

FROM LIVING TO FISH TO FISHING TO LIVE: THE EVOLUTION OF PERSONAL LEISURE

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of guiding anglers for compensation on a guide's attitude toward fishing as a personally satisfying recreational activity. Additionally, we sought to develop and employ a specialization typology based on style of fishing participation to understand how current attitudes towards fishing as a personal leisure activity vary among different groups of fishing guides. Eighteen semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with Texas inshore fishing guides and subsequent analysis yielded a typology representing four distinct styles of participation. These guides can be placed on a continuum from least specialized to most specialized: 1) Limit Guides, 2) All-purpose Guides, 3) Lure Guides and 4) Sight-casting Guides. Guides exhibiting less specialized styles of participation were more likely to view guiding as "work" or a "job", less likely to participate in fishing as a personal leisure activity, and less likely to experience personal angling enjoyment vicariously through their clients' fishing experience.

1.0 Introduction

The coastal waters of Texas provide recreational saltwater fishing opportunities for over 1.1 million licensed anglers each year (Southwick 2006). As with many other recreational activities, some individuals may lack the necessary skills, knowledge, confidence, or insight to participate. Recreational inshore fishing guides share their knowledge and experience and provide an opportunity to participate in saltwater fishing to anglers who might not otherwise engage in the activity.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) defines a guide as "any person who for compensation, accompanies, assists, or transports any person engaged in fishing in the public waters of the state" (TPWD 2011). Guides are most often advanced anglers, who for a variety of reasons (e.g., lifestyle preference, pursuit of angling passion, financial incentives), aspire to make a living (or generate at least part of their income) by guiding other anglers on fishing trips (Ditton et al. 1978). Guides acknowledge, and the first author has personally witnessed, that anglers frequently remark that guides have the "best job in the world to make a living fishing". From the perspective of the general angler, progression from avid angler to professional fishing guide may seem like an enviable career move. However, we sought to investigate if attitudes toward fishing as a personal recreation activity were negatively impacted once a person adopts the activity as a professional career.

The purpose of this research was to develop and employ a specialization typology based on style of fishing participation and use this typology to understand the potential ramifications of developing a professional career from a personal leisure activity. Specifically, we wanted to understand how this recreation-to-work transition might impact a guide's attitude toward fishing for leisure based on their level of specialization.

1.1 Previous Work

Serious leisure is defined as "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist or volunteer activity people find so substantial, interesting and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a leisure career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience" (Stebbins 2008). Unlike casual leisure, which is "a short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it", serious leisure represents a substantial and enduring pursuit of a recreational activity over time (Stebbins 2008, p. 5). Stebbins describes this phenomenon of recreational advancement over time as a leisure career. In fact, a leisure career may even evolve into a work career (Stebbins 2008). The concept of recreation specialization is closely associated with serious leisure.

Specialization suggests that as one becomes more involved in an activity, one may experience a focusing of behavior, skill, and commitment to that activity (Scott & Shafer 2001). Specialization is defined as "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, p. 175). Bryan (1977, 1979) characterized specialization as a developmental process by which participants become more committed and involved in the activity over time (Scott & Shafer 2001) and exhibit a range of characteristic styles of participation that could be placed along a continuum (Kerins et al. 2007). Styles of participation are "a mix of orientations and behaviors that characterize a person's involvement in a given activity" (Scott & Godbey, 1994, p. 276). Research suggests that many people do not progress continuously and that developmental stages may be better understood as distinct styles of participation (Kuentzel 2001, Kuentzel & Heberlein 2008, Scott & Godbey 1994, Scott & Lee 2010). The concept of participation style is particularly helpful for understanding the fishing guide population and the associated fishing context.

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Texas saltwater fishing guides represent a population whose serious leisure pursuit has evolved into a work career. Although guides represent a unique, highly specialized population in the world of recreational fishing, a diversity of participation styles is evident among them. This study used specialization based on style of participation to differentiate attitudes toward guiding as work. Specifically, we investigated three research questions:

- 1) Do recreational fishing guides consider taking anglers on chartered fishing trips as work?
- 2) Do guides continue to view and participate in recreational fishing as a personal leisure activity?
- 3) Is a guide's personal enjoyment associated with angling fulfilled vicariously through the client's fishing experience?

2.0 Methods

The study site encompassed over 367 miles of Texas coastal waters from Louisiana to Mexico. Data were collected over a six month period from May 2010 to October 2010. A purposive sampling framework was employed and participants were selected based on the author's knowledge of the inshore fishing guide community, the guide's geographic location, the guide's observed fishing style, and the guide's reputation among anglers and other guides. Eighteen face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with TPWD licensed recreational saltwater fishing guides. Interview conversations were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed and analyzed using ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software. Interviews lasted approximately one to five hours. Participants were afforded ample time to ensure that topics were fully explored. Data collection concluded after 18 participant interviews since data saturation had been reached and it was determined that additional interviews were unlikely to yield further insight.

Thematic analysis drew on grounded theory processes to develop a subworld model of specialization (Charmaz 2010). The iterative analytic process began with open coding of each informant's transcript followed by familial designation to identify like concepts. Each familial group then underwent focused coding followed by memo writing which ultimately led to the development of a manuscript (Charmaz 2010).

3.0 Results

This section is divided into two segments to address our research purpose. The first segment explores the specialization typology we developed using styles of participation and the second segment examines the ramifications of developing a professional career from a personal leisure activity based on our typology.

3.1 Specialization Typology Based on Style of Participation

Based on our analysis of recreational inshore fishing guides, several distinct contextual attributes contribute to understanding style of participation including tackle and technique, water depth, fish species and fishing method (Figure 1). Collectively, these four attributes define a guide's particular style of participation and each attribute reflects the specific skills and knowledge necessary to engage in a particular fishing style. Tackle and technique refer to the technical nature of the guide's rod and reel (e.g., spinning, casting, or fly/light tackle) and bait choice (e.g., natural bait, artificial lures, or fly). For our purposes, water depth is a function of the participant's ability to actually see the fish (blind-casting or sight-casting) in order to make a bait presentation. The type of fish and the preference of a target species also indicate particular fishing styles. Lastly, the fishing methods employed on a guided trip refer to the tactics used to actively or passively approach the fishing situation including: drifting or anchored from a watercraft, wading, poling a skiff, using a troll motor or walking in to a fishing area. These four attributes were commonly used by all participants in combination and help characterize the various types of guides encountered along the Texas coast.

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

Our analysis revealed four types of guides exhibiting different styles of participation: Limit Guide, All-purpose Guide, Lure Guide, and Sight-casting Guide (Table 1). Limit Guides were characterized first and foremost by their desire to catch the maximum allowed number (a.k.a. limit) of any inshore game fish; this typically includes spotted seatrout, red drum, flounder and black drum. This type of guide tends to employ the most effective tackle and techniques for catching the maximum number of particular kinds of fish and often uses spinning tackle with live bait. Limit Guides most often fish from an anchored boat and blind cast for fish.

<Insert Table 1 about here>

All-purpose Guides use a wider range of tackle, techniques, and fishing methods. This fishing style is characterized by the use of both natural bait and artificial lures while fishing from an anchored or drifting boat and may occasionally include wading. All-purpose Guides typically fish for red drum and spotted seatrout using blind casting techniques and keep the majority of their bag limit.

Lure Guides are a very specialized group exclusively targeting trophy trout with artificial lures. This group typically fishes while wading in shallow water and blind casting but will occasionally sight-cast to structure or fish. This group will often keep smaller-sized seatrout and release larger trophy seatrout.

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Lastly, the most specialized fishing style is the Sight-casting Guide who actively stalks red drum in very shallow water via a poling skiff or wading. This group is generally interested in sight-casting only and typically uses flyfishing techniques and tackle to pursue their quarry. Red drum are their primary target and this guide type will usually practice catch-and-release fishing while occasionally retaining a fish.

3.2 Ramifications of Developing a Professional Career from a Personal Recreation Activity

Three separate research questions were used to investigate the impacts of professional guiding on a guide's attitude toward fishing as a personal recreational activity based on style of participation: 1) Do recreational fishing guides consider taking anglers on chartered fishing trips as work? 2) Do guides continue to view and participate in recreational fishing as a personal leisure activity? 3) Is a guide's personal enjoyment associated with angling fulfilled vicariously through the client's fishing experience?

With respect to the first question, Limit Guides and All-purpose Guides were more likely to indicate that guiding anglers was "work" or "a job." One participant responded, "It is, it's a job. That's all it is. It's a job." Guides using more specialized fishing styles such as Lure and Sight-casting were more likely to indicate that guiding was not work or qualify their answer if they thought it was work. For example, one Sight-casting Guide responded to question one, "Yes. But I view it as the best job in the world. OK. And I view myself and the luckiest human on Earth."

Regarding question two, guides with less specialized styles of participation were less likely to view fishing or continue to participate in fishing as a personal leisure activity. When asked if fishing was pursued for personal enjoyment or just to have fun, one participant responded, "No. No. That's why I like hunting." Conversely, guides with more specialized styles of participation were more likely to indicate that they still viewed fishing as personal recreation and still participated in the activity during their leisure time. Also, some guides from each different style of participation indicated that they do not fish in their leisure time due to fulfillment through guiding or overexposure to the activity through guiding.

Lastly, with respect to research question three, guides with all styles of participation indicated that it was more fulfilling to guide someone to catch a fish than to personally catch a fish. Sight-casting guides were most likely to indicate that their personal angling desire was fulfilled vicariously through their clients' fishing experience. One Sight-casting Guide replied, "It was all coming back to me of how exciting it was the first time I ever did it and so you just transfer that." Guides exhibiting more specialized styles of participation also indicated that the meaning of fishing had evolved from participating as an angler catching fish to acting as a teacher instructing clients.

4.0 Discussion

Not surprisingly, a guide's particular style of participation appears to be linked to their current attitude toward angling as a personal recreational activity. Guides exhibiting less specialized styles of participation (Limit Guides and All-purpose Guides) were more likely to consider guiding anglers as "work" and to abandon it as a personal leisure activity. Conversely, guides exhibiting more specialized styles of participation (Lure Guides and Sight-casting Guides) were more likely to continue fishing as a personal recreation activity. The attitudes expressed by these four guide types are attributable in part to several factors that influence their attitudes of fishing as work: the angling experience of clients, degree of actual angling participation by guide on a guided trip, guide-client relationship, and how closely the style of participation used with clients reflects the guide's personal style of participation (Table 2).

<Insert Table 2 about here>

Limit Guides tend to cater to clients that have the least amount of angling experience and require the most assistance in performing basic fishing tasks (baiting the hook, casting the bait, fish retrieval, and hook removal); in some cases these guides actually fish for the client. This elementary fishing style often does not parallel the more advanced fishing styles the guide would use for personal recreation. This guide group frequently experiences higher client turnover than other guides, preventing the development of longer-term relationships with their clients. All-purpose Guides tend to cater to a more advanced angler clientele than Limit Guides. Clients of All-purpose Guides are more proficient anglers and some bring their own fishing tackle to use on guided trips. All-purpose Guides often fish alongside their clients and have more repeat customers leading to more long-term relationships than Limit Guides. These two guide types often serve groups of anglers that demand more attention for participation in the fishing process, are sporadic or one-time customers, and require the guide to adopt a fishing style that does not represent their preferred style.

Lure and Sight-casting guides tend to cater to very experienced anglers and have a much lower client turnover than guides with less specialized participation styles. Clients of Lure and Sight-casting Guides more accurately reflect the personal fishing styles of the guides themselves. These guide types also cater to smaller groups with Sight-casting Guides routinely guiding only one angler per day. While Lure Guides may sometimes fish alongside their clients, Sight-casting Guides typically participate by poling a skiff with the client aboard and scanning the flats for fish. The large percentage of repeat business from these clients enables the guides to develop strong relationships and, in many instances, close friendships with their customers.

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Guides' attitudes toward fishing as a personal recreational activity were partially affected by their participation style while guiding other anglers. Among the guides interviewed for this study, those with less specialized styles of participation seemed more likely to view fishing as work and to abandon it as a personal recreational activity. While all guide types indicated that it was more fulfilling to guide someone to catch a fish than to personally catching a fish, guides with more specialized styles indicated that personal fishing enjoyment was fulfilled vicariously through their clients' angling experience.

5.0 Limitations

In addition to style of participation, other factors such as time of year, weather conditions, recentness of last fishing trip, career state, and life pursuits are likely to contribute to or constrain guides' pursuit of fishing as a personal leisure activity. The qualitative nature of this study only reflects the attitudes and experiences of a limited group and does not facilitate generalization to the larger guide community. This study was exploratory in nature and was undertaken to inform quantitative research that will target all licensed saltwater fishing guides in Texas.

6.0 Citations

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Figure 1. Primary Attributes that Comprise Style of Participation among Texas Inshore Fishing Guides

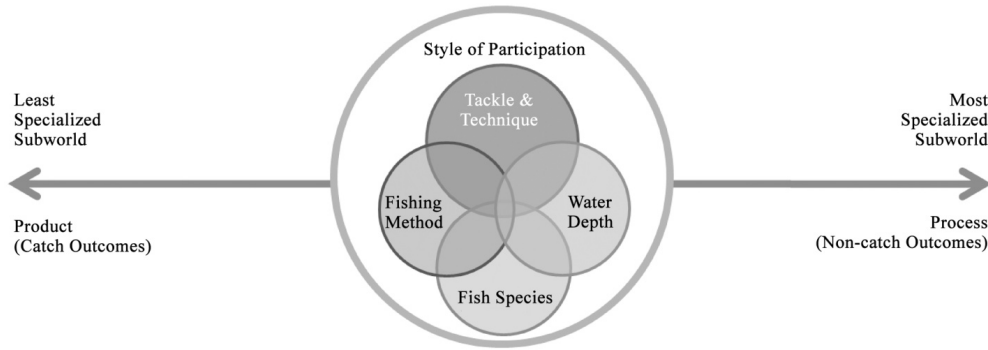


Table 1. Specialization Typology of Texas Inshore Fishing Guides based on Style of Participation

Limit Guide	All-purpose Guide	Lure Guide	Sight-casting Guide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Catch any game fish (Trout, redfish, black drum, flounder) - Desire full bag limit - Mostly bait - Any depth of water - Blind casting - Anchoring, drifting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bait/Lures - Drifting, some wading - Mainly trout, some redfish - Desire majority of bag limit - Any depth, some shallow - Blind casting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lures only - Target trophy trout - Mostly wading - Shallower depths - Sight & blind casting - Desire partial bag limit - Some catch & release 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flyfishing/light tackle - Shallowest depths - Mostly poling, some wading - Mostly catch & release - Redfish, some trout

Table 2. Factors Influencing Attitudes toward Fishing as Work among Guides by Style of Participation

Limit Guide	All-purpose Guide	Lure Guide	Sight-casting Guide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very inexperienced clients - Fish with or for the client - High client turnover - Doesn't reflect personal fishing style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inexperienced to intermediate clients - Fish alongside the client - Less client turnover - Sometimes reflects personal fishing style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Often very experienced clients - Fish alongside client - Longstanding relationships - Closely reflects personal fishing style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Often very experienced clients - Team fishing effort - Longstanding relationships - Closely reflects personal fishing style