I hooked into something that nearly jerked the rod out of my hand. I only had a small rig and was using worms but I had hooked into a big flathead. It wasn't no time before that fish had stripped out all of my line and broke lose. From that point on I was determined to catch one of those devils so I began to talk to those old-timers who had always fished the river and they showed me how to catch them. It was still a while before I landed one but it was worth it. I've been at it every since.

Others became interested in flatheads by watching them being caught.

Dalrymple describes his experiences in the following continuation of his catfishing story.

He chunked the rod butt into a rock crevice so the tip was upright, sat down nearby, produced papers and the makin's, and rolled a cigarette. I was uncomfortable, presuming I must appear mighty stupid to him. Or maybe he was stupid; some kind of addled local river runner. I moved on down around a bend. When I came back he was on his feet, laid back at an angle against the force of that bull-killer rod, which was arched off toward the river. The line was circling, slicing water, throwing a miniature rooster-tail.

"Cripes!" the old gent exploded without looking my way. "He's a good 'un."

Instantly roiled with excitement, I propped my rod and ran up beside him. "Good what?"

He shot me a glance that would wither a cactus. "Why dammit, a yellor cat--what else?!"

The brute circled unseen several times around the big hole. Then it shot up into the edge of the shallow swift riffle above, and literally exploded. Buckets of water flew. For a split second I glimpsed the outline of the fish. It was certainly over 3 feet long, and thick as my leg. I was astonished (1978: 74).

Still, others grew up fishing with friends or relatives who were catfish fishermen.

The socialization process includes transmission of esoteric knowledge about the flathead. This includes notions about the characteristics of the fish, techniques and equipment for catching the catfish, and other information. Much of the knowledge falls into the theoretical legitimation level of the Berger and Luckmann legitimation scheme. The transmission of knowledge on the flathead catfish is premised upon previous basic knowledge about general fishing techniques and terminology. Thus, the first level of legitimation, linguistic objectifications, is a basis for other meanings associated with the activity.

A primary notion about the flathead catfish is that it does not fit the scavenger pattern of other catfish. The flathead is thoroughly a predator. As Dalrymple notes:

It is the largest of all freshwater predators so discriminating in diet; this, along with the difficulties of locating and cajoling it, and the fact that it is a dweller chiefly in large and sometimes swift streams, lends it super stature. It is a fish of big waters; large but not heavily polluted rivers. Fingerling yellows forage almost exclusively on living aquatic insect larvae and then graduate swiftly to live minnows. It's common to see 6- or 8-inch-long ones chasing minnows along winged dams and riprap in shallow, swift riffles, such as on the Mississippi (1978: 76).

The predatory nature of the flathead determines the type of bait to be used, making further distinctions among catfishermen.

You don't have to smell like a three day old coyote carcass to be a catfisherman. Most people think that you need to use the rankest, worst-smelling concoction possible to catch catfish (Kidd, 1979: 4).

The size and food habits of the flathead provide a number of areas in which ideas on flathead fishing have developed. One area deals with the equipment needed to land one of the big fish. All six flathead

fishermen interviewed used 'heavy duty' equipment. This included a rod measuring over seven feet long with an appropriate sized, open-faced reel. A 30- to 50-pound line was normally used, with one informant using 108-pound line. Hooks of 4/0 to 7/0 were used with three to five ounce slip sinkers. The slip sinker is used to reduce resistance when a flathead picks up the bait. This is an attempt to make the bait seem more natural to the predator. The hook is placed behind the dorsal fin of the bait fish. This gives the bait some freedom to swim around a little to attract the flathead.

Flathead fishermen believe that good strong equipment is essential for consistently landing the big ones. Even then it sometimes isn't enough. One informant related the following story.

I was fishing from a boat one day when I hooked into a monster of a fish. I had 75 pound test line on a short but stout rod that I use when fishing from a boat. When I hooked him, he went to the bottom and began to bury himself in the mud. I tried to raise him but would only get him about two feet off the bottom and couldn't hold him any more. I rowed my boat to get a better angle but it didn't help. Finally, after about three hours and 45 minutes, the line broke and I went home empty handed. Now I use 108 pound test line.

The discriminating diet of the flathead influences places where a large one will be found. Since the large flatheads require a lot of food, it selects a lair which is conducive to feeding its enormous appetite. The fish is primarily a nocturnal feeder and does not stray far from its lair during the day. However, the fish will feed on prey which are close to the lair during the day. Thus, day time fishermen search out spots where the flathead might stay during the day.

The homesite, where it lazes during the day, may be a hollow submerged stump, or a depression among a heap of bottom boulders. Commonly it is a big cave in a rock wall, or a big hollow beneath an undercut ledge. In some rivers,

beaver or muskrat burrows are taken over by adult yellows. Where these cover types are unavailable, some individual cats make "wallows" on the bottom in quiet spots. In all such situations the big cat lies quietly, waiting to engulf prey. As light dims, the fish may move out of the lair to feed noisily in a shallow, clear riffle, simply blotting up bait fish. Sometimes they gang up below dams to feed by day, particularly during spring flood periods (Dalrymple, 1978: 80).

The informants displayed similar knowledge. Five of them regularly fished the tubes and river just below a dam. The other fished various spots along brush piles and crevices in the river. The latter informant had a good knowledge of the river and knew of several deep holes in the river where flatheads generally lived.

Part of the socialization process involves learning to 'read' a river, stream, or other body of water to pick out places where big flatheads make a lair. The above body of knowledge on the feeding and living habits of the flathead and the experience gained by fishing and talking to other fishermen assist in this learning process. Casting techniques become perfected to an extent that bait can be placed very close to the lair. This often involves a knowledge of how the current will carry the bait.

The next relevant notion of catfishing is what to do once a flathead takes the bait. This is an exact technique which is different from many other freshwater fishing techniques. As previously noted, flathead fishing is not for the impatient. "You may wait for hours for a bite, or maybe days." Since the fisherman may wait so long, the 'drag' on the reel is set very loose so that if a catfish takes the bait, the line will pull out of the reel with little resistance. This is accompanied by movement of the tip of the rod and the sound of the 'drag' being pulled.

Often, the 'bail' on the reel is released to offer no resistance. When the fish stops to eat the prey, the line is carefully tightened up. When the next tug is felt, the rod is sharply jerked back by the fisherman to set the hook in the fish's mouth.

The "bite" is sometimes very slow and deliberate. Some old hands claim the cat is scaling its prey. Scientists believe the fish simply takes time to crush the live forage with powerful mouth bones before swallowing (Dalrymple, 1978: 80).

Once hooked, it is believed the catfish will attempt to return to its lair. If the fish gets to such a place, it may be impossible for the fisherman to land the fish. The struggle may go on for hours until the line either breaks or is cut by the fisherman. Sometimes the catfish will make a run and pull all the line out of the reel and may even pull the pole into the water. This occasionally happens to those fishermen (often 'generalists') who accidentally hook one of the big fish. One respondent reported losing an unattended rod in his boat when a big catfish or "something" took off with it.

Once hooked, the battle between fish and fisherman becomes intense. A great amount of skill and knowledge is required to 'tire-out' a flat-head and eventually land him. Learning to use the rod to take the brunt of the resistance and other techniques come with experience. A great deal is learned when a large fish is lost. One learns not to repeat past mistakes.

Another notion and bit of esoteric knowledge in the fishing sequence is landing a big fish once one is hooked and the struggle has subsided. The catfish is considered to be a dangerous fish and many legends and stories abound which support this danger. (These legends will be

discussed later). Dalrymple discusses the dangers in the final scene of his fishing story.

I'm not sure how long the two of them battled each other. At last, his shirt soaked to his hide by perspiration, the old gent had the fish in the shallows. I know you're not supposed to mess with a fellow's fish when he's about to land it. But I was in a frenzy, now seeing the enormous, slope-headed, mottled fish with its undershot lower jaw. He mustn't lose it! I jumped in beside it, up to my waist, hoping to somehow force that gigantic fish ashore.

"Git away!" the grizzled one yelled. "Look at them spines. You wanta get your guts cut loose? One flop and he'll open you up like a tomater can!"

The greater pectoral spines I now saw were bristled straight out from the bottom of the body just behind the gill covers. They were at least 6 inches long and serrated. I sloshed ashore, embarrassed, but still overwhelmed with excitement. The fisherman kept pressure on until the catfish, well hooked, finally ceased all protest. Then very slowly he eased its head onto the sand, snubbed up, made an expert grab for the gaping lower jaw, and dragged it out onto the dry land. Later, on a cotton scale at the old man's nearby ranch house, that fish hung down a whisker over 40 pounds (1978: 74-76).

As noted in the story, fishermen have developed techniques for getting the big catfish ashore without being injured. The informants all felt that the use of landing nets was a poor technique. A net large enough to handle a big flathead is very awkward to use. "Too many things can go wrong when you are using a net (because) if you bump a flathead with the metal hoop on the net, you can kiss him goodbye." One flathead fisherman described the method to Vic McLearn in an article on flathead fishing.

"For some reason, the touch of a man's hand doesn't seem to bother them so I (land) all my flatheads by hand". Before grabbing a fish (he) locates the position of the hook in the flathead's mouth. "You've got to be real careful about that hook," he cautions. "If you get it caught in your hand with 30-40 pounds of flathead flopping around it's gonna 'smart' some!"

"As soon as I get up close to a flathead, I just ease my hands down of the fish's stomach or side and start rubbin' him gently. From there, I work my hand into his mouth, get a good grip on that lower jaw and just haul him aboard" (McLearn, 1973: 3-4).

This technique is not without its danger as one learns to become an expert grabber. Informants described different instances of people getting the skin of their arm scraped off while trying to land a big flathead. However, with experience, the danger diminishes.

Sanctions and Legends

The third characteristic described by Hollingshead centered upon the sanctions imposed by the subgroup. Hollingshead described this characteristic as "...appropriate sanctions applied by the membership to control members in their relations with one another and with the larger society and to control nonmembers in their relations with members" (1939: 817). Since the social circle is informal, only informal sanctions are applied. Ridicule is one sanction applied to 'deviant members.' An example for the flathead fishermen is those members who may try different fishing methods. Some use artificial lures which requires constantly casting and reeling the lure. While this behavior may be acceptable when the individual is alone, when he/she is out with other members, he/she is expected to follow the normal routine.

Other sanctions also govern the interaction. A certain degree of sociability is expected of the catfish fisherman. An unfriendly catfish fisherman is uncommon and sanctions similar to shunning may be imposed to those who are unfriendly. Sociability centers on brief comments about the weather and fishing conditions. However, sanctions exist on too much sociability. That is, one is not supposed to bother a catfish fisherman if he is busy. The same nonverbal clues which exist in normal

conversation are apparent in the sociability patterns. Sanctions against too much conversation may include blaming the excessive talker for scaring the fish or allowing a fish to get away.

The conversation restraints may be ignored in some cases. This was apparent in the research and was probably due to at least two different factors. First, it often occurs on a slow day for catching fish and talking was the next best thing to do. Secondly, some older fishermen saw fishing partly as a means to escape the boredom of retirement and actually enjoyed talking.

Perhaps the area in which sanctions are the greatest are those concerning who should attempt to land a large catfish. As previously noted, catfish present some very real dangers and young or inexperienced fishermen are strongly discouraged to land one alone unless under the supervision of a member of the social circle. Many legends abound which highlight the dangers of inexperience in landing catfish. All six flathead fishermen noted that catfish were dangerous while only four other respondents expressed such opinions. Many generalists and species-specific types laughed at the idea of a person being fatally or critically injured by any catfish. Most of them had experienced minor 'stings' from the poisonous horns of the catfish but the dangers of the large catfish was out of their range of experience.

As Dalrymple notes:

Most of the fishermen caution against letting youngsters go after really big yellow cats. A kid in a boat, or wading a stream, could get himself drowned in a hurry (1978: 82).

Informants supported this belief. One related an incident in which a boy was fishing with a cane pole. The pole broke as the fish was close

to shore so he dived in the water after the big flathead. The large dorsal fin of the catfish stabbed the boy right through the heart. Another stated that his grandson was almost pulled into the river once when a 25 pound catfish took his bait and headed down river. "The boy wouldn't let go for the world but I got there in time to take over and land it. He is so stubborn that that old flathead would have pulled him into the river before he would have let loose of the pole".

A body of legends and folktales have been built up around such experiences. These bits of folklore, which comprise the second level of legitimation in the Berger and Luckmann framework, provide further insight into the subjective world of the social circle. Folklore on huge catfish relate the dangers of its size, of fishing for one, of trying to land one, and of 'noodling' (hand-grabbing) for big catfish. Some old-time catfishermen tell some wild catfish stories in which it is difficult to separate fact from fiction. However, enough documented cases on the dangers of big catfish are recorded to support the idea that most fictitious stories have some basis or element of truth.

Many stories emphasize the large size of the catfish. One story involved a fisherman who had set a trotline across a river. The man was using a rowboat to check the line when he came upon a big flathead hooked to the line. "He pulled up on the line and felt a thud on the bottom of his boat. He looked on the right and saw an eye of the fish. Then he looked to the left and saw the other eye. He cut that line and got the hell out of there in a hurry!"

Other stories of catfish big enough to eat a man abound. These include the 'divers' stories. The common theme involves underwater divers reporting very large catfish abiding in the area where they were

diving. Often the divers were said to have been routinely checking dams for structural conditions. One informant said that a T.V. newscast out of Wichita, Kansas, 15 years ago reported such an incident. One diver who was inspecting a dam came up immediately and refused to go back down because of giant catfish big enough to eat a man. Another diver didn't believe the first and went down next. He returned immediately with the same story. Variations include divers demanding shark cages or place the setting at the scene of an accident in which a vehicle has gone into deep water. The latter version included one in which a school bus was involved and reported giant catfish attempting to eat the victims.

The bus incident may have had an influence on, or resulted from the following legend concerning the dangers of fishing for the big flatheads.

The incident occurred at the Nolin River in Kentucky. It seems that there was a great big catfish spotted in the river. It reportedly had attacked a calf as it stood in the water near the bank. The catfish grabbed the calf by the leg and pulled it into the river. A few days later, an old man who frequently fished the river went on his usual daily fishing trip. The man had a technique of casting his line into the water with his cane pole, then untying the line from the pole and tying it to his big toe. Thus, the man could nap and know when he had a bite by the tugging on his big toe. However, on this particular day, the man disappeared and was never seen again. It was speculated that the big catfish got hooked and either sucked the line in or took off down stream pulling the man into the water before he could get loose. It was thought by some that the catfish ate the man.

Other reports of near drownings occurring from boat fishing were also told. "I've heard of a fisherman being yanked overboard and almost drowned," stated one informant. Indeed, this story may have a basis in fact. In 1947, Bud Jackson wrote an article which vividly describes several cases of fatalities or injuries inflicted by big 'yeller cats.' Two incidents involving near drownings were reported. Both involved

attempts to land a fish which had been caught on a trotline. In one, a man and neighbor boy had hooked a large flathead on a line.

George paddled the boat alongside the spot, some twelve to fourteen feet from shore. George instructed the youth to reach for the staging which held the big one and then try to bring the fish over the side of the boat. The boy went him one better and got a hand in the fish's gill-slit, where-upon the monster promptly closed down the gill cover crushing the boy's hand painfully, and then lunged away, pulling the youngster half-way over the side of the boat. The small craft immediately swamped and its two occupants were pitched off into deep water (Jackson, 1947: 40-41).

In the other incident, the fisherman's line broke and the man grabbed the end with fish attached and was pulled into the water. He made a grab at the fish and was finned clear through the palm of the hand.

If you have ever been gipped by a catfish - however large or small - you'll concur in the statement that it is a most painful thing. The spines of the catfish, located one on each side and one on his back, are serrated with tiny, needle-sharp projections, curving backward like tines. They go in easily, but they come out grudgingly, and in coming out they lacerate the flesh unmercifully (Jackson, 1947: 84).

The man was almost drowned before being rescued by a fellow fisherman.

Since all six informants reported they didn't read fishing magazines, these stories probably have been passed along orally among flathead fishermen. The situations and other details may have been changed to fit other experiences. A story of being fatally stabbed in the eye was mentioned by one informant. Jackson also documented a similar incident in his article (1974: 83-84). Still other stories of fishermen being stabbed in the stomach while landing a fish were reported by informants and supported by Jackson (84-85).

Perhaps the most documented area of flathead related injuries and deaths occurs among 'noodlers.' These legends also have broad variations and probably have been passed on in oral traditions. The most famous

story is about the one-armed man who went noodling (A noodler is one who catches large fish with his/her bare hands). Fourteen of the 28 respondents indicated knowledge of the one-armed man incident by either reporting it or acknowledging knowing the story when it was mentioned by the researcher. Jackson describes the incident as follows.

They tell a story down in the White River country of Arkansas about "Hooker John," a one-handed hill man who wore a hook on the stump of his brawny right arm and one of the section's most widely renowned "noodlers." A noodler in case you don't know, is one who specializes in catching large fish with his bare hands, or, in the case of Hooker John, with one bare hand and a hook-hand.

The hook was far from a handicap to the mountaineer, for it was a first-class asset in handling big catfish. Hooker John would wade or dive into a pool which he knew, or suspected, to hold a large fish. When he located his quarry, he caught it by the simple expedient of driving the razor-sharp hook into its head and dragging it out onto the bank.

The one-handed man failed to return home after one such expedition, so the legend goes. They found his body a few days later, bobbing in an eddy, and still caught on the hook at the end of that right arm was the carcass of a tremendous catfish. They theorized that Hooker John had caught a tartar, a fish too heavy even for his strength, and had been unable to free the hook; hence he was dragged under and drowned.

I cannot vouch for the authenticity of the tale, but I can vouch for the soundness of the theory that there are plenty of catfish in the world of water that are big enough and mean enough to drown you if you grab one in such fashion that you can't turn loose. The big cat is the rough-neck of fresh water, strong as a bull, usually as awkward, but always an antagonist worthy of respect in any man-to-fish battle (1947: 40).

The informants mentioned different variations. Two reported the incident occurred in Texas in the San Angelo River. Others reported that only the man was found, not the catfish. Some reported the man was never found. Still others said the man had two good arms with a bale hook tied to one. Despite the variations, the danger of the catfish was highlighted.

Other legends are also found among members. The catfish is considered by many members to be a very intelligent fish. Many legends and folktales build up around this perceived intelligence. In general, it is assumed that the water is the territory of the catfish. Thus, care is taken by the fisherman to not make disturbing noises or actions which might scare the catfish. Most of the legends addressing the catfish's intelligence center upon the 'battles' between the catfish and the fisherman. The saying "...you have to be smarter than what you are fishing for," (or some variation) is often quoted. The first battle has to do with the action which takes place before the fish is caught. Many a fisherman has attributed getting his line caught in underwater brush or rock to a crafty catfish putting the hook in such a position. Often, when the fisherman reels in his line to reveal a barehook, the fisherman will attribute this to a smart catfish getting a free meal. If this happens often enough, the fisherman may say something like, "...I'm getting tired of feeding the fish today". Legends of the older catfish teaching the younger catfish how to get the bait without being hooked also abound.

Still other stories relate innovative methods to land a large catfish. These usually occur after a big one has broken loose and got away. One informant related one such innovative method for the 'hundred pounders.' It involves a very large hook connected to a steel cable which is wound on a wench attached to a fourwheel drive pickup. An entire chicken (feathers and all) is placed on the hook and cast out into the middle of the river by a rowboat. When the 'hundred pounder' is caught, the pickup is used to reel the fish in, thus relieving the fisherman from too much physical effort. This method is of course highly

questionable and undoubtedly is one of those proverbial fisherman's stories. This points to another important aspect of the subculture; the story telling behavior. It also points out the innovative nature of the catfish fisherman and a symbolic aversion to hard, physical work. However, the symbolism is a contradiction since most catfish fishermen observed were employed in manual labor type jobs and expressed a deep satisfaction with 'fighting' a big catfish, often over an hour, to catch it.

While it is sometimes difficult to separate fact from fiction in most fishing stories, the danger imposed by the big catfish is very real. While the legends may seem like wild stories, they serve a very real purpose in instruction and warning to the members of the social circle. Such folklore also has relevance exoterically. When these stories are told between members, they generally know when the truth is being stretched. However, people outside the social circle may not readily recognize the difference between fact and fiction. Indeed, members may tell especially tall tales to non-members as a means of asserting one's fishing and storytelling skills. These tall tales may be used to control nonmembers in their relations with members (i.e., they are not to always take the fisherman seriously). This helps to draw and maintain a group boundary.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has had several objectives as an impetus for conducting the research on catfishermen. First, very little was known about the subgroup beyond various mass media accounts of the exploits of the catfishermen. Thus, much of the thesis has been purely for the sake of gaining knowledge, esoteric and other on a subgroup of which little is known. Further, mass media sources indicate that the social circle of flathead catfishermen, and catfishermen in general, is not isolated or solely unique to Kansas. Indeed, catfishermen social circles exist in many different parts of the nation. Dalrymple (1978) mentions groups in Arizona and Texas. Sergeant (1979) describes such groups in Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Jackson (1947) adds Missouri and Oklahoma to the list of states which have subgroups of catfishermen.

These subgroups provide a unique contrast to the numerous studies on 'elite' fish species such as bass and trout. By studying these unique subgroups, refinements can be made in current typologies, methodologies, and approaches which might otherwise be obscured. These refinements furnish a greater sociological base from which social scientists can enter the field of the sociology of fishing. In turn, this could afford greater utilization of resources, both social and natural, to begin to solve current 'people' problems in fish and wildlife management.

One small beginning in this endeavor would be to explore myths about catfish which prevent many people from fishing for the species.

Sergeant (1979: 82) notes that in the South, catfish are being under-harvested to such an extent that the abundant fish are still being taken commercially. Literally thousands of tons are being harvested each year and winding up in some of the world's finest restaurants. Yet, these very same waters are being overfished in other species. "It's a resource that's going untouched, even during these days when bass and other freshwater species are feeling a rather acute case of angling pressure" (Sergeant, 1979: 82). This occurs despite the fact that "modern bassing methods are not a 4X leader's width away from the best catfishing methods" (Sergeant, 1979: 82).

One myth about the catfish is its taste. Many people still have a cultural aversion to anything which scavenges half-rotted 'stuff' off the bottom of a lake or river. However, the flathead catfish is strictly a predator and does not fit the above image. Yet many catfishing experts find it difficult to distinguish between the two types when eating the fish. Even those who do like catfish have an aversion to the taste of the large ones. Seventeen of the 28 respondents indicated a belief that the large catfish had a greasy taste which made them unfit to eat. However, when prepared properly, a big one tastes as good as any other.

If they're prepared properly, the meat is delicious. But you've got to be sure and trim off all the dark meat as well as the big veins. These are what give the meat a strong, oily flavor. I learned you don't "dress" a flathead, you "Butcher" it like you would a hog. The tail was cut off, severing the large caudal artery. After letting the fish bleed out, it was skinned. At this point the dark side and belly meat was sliced off the underlying white meat. There's about a half-inch of this dark meat that should come off (McLearn, 1973: 5).

Some attempts have been made espousing the fine qualities of catfish meat. Playboy magazine published a recent article describing the fish

as a fine delicacy (Greenberg, 1979). However, many everyday anglers still hang on to these and other myths about taste, fighting or sporting abilities, and other cultural aversions.

The description of the social circle of flathead fishermen provides many implicit meanings the activity has for its members. Triangulation methodologies indicate that these meanings are fairly common among all flathead fishermen. Thus a researcher can get a better idea and feel for the intricacies of the fishing subgroup. Ideally, this should hold true for any such subgroup whether they be catfish fishermen, trotline runners, or even subgroups out of the sportsmen's world such as joggers or pool players. By treating the subgroup as a social circle which may have criteria associated with a somewhat more developed behaviors system (e.g., Hollingshead's criteria), the subgroup becomes more than just a group of isolated individuals participating in the same activity. The structure of the subgroup can begin to be seen in the context of a social circle. This applies to subgroups which might not fit into a subcultural context (Bryan's or Waxman's and Issac's). Thus, subgroups with less structure have a sociological framework in which they may be studied.

The Berger and Luckmann legitimation framework provides a basis from which to gain insight into the subjective meanings held by the subgroup. This emphasizes items the researcher should be aware of in order to gain a more complete perspective on the subgroup. Particular terms, argot, and other communication devices (e.g., gestures, facial expressions, voice tones, etc.) yield a more meaningful perspective on the subgroup. Other items of folklore associated with the group such as tales, legends, proverbs, riddles, and jokes furnish even more insight into the intricacies of the subgroup. These first two levels furnish a

basis for a detailed look at the notions associated with the group. These notions, in the case of fishermen, may be useful in understanding or assessing impacts on fishing resources. The general overview of the meaning the activity may have for the fishermen provides a base from which to furnish better programs and recreational management to improve the quality of an individual's experiences.

Implications for Future Research

Like many research endeavors, the research on the social circle of catfishermen yielded more unanswered questions than it did answers. Several unexplored areas among catfishermen exist. One area is the possibility of a negative stereotype of catfishing which may cause anglers to avoid fishing for catfish. The myth concerning taste has been briefly explored. However, there is also a strong stereotype that catfishing is a lower class activity. The role of the media in perpetuating bass and trout fishing while systematically ignoring catfish could be further researched. A quantified study of socioeconomic status of various social circles of catfishermen, bass fishermen, trout fishermen, etc., could be combined with the qualitative aspects to gain a perspective on any myths and differences which may exist. This would also strengthen the triangulation methodological approach. The socioeconomic aspects might have relevance for the current typology of recreational specialization.

While concentrating on the social circle of flathead fishermen, other social circles of catfish fishermen have been largely ignored. The channel cat fishermen represent a group of fishermen who possess equally interesting and valuable social circle qualities. The esoteric knowledge

and transmission of stink bait recipes offer several unique features. The social circle of trotline fishermen has been left untouched, although some mass media sources have briefly examined this dying artform (McLearn, 1973a; 1973b). These subgroups and other fishing subgroups offer areas for further applying the descriptive framework developed in this thesis.

The description of the flathead subgroup only briefly touches the surface of the folkloristic potential with argot and legends concerning the activity. These items could provide further insight into the meaning of the activity. Using folklore field methods to record and analyze the variations of folktales and legends and their oral transmission may provide further information on the structure of the social circle on a broader regional level. This and other items described in the study could be expanded by narrowing the study to only flathead fishermen instead of surveying a wide field of catfishermen. The descriptions might also be improved by designing a quantitative study to look at the subgroup. This would provide a methodological triangulation when combined with the qualitative approach.

The recreational policy aspects of the catfishermen subgroups might provide a further area of investigation. Catfishermen tend to be self-policing in that they display an aversion to illegal fishing tactics or unsportsmen-like activities. They also display ecological concerns of preventing pollution and depletion of fishing resources. In addition, certain safety policies are informally held by the catfishermen. These and other policies might be further explored, developed, and compared with the policies of other subgroups. This would add to the understanding of different subgroups and serve as potentially useful information for recreational resource managers.

General observations of the fishing activity yielded additional insight beyond the subgroup, social circle level. It was observed that fishing provides a basis for interaction between people who would normally ignore each other. One respondent said, "If I met you on the street downtown, I wouldn't say shit to you. But here, (the tubes) it is different. It is easier to talk to strangers and be friends. Almost everyone here is friendly". This interaction element of fishing may be peculiar to certain unique areas such as the tubes but it nevertheless provides insight which might be used in recreational management to improve the recreational experience of these types of fishermen. Future research may further explore this area.

The interaction atmosphere also provides a rare opportunity to transcend the age segregation that is apparent in our society (e.g., see Riley, 1971, 1972, 1976; Rose, 1965). Fishing is an activity in which the elderly and children can interact in a common endeavor. Some of the respondents reported such instances as part of the reason they went fishing. Other cases were observed during the various roles of participant observation. Grandparents teaching a grandchild to fish were often observed. This provides opportunity for meaningful interaction between the age groups that otherwise might not occur. The socialization patterns between young and old is another area which warrants further study from both a recreational and aging perspective.

A further area of research is the therapeutic role fishing has for many people. Several of the older respondents indicated the possibility of such a role as both a manifest and latent function of the activity. One respondent reported that his doctor encouraged him to go fishing to help settle a nerve condition. Another felt that fishing helped his

arthritis since he was out in the sun while fishing. The activity also can be seen as a form of social therapy. The previously mentioned interaction qualities and age integration are examples. Indeed, fishing therapy may be analogous to the current trend in horticultural therapy. This approach may have substantial relevance to a variety of sociological interests.

Current sociological terminology and theoretical development is noticeably inadequate for describing subgroups such as the flathead catfishermen. The social circle is a very broad concept and must be constantly refined to fit the subgroup under investigation. The use of Hollingshead and Berger and Luckmann to refine the meaning of a particular social circle is cumbersome and not always expedient. However, in describing the social circle of flathead catfishermen, different terminology and theoretical constructs became apparent. Furthermore, these findings have relevance beyond the social circle of flathead anglers, and beyond the activity of fishing and other forms of recreation. Indeed, the findings conceivably have relevance for any activity in which individuals share common interests.

The activity of fishing can be conceived of in terms of the amount of commitment an angler has. The degree of commitment influences the experiences and meanings the activity has as well as enhancing relationships with those who have similar commitments. Fishing in general may be thought of as a first-order activity in which participants have enough interest to commit a certain amount of time and money into the sport. This is similar to the 'generalist' who has established fishing as a part of his/her recreational routine.

As the angler becomes more involved in the sport, an interest in a specific species of fish or similar species of fish is developed. The angler becomes committed to catching a particular species of fish by a variety of techniques. Fishing for these anglers may be conceived of as a second-order activity. These anglers have more commitment to the sport than those who view fishing as a first-order activity. The second-order activity is analogous to the 'species specialists' typology.

A third-order activity may be said to exist for those individuals who are highly committed to fishing for a particular species of fish using a particular technique in a specific body of water. The flathead catfishermen, specialized channel cat fishermen, trotliner fishermen, and Bryan's trout fishermen exemplify instances of a third-order activity. These anglers have more commitment to their fishing activity than those anglers involved in lower order fishing activities. Again, this third-order activity is analogous to the species-technique-setting specialists typology.

As a progression is made from a first-order activity to a third-order activity, the structure of the social circle surrounding the activity changes. As indicated from this research, the social circle centered around a third-order activity has a more developed body of technical and esoteric knowledge. Although the structure and membership remains informal and voluntary for the flathead catfishermen, there are distinguishable behavior patterns, communication symbols, sanctions and other structural differences. The use of Hollingshead and Berger and Luckmann is one of several potential 'tools' which could be used to discover these structural differences.

To re-emphasize, the terminology of first-order, second-order, and third-order activities has relevance beyond the social circle of catfishermen and fishing. Progress and development of this new conceptual approach will occur as sociologists begin to apply the approach to particular activities and groups with which they have experiences with. By testing this conceptual approach, it is hoped that advancements will be made in qualitative sociology as well as sociology itself.

As indicated by the various suggestions for future research, the sociology of fishing has relevance beyond fishing and recreation. Since the subject deals with individuals and groups, it has implications for many areas of sociology. However, the concepts and approaches used must continuously be tested for the advancement of sociology.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDES

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR BAITSHOP OWNERS

The following interview guide was employed in discussions with local baitshop owners. The questions served as cues to state questions in a more practical sense, most normally within the context of a general conversation concerning local fishing activities and local fishermen. The questions facilitated further in-depth discussions of fishing and were used to help develop an interview guide for local catfishermen.

Introduction: I am interested in researching local fishing activities and fishermen and would like to talk with you about your insight on this subject. Your name and responses will remain anonymous if you wish to participate.

What do you think is the most popular kind of fishing in this area?

Are there people in this area who fish primarily for catfish?

Do you think that there are any differences between fishermen who fish for catfish and those who fish for other species of fish?

Are catfishermen unique or special in any other way?

What kinds of equipment do catfishermen usually buy?

What kinds of bait are popular among catfishermen?

Do you know of any popular catfishing spots in the area?

How and where do most catfishermen get their information?

Are you familiar with any local stories (true or untrue) about catfishing?

Have you ever heard of people being injured from a catfish?

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CATFISHERMEN

The following interview guide was employed in the field collection of data involving catfishermen. The questions served as cues to state questions in a more practical sense, most normally within the context of a general conversation with the respondents. The questions also facilitated further in-depth discussion of various related topics.

Introduction: I am conducting research on local fishing activities and fishermen and would like to talk with you about your fishing experiences. Your name will remain anonymous and your responses will be confidential if you wish to participate in the study.

What kind of fishing do you think is best?

Do you fish primarily during a particular season or year around?

During the best part of the fishing season, about how many hours a week do you fish?

Do you fish during the week, weekends or both?

Do you fish during the winter?(if so, what kind of fish) (if not, what types of recreation do you engage in?).

Do you fish primarily for catfish or other kinds of fish?

Do you feel that there is any difference between catfish fishermen and other types of fishermen?

What size of catfish do you generally fish for? Why?

Is there any particular size that is best for eating? Why?

What are the differences between the sizes?

How did you get interested in fishing? (in catfishing?) (who interested you?).

When did you first become interested in catfishing?

Would you say that most of your friends are involved in catfishing?

Do you fish alone or with a regular group?

When does the regular group usually fish? (overnight, weekends, etc.).

What are some reasons that you go fishing? (recreation, food/subsistence, diversion/fill empty hours, etc.).

Do you feel that the quality of your fishing experience is diminished if you don't catch a fish?

Are there any particular magazines or other sources of information which are helpful to you in your catfishing experience?

What kinds of considerations about the behavior of the catfish do you take into account when choosing bait, equipment and fishing methods?

What kind of bait do you usually use?

Do you make your own bait? Where did you get the recipe or information on how to make the bait?

What kind of reel do you prefer to use (not brand name)? Why?

What size and type of rod do you prefer?

What pound test line do you usually use?

Do you set trot lines or use any other fishing methods?

How much money would it cost me to get equipped as well as you are?

Do you have a special fishing area or spot? How did you find it or what attracted you to it?

Is there any kinds of behavior by other fishermen that you find disturbing?

Is there any type of fisherman that is detrimental to catfishing?

Do you think that more people are interested in catfishing than other sport fishing?

Have you noticed any changes in the type of fish which is popular in the past few years?

What is the largest catfish that you have ever caught? (age, method, bait, etc.).

How old were you when you first caught a big catfish (over 25 lbs.)?

Can catfishing be dangerous?

Have you every heard of any one being injured by a big catfish?

Have you every fixed a carp? What do you do when you accidently catch one?

What kind of work do you do for a living?

THE SOCIAL CIRCLE OF CATFISHERMEN:
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF FISHING

by

Allan Duane Gill

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

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Despite fishing's popularity both as a sport and leisure activity, the world of the recreational fisherman has been largely ignored by sociology. As 'people problems' in recreational resource management become more evident, the need for information on various recreationalists becomes essential for sound management policies. Past research efforts have provided information about the fisherman but these have primarily been quantitative descriptions of characteristics, motivations, and economics of the participants. This has created misconceptions such as the idea that fishermen constitute a homogeneous group of recreationalists. In addition, there is a lack of research on the qualitative aspects of fishermen. These issues need to be dealt with to provide more accurate information for maximization of recreational resources.

This thesis contributes to the sociology of fishing by providing a framework for understanding the subjective world of a subgroup of fishermen. A description of the subgroup of catfish fishermen was the vehicle for illustrating the framework. Research on local catfishermen involved Gold's (1958) four roles of participant observation (including interviewing area baitshop owners, a district fish and game protector, and 28 catfishermen) and a review of mass media sources dealing with the subject. This data triangulation methodology provided internal validity to the findings. The research also offered refinements to current typologies of recreational specialists (Bryan, 1976) and various approaches of describing subgroups of recreationalists.

The research revealed four types of catfish fishermen: generalists, who fished for a variety of species as well as catfish; species specialists, who primarily fished for catfish using a variety of methods in a variety of settings; and two distinct groups of "technique-species-setting

specialists" who fished for a particular genus of catfish using specific methods under specific water conditions. One subgroup of technique-species-setting specialists concentrated on channel cat, ictalurus punctatus, while the other subgroup fished for flathead catfish, pylodictis olivaris. The latter subgroup was the principle subject evaluated in the thesis.

Using Simmel's (1955) broad concept of the social circle combined with specific characteristics described by Hollingshead's (1939) criteria for a behavior system, the subgroup of flathead catfishermen was examined. The social circle of flathead fishermen displayed behavior characteristics which coincided with Hollingshead's criteria. They showed an identifiable complex of distinct values, communication devices (argot and other symbols), techniques, behavior patterns, socialization processes, and sanctions. These characteristics showed that the social circle of flathead catfishermen was distinct from the other groups of fishermen.

The subjective meaning of the social circle of flathead catfishermen was examined and described by adapting the framework of legitimation levels as explained by Berger and Luckmann (1966). Three levels of meaning were described: linguistic objectifications of experiences; folkloristic experiences; and experiences with the explicit notions associated with the activity. The social circle's argot and other communication devices comprised the first level of meaning. Legends and folktales expressing the dangers involved with big catfish and killer catfish exemplified the folkloristic meanings. Precise fishing techniques concerning the whys, hows, whens, and wheres of flathead catfish fishing illustrated the third level of meanings.

The descriptive framework based on the social circle and levels of meaning attached to the activity has relevance beyond the subgroup of

catfishermen or other recreationalists. This framework can be developed and adapted to more accurately describe other subgroups of individuals in various sectors of society. Thus, the research presented in this thesis has value beyond the area of the sociology of fishing.