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# A Model for Commodity Intensive Serious Leisure

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This study explored tournament bass fishing, compared it with the conventional model of serious leisure and investigated the relationships among various groups in the sport. Data were collected using a mixed methodological approach that combined a review of documents, participant observations, in-depth interviews and self-administered surveys. Research subjects included members of two local bass fishing clubs, their significant others, ex-tournament bass fishermen and professional bass fishermen. Although the organizational model of serious leisure developed largely by Robert Stebbins provides a valuable framework for understanding many leisure activities, it is insufficient to explain this commodity intensive sport. This article posits a new model that recognizes the influential roles of commodity agents and professionals/commodity agents. In recognizing the conflictual elements as well as the functional elements in this particular social world, this research provides a more complete understanding of the relationships between the groups in commodity intensive serious leisure activities.

KEYWORDS: *Serious leisure, commodity-intensive, tournament bass fishing, amateurs, social worlds, commodification*

## Introduction

Serious leisure, "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience," (Stebbins, 1993, p. 23) has grown significantly. As underemployment and early retirement increase, more people may seek life satisfaction through serious leisure experiences. The current model of serious leisure developed by Stebbins (1968, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1982, 1992, 1993) provides valuable insight into the multi-dimensional nature of this special type of leisure. This study compared the commodity intensive sport of tournament bass fishing with the conventional model of serious leisure, investigated the relationships among groups and examined the roles of participants in the activity.

## Serious Leisure

Drawing on various biographies and his own ethnographic research of musicians, thespians, archeologists, baseball players, astronomers, magicians,

and stand-up comics, Stebbins (1968, 1977, 1982, 1992) has developed theory that contrasts serious leisure to casual or non-serious leisure. Other researchers have undertaken mostly ethnographic studies that support and extend serious leisure theory. Bishop and Hoggett (1987) explored volunteer activities in several sports in Great Britain, Mittelstaedt (1995) examined American Civil War reenactors, Yair (1990) explored long distance runners, Olmstead (1993) studied hobbyists, Hamilton-Smith (1993) explored Australian bushwalkers and Juniu, Tedrick and Boyd (1996) compared amateur and professional symphonic musicians.

The serious leisure model consists of three functionally interdependent groups—amateurs, professionals and publics. Amateurs are created by the emergence of professionals in recreation activities. Stebbins (1992) noted, "the part-time pursuit of an activity is reshaped in the sense that increasingly, it is modeled after its new professional counterpart" (p. 15). Professionals impose a level of excellence previously unknown within the activity. Participants may choose to meet the new professional standards and thereby become amateurs; they may continue with limited involvement and thereby become dabblers; or they may cease involvement completely.

Amateurs approach their activity with great passion and commitment, but they are not recognized as professionals. Lacking an understanding of the activity, outsiders may place amateurs "on the margin of modern leisure" (Stebbins, 1992, p. 56). This marginal position includes several potentially problematic areas. Misunderstandings about the activity occasionally place amateurs in awkward and sometimes oppositional positions to friends and relatives. While amateurs' spouses have the most potential to be negatively impacted by the activity, they may also moderate the conflict through their support of the activity (Goff, Fick, & Oppliger, 1997). Feelings of inferiority may appear as participants strive to meet the highly visible standards of performance established by their professional counterparts. The chances of attainment of the new activity standards are remote as amateurs usually lack necessary time, skills, training and, in some cases, equipment.

Publics, the third group in serious leisure activities, are, "sets of people with a common interest; people not served by, but rather informed, enlightened, or entertained by professionals or amateurs, or both, and who make active demands on them" (Stebbins, 1992, p. 59). Publics contribute to professionals and amateurs by providing financial support, feedback on performances or products and role support.

At the social psychological level, several interrelated qualities of serious leisure are displayed by amateurs (Stebbins, 1992). They demonstrate a willingness to persevere through adversities ranging from extreme weather conditions to rowdy audiences. Second, amateurs develop careers of involvement in which activities become "enduring pursuits with their own background contingencies, histories of turning points, and stages of achievement or involvement" (p. 6). Third, the significant personal effort required in serious leisure leads to amateurs' acquisition of special knowledge and skills. Fourth, amateurs display durable benefits including self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-expression, renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, en-

hancement of self-image, social interaction, and lasting physical products. These qualities are part of a unique ethos that leads to the development of serious leisure social worlds.

## Social Worlds

The concept of social worlds has proven to be a productive complimentary perspective with which to study serious leisure (Ditton, Loomis, & Choi, 1992; Goff, Fick, & Oppliger, 1997; Mittelstaedt, 1995; Scott & Godbey, 1994). Social worlds are more than formal organizations, usually encompassing one or several formal organizations in a larger though more amorphous structure. Unruh (1979) posited that these diffuse social units "must be seen as an internally recognizable constellation of actors, organizations, events, and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants" (p. 115).

Personal involvement, the life-blood of all social worlds, is marked by key elements. Participants voluntarily chose to become involved or to subsequently cease their involvement. Moreover, few social worlds demand exclusive engagement by its members. Simultaneous membership is the norm and naturally leads to partial involvement. Unruh (1980) suggested that social worlds consist of four types of members: strangers, tourists, regulars and insiders. Strangers participate very little in the social world but perform essential tasks to make the social world possible. Tourists participate only temporarily. Regulars participate on a routine basis. Insiders are exceptionally committed to the social world and are the forces behind keeping the social world thriving. Insiders "have the most to gain or lose when a social world succeeds or fails" (Unruh, 1980, p. 282). In serious leisure, amateurs are considered regulars or insiders.

Social worlds theory has been extended by Scott and Godbey (1992, 1994) who explored specialization in contract bridge players. They found that the social world of contract bridge consisted of two subworlds: social bridge and serious bridge. Ditton, Loomis and Choi (1992) studied recreation specialization in the social worlds of anglers and concluded that the degree of specialization for fishers is positively correlated with the level of resource dependency. Fine (1983, 1987) and Fine and Holyfield (1996) have contributed to social worlds theory development through studies of Little League baseball, mushroom hunting and fantasy game playing. It follows from these studies and others (Middelstaedt, 1995; Stebbins, 1993) that the development and maintenance of social worlds, particularly those centered around serious leisure activities, necessitates the acquisition and use of various commodities (i.e. purchased goods and services) unique to the area of interest.

## Commodification of Leisure

Commodification has been the topic of a diverse collection of authors for more than a century. Marx (1887/1947) used the term commodity fet-

ishism to describe the phenomenon in late capitalism in which the commodity would reign supreme and transform all—objects values, and ideas—into things to be bought and sold. Veblen (1965) developed the concept of conspicuous consumption to critique leisure in stratified societies. Clarke and Critcher (1985) addressed the commodification of leisure by examining the evolution of leisure in Great Britain. Kelly (1992) addressed the topic and noted that leisure is influenced by the market (the producers of goods and services). "The market is not neutral; it creates as well as responds to demand" (p. 251).

Commodities play a prominent role in some serious leisure activities. Mittelstaedt (1995) briefly commented on the role of commodity producers for American Civil War reenactors:

> A small industry of crafts people has sprung up to meet the needs of Civil War enthusiasts. Artisans are turning out reproductions of Civil War saddles and harnesses, cannon barrels and military uniforms complete with cap, belts, swords and insignia, all at significant cost (p. 25).

Stebbins (1993) briefly acknowledged the role of strangers (magic equipment dealers and comedy club owners and managers) in studies of entertainment magicians and stand up comics. Stebbins (1992) also noted that commodities played a role in a tendency toward uncontrollability. The acquisition and use of expensive goods and services may become problematic. "There is the universal desire to upgrade: to own a better set of golf clubs, to buy a more powerful telescope, to take more dance lessons . . . amateur activity stands ready to devour all the practitioners' time and money" (p. 56). While some researchers have recognized that the producers and distributors of commodities are a part of serious leisure social worlds, there have been no systematic investigations to explore their relationship to the activity and their influence on participants.

## Tournament Bass Fishing

Tournament fishing is head-to-head competition between fishers with the goal of catching the largest and the greatest poundage of fish during a given time period. Schramm et al. (1991) defined the phenomenon as, "organized events in which a group of anglers fish for inducements—awards, prizes, or public recognition—in addition to the catch or the satisfaction of catching fish" (p. 4).

Tournament bass fishing competitions, the most popular events, exist on different levels. At one extreme national tournaments lasting three or four day receive considerable media attention. Prize packages for winners range from $25,000 to $50,000, with a few in the $100,000 range. At the other extreme small amateur tournaments hosted by local bass clubs receive little attention and offer little or no prize money.

The modern bass fishing tournament started in 1967 when Ray Scott, an insurance salesman, envisioned that a profit could be made by offering tightly structured fishing contests for bass anglers. Participants were arranged in pairs and fished strictly from boats to reduce opportunities to violate tour-

nament rules (Taylor, 1985). Encouraged by the concept's early success, Scott initiated an organization devoted to tournament bass anglers. Scott's club, Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.), had 550,000 members by 1991. It continues to be the most influential organization in the sport (Thomas, 1993).

Sponsorship by manufacturers and distributors of fishing equipment played a major role in the development of the sport. Although sponsors were initially hesitant to get involved, they soon recognized the potential profits because these sportsmen are a tightly focused market in the middle to upper-middle socioeconomic class (Taylor, 1988). Several fishing goods and services industries emerged along with the sport. Schwartz (1989) has noted, "freshwater fishermen spend about $19.4 billion annually on fishing, [and] corporate sponsors are taking an interest" (p. 48). Laden (1992) reported that bass fishers account for several billion dollars of the fishing industry's revenues through purchases of boats, tackle and the myriad of fishing related goods and services.

Economic factors play an important role in determining participation. The sport, even for amateurs who restrict their participation to tournaments in and around their home state and never compete in national competitions, is an expensive endeavor. Bryan (1987, 1988a, 1988b) reported that tournament bass anglers invest over $30,000 in equipment and come from middle to upper-middle income categories. Economic, gender and ethnic factors operate in unison to drastically limit who participates in tournament bass fishing at any level.

Although large entry fees and numbers of participants suggest that tournament bass fishing might sustain itself solely through competitive events, it is extremely dependent on the sponsorship of large and small businesses who are completely or partly dependent on fishing. Besides the manufacturers of fishing tackle and boats some of the largest tournament sponsors are beer, automobile and tobacco companies (Schwartz, 1989).

Approximately 40 million fresh water anglers exist in the United States. At least one-quarter of these outdoor enthusiasts fish for black bass, the most popular game fish in the country (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1990). Although it is difficult to determine how many fishers participate in organized fishing tournaments, it is known that B.A.S.S. had 600,000 members in 1996 (Roberts, 1996). In addition, a significant number of anglers fish in bass tournaments who are not members of B.A.S.S. Ditton, Loomis and Choi (1992) offer a valuable perspective on the social world of tournament bass fishing by noting "the distinction between social worlds and social sub-worlds is subjective . . . . For example, sport fishing . . . could contain numerous sub-worlds such as fly fishing or bass fishing. However, these can be alternately viewed as social worlds themselves" (p. 36). For this study, tournament bass fishing is considered a sub-world that is part of the larger social world of sport fishing.

Considerable research exists on serious leisure with a significant number of studies approaching the topic from a social worlds perspective. Likewise, there is a sizable body of literature on commodification and some about the

commodification of leisure. However, no research has considered the relationships among these topics. The purpose of this study was to link these areas of research and answer the following questions: (1) How does the commodity intensive sport of tournament bass fishing compare to the conventional model of serious leisure? (2) What are the relationships among the primary groups in tournament bass fishing from a social worlds perspective? (3) How do competing roles create conflict for some participants in tournament bass fishing?

## Method and Analysis

Several leisure researchers (Chick, 1985; Glancy, 1993; Henderson, 1988; Scott & Godbey; 1990) have called for investigative methods that are compatible with the inherently subjective nature of much leisure. They have noted that participant observation has proven valuable in the past and may be even more valuable in future research. Because tournament bass fishing is a complex and dynamic social phenomenon, this project employed a mixed methodology consisting of ethnographic techniques and self-administered surveys.

Researchers have the choice of different roles or levels of involvement from which to select when contemplating field research or ethnography (Denzin, 1989; Gold, 1969; Junker, 1960). Adler and Adler (1987) suggest that field workers may chose to adopt peripheral, active or complete membership roles. Although peripheral members desire to understand the lives of the individuals in the group under observation, they refrain from participating in core activities. "The peripheral role is the most marginal and least committed to the social world studied" (p. 36). Active members participate in most core activities of the group. They take a functional role in activities and thereby become co-participants in joint endeavors (p. 51). Complete members exhibit the greatest degree of commitment to the group, participating in all core activities and adopting similar attitudes and beliefs.

Reimer (1977) has posited that social science researchers "often ignore or treat as ancillary their own unique biographies, life experiences, and situational familiarity when these could opportunistically serve as important sources for research ideas and data" (p. 467). Researchers should take advantage of accustomed social situations. The benefits of operating in such settings are displayed in Goffman's (1967) study of gaming, Caplow and McGee's (1965) study of academic institutions and Liebow's (1967) investigation of lower class African-American neighborhoods. Moreover, Reimer suggested that the special skills and knowledge possessed by social scientists outside of their sociological expertise should be exploited. Classic examples include Becker's (1963) study of musicians, Polsky's (1969) research of pool hustlers and Pine's (1975) investigation of funeral directors.

This researcher adopted an opportunistic complete membership research role in which I used 30 years of experience as a bass angler. I attended regularly scheduled monthly meetings of two different local bass fishing

clubs. One club was in the town in which I lived; the other club was in a small town approximately 15 miles away. I announced to each group that I desired to join the club because I liked to bass fish, but that I was also a university student and wanted to study groups that fished in bass tournaments. At both meetings members questioned why I wanted to study them. My response was that leisure was an important part of life and it warranted study. Bass fishing was an activity in which I had many years of experience and for me it was an enjoyable activity to study. Members voted and I was admitted as a member in both clubs.

Over the course of approximately two years, I attended board meetings, club meetings, special events and fishing tournaments of both clubs. I also attended several professional bass tournaments. During this time hundreds of casual conversations were initiated with people involved in the sport. Publications of the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society and articles from the outdoor sports sections of *The Atlanta Constitution*, the *St. Louis Post* and the *Chicago Tribune* contributed to my understanding the historical development of the sport and helped me place the sport in the context of bass fishing in general. After an extended period of participant observation, in-depth interviews were employed to develop the emerging conceptual framework. I sought the perspective of each of the three groups in the conventional serious leisure model—professionals, amateurs, and publics. The amateurs interviewed ranged from a one year club member to a member who had participated in tournaments for 22 years. Realizing that those currently involved might be positively biased toward the sport, I balanced the data by also interviewing ex-tournament anglers who had ceased involvement within the last five years. Moreover, the perspectives of the significant others of tournament bass fishers held the potential to validate existing data and contribute additional information. Therefore, extended interviews that lasted between one and two hours were held with three professional tournament bass fishermen, ten amateur tournament bass fishermen, three ex-tournament bass fishermen, the significant others (wives) of three amateur tournament bass fishermen, and five spectators at an elite level bass tournament. Most of the interviews were held in the homes of the interviewees. However, the interview of one amateur took place in his boat while we competed in a bass tournament.

Additional data, much of which was demographic, were collected through self-administered surveys mailed to the members of the bass clubs. The questionnaire was piloted with 50 members of an unrelated bass club in another town. The results and feedback from the pilot were incorporated into the final questionnaire. After announcements in meetings regarding the survey, a 58 item questionnaire with cover letter was mailed to all 86 members of both clubs. The combined return rate was 81.4%. This extremely high return rate may be attributed to two factors. First, I was generally perceived more as a co-participant in an important and enjoyable leisure activity than as an unknown, detached researcher. Second, if the surveys were not re-

turned within two weeks I called and reminded those who did not return their surveys.

A large amount of qualitative and quantitative data from many sources was collected. Notes were kept of all participant observations. Recordings were made of all interviews. Coding procedures detailed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) were employed to analyze the large amount of qualitative data. In the initial stage of open coding, data were examined for key words and phrases, and primary research themes were determined. Initial themes to emerge included the sport's reliance on an extensive array of highly developed technological fishing equipment, the different roles played by the sport's participants and the personal conflicts experienced by some anglers. The data were then subjected to a process of axial coding in which linkages between themes were explored. This led to hypotheses about how various groups and individuals within tournament bass fishing operated in relation to others within and outside of the social world of tournament bass fishing. Finally a process of selective coding was undertaken to validate the emerging understanding of the research project. Data from different sources and collected with different methods were compared. This process is known as triangulation by ethnographers. Fetterman (1989) noted that "triangulation is basic in ethnographic research. It is at the heart of ethnographic validity" (p.89). Descriptive quantitative data were analyzed and used as additional sources of information to triangulate or validate observations. When apparently inconsistent data surfaced the emerging theory was reexamined and explanations were sought from a more holistic perspective. Jick (1983) noted the value of inconsistent or divergent data. "In fact, divergence can often turn out to be an opportunity for enriching the explanation" (p. 143).

## Results

This research found that the conventional serious leisure model developed mainly by Stebbins must be significantly modified to explain the commodity intensive serious leisure activity of tournament bass fishing. The influence of fishing commodity producers and promoters effects participants to varying degrees, at times creating conflict among groups that have different interests in the sport. Individual participants, especially those attempting to make the transition from one level of involvement to another, may also experience significant role conflict.

Descriptive data were gathered from the members of two local bass fishing clubs. The clubs displayed no significant differences in attitudes, behaviors and demographic factors. All members of the clubs were adult white males with a mean age of 41 years and most held blue collar jobs.The majority of club members (85.7%) started fishing before seventeen years of age. Respondents indicated they had an average of 8.3 years of involvement in the sport, and they had been in fishing clubs for an average of 7.1 years. Eighty percent of the respondents were members of B.A.S.S.

*Structural Qualities of Tournament Bass Fishing*

Tournament bass fishing deviates significantly from the conventional model of serious leisure that consists of professionals, amateurs and publics. It is a highly structured sport heavily dominated by national fishing organizations, event promoters, and the manufacturers and distributors of sporting goods and services. The conventional model fails to recognize these profound influences and is subsequently unable to adequately explain tournament bass fishing and its conflictual and cooperative relationships.

An influential collection of groups and individuals involved in the production, facilitation, and exchange of activity related commodities (herein referred to as commodity agents) are essential to the understanding of tournament bass fishing. Without high-tech bass fishing equipment and services, the sport would not exist in its current form. Groups and individuals have responded to, nurtured, and in some cases boldly claimed to have created a demand for fishing boats, tackle, electronic equipment, services and the competitive formats fundamental to the sport.

In tournament bass fishing, commodity agents are a diverse group that includes manufacturers, distributors, advertisers, and retailers of fishing commodities and administrators and promoters of bass fishing tournaments. Organizations that promote the concept of bass tournaments such as B.A.S.S. and Midwest Bass are also included. Anglers merely using bass fishing goods and services are excluded. However, the significant number of amateurs who make, advertise or sell commodities for the sport are included. Just as Stebbins (1992) suggested that participants in the social world of serious leisure activities can switch and combine roles, so it is with commodity agents. Some professional bass anglers are also commodity agents who produce and promote their own fishing commodities.

Twenty percent of the members of the clubs indicated they were involved in the manufacture or sale of bass fishing equipment. This relatively large proportion of commodity agents does not reflect the significant number of club members who buy and sell boats and equipment with other club members. Most amateurs are commodity agents at some time, putting on and taking off the role as the opportunity presents itself.

Stebbins noted that the complex and dynamic relationships between professionals, amateurs and publics contributes to the maintenance of a unique ethos that constitutes the serious leisure activity. Tournament bass fishing is no exception. The relationships within the unique ethos, however, can be significantly enriched if commodity agents are added. Explanations of these relationships is further enriched because individuals are likely to change roles and to take on different roles simultaneously.

Stebbins' model of serious leisure has three organizational groups (Figure 1). So too does the structural model of tournament bass fishing. However, in addition to the previously mentioned new group of commodity agents, there is evidence of two hybrid groups—professionals/commodity agents and amateur/publics. Figure 2 illustrates this new model. The ensuing

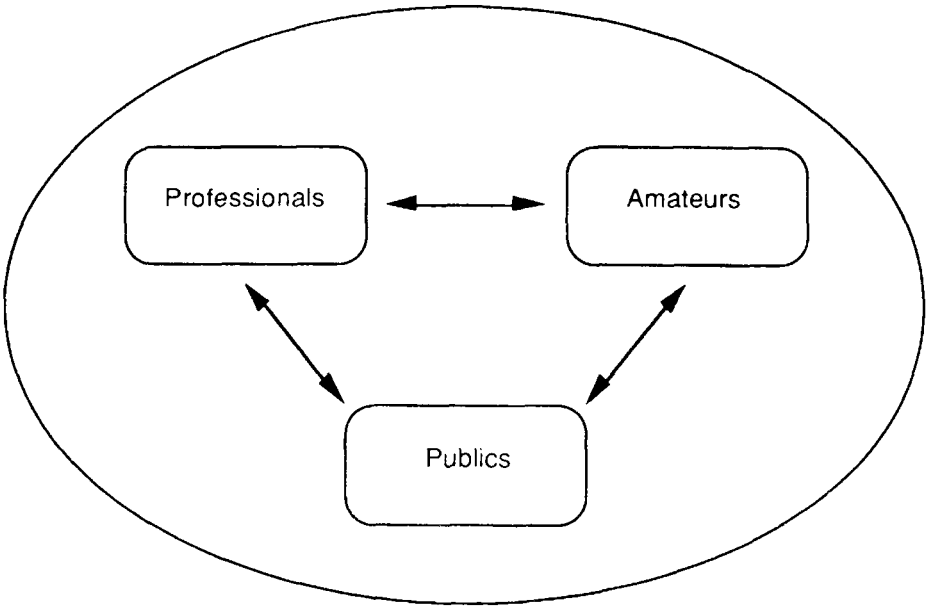


*Figure 1.* Stebbins' Model of Groups in Serious Leisure Activities

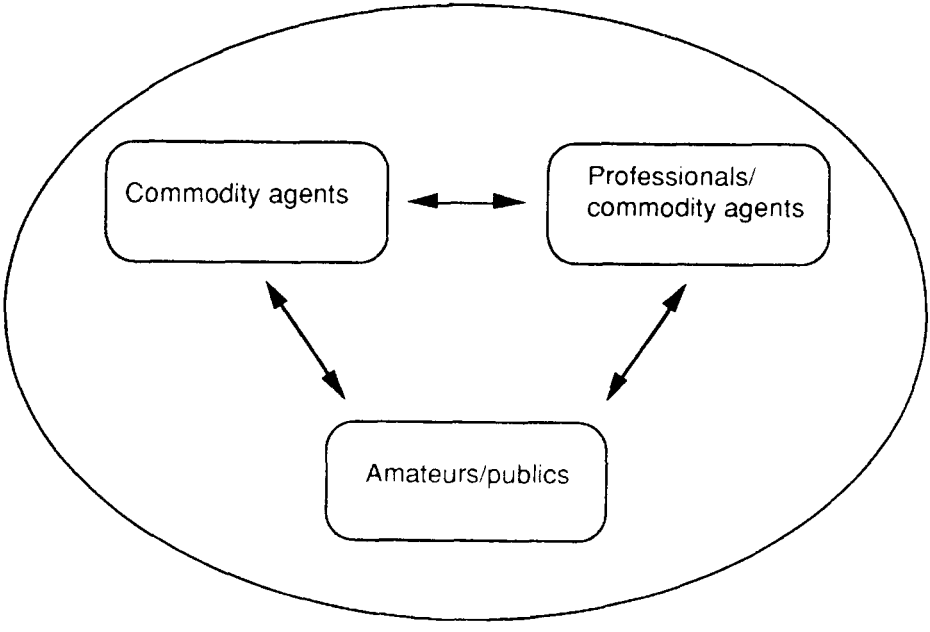


*Figure 2.* Model for Groups in Commodity Intensive Serious Leisure Activities

explication of these dynamic relationships will produce an enriched understanding of this serious leisure activity.

*Relationship between Commodity Agents and Professionals/Commodity Agents*

The relationship between commodity agents and professional tournament bass fishermen is crucial because professionals play such an integral part of the commodity exchange network in this sport. All are middle-aged, white males willing to make significant contributions of time and effort to achieve professional status in the sport.

Professionals could not continue participation in the sport without the direct support of the manufacturers and distributors of fishing commodities and the promoters of bass tournaments (Taylor, 1988; Thomas, 1993; Wohlwend, 1986). The men who participate at the elite level of tournament bass fishing receive varying degrees of sponsorship from the manufacturers and distributors of fishing commodities. This usually includes the payment of entry fees and the provision of boats, fishing tackle, fuel, and other necessities for the events. Living expenses are also provided by some professionals' sponsors. In addition to the payment of entry fees, provision of equipment, and contributions toward living expenses, salaries are paid to the top professional anglers for the promotion of fishing commodities (Taylor, 1988).

At the intermediate level of competition, many men receive some sponsorship by commodity agents. These anglers are not full professionals, and they usually participate only in state and regional tournaments. At most, they use fishing in tournaments to supplement their regular occupations. In many cases entry fees for events are paid by their sponsors, and they are provided with some of the commodities required for their participation in specific competitions. If they receive any additional money to help them with the cost of participation it is usually a small amount for the days they are actually at the events. Fisherman rarely receive any sponsorship at all to participate in local club tournaments.

In return for company sponsorship, professional bass fishermen promote the companies' fishing goods and services. They may also sell their own commodities—usually special knowledge or fishing techniques. Professionals are commodity agents themselves, advertising and selling a wide range of fishing commodities. In some cases the professionals' reimbursement from the companies for advertising services is far greater than their tournament prize money. Professional bass fisherman Hank Parker retired from bass tournament competition in the mid-1980s after establishing himself as one of the premier anglers in the sport. Parker realized it was more lucrative and secure to make public appearances and endorse fishing equipment than to actually compete in bass tournaments (Husar, 1990a).

As professionals become an integral part of the commodity system their approach to the sport and their relationship to other organizational components of the social world of tournament bass fishing changes. Although professionals may already be extremely committed to their sport, they make

additional sacrifices of time and effort when they know that current and potential sponsors are evaluating their performance. Taylor (1988) noted that new professionals/commodity agents spend many nights sleeping in the back of their trucks to save money. Sacrifices like this allow those not yet established to continue participation in the sport. Many young professionals, hoping to become employees of major commodity producers, purchase press kits to help sell themselves to the manufacturers of commodities and the promoters of elite tournaments. Fishing skill alone is insufficient for the amateur to move into the professional ranks.

Ex-professional bass fisherman and key informant, Will, provided valuable insight into the world of tournament bass fishermen who are trying to attract sponsors: Hell, I don't know how many times I spent all day driving to another tournament. Then I'd get a couple of hours of sleep and get up before sun-up to be on the lake. I missed my kids' birthdays, football games, all sorts of stuff like that. Missed my anniversary I don't know how many times. I don't know. It just got to where that was the only thing that was important. You gotta do well if you're going to continue in this sport.

Conflict may arise from the simultaneous adoption of the roles of tournament bass fishermen and commodity agent. Husar (1990b) noted an ongoing struggle over the appropriate image for professional bass fishermen. Some fishing commodity dealers and tournament promoters have encouraged anglers to forsake an unsophisticated image for a more refined image of the high-tech professional angler. One top bass tournament professional commented, "We don't want people to think of us as just a bunch of rednecks anymore. We hope you'll never again see fishing pros competing in shorts and thongs" (Husar, 1990b).

Greg, a rare amateur angler who fished in an elite tournament, shared an example of conflict between professionals/commodity agents and tournament administrators.

> Oh yeah, I gotta tell you about what happened at the tournament. Ray [Ray Scott is the most influential and highly visible promoter of bass fishing tournaments] wanted everyone to wear a glove on their casting hand. I guess some sponsor wanted Ray to make sure that all of the guys had them on for pictures and stuff. But some of the pros didn't like them cause they weren't used to fishing with a glove. Well, it's about 4:30 [A.M.] and me and my partner are getting our boat ready to go. I'm over there by the back of the boat and my partner says to me "Hey, you better get your glove on. You know Ray wants everyone to wear them." So I slapped my back pocket and said, "I got Ray's glove right where it ought to be." Well, what I didn't know was that my partner had set me up because Dewey was coming up right behind me. Now I don't know how many of you know Dewey Kendrick, but he's Ray's right hand man.

The relationship between commodity agents and professional bass anglers is generally mutually beneficial. Professionals' willingness to take on the role of commodity agent is evidence that the interests of the two are usually compatible. Conflicts, however, do arise. Disagreements tend not to

be widespread or persistent, and solutions to conflicts are usually found quickly.

*Relationship Between Professionals/Commodity Agents and Amateurs/Publics*

Professionals/commodity agents have a complex and dynamic relationship with amateurs in tournament bass fishing. Most of the time the relationship is positive. Professionals/commodity agents realize that amateurs are the primary consumers of the vast assortment of bass fishing commodities. They recognize that this relationship is essential to the maintenance and continued growth of the sport. Professionals/commodity agents are superficially friendly and helpful to amateurs when they are in competitions or at sporting goods exhibitions.

An intellectual relationship based on the sharing of information between professionals/commodity agents and amateurs/publics has evolved over the past two decades. Professionals/commodity agents primarily provide amateurs/publics with information about fishing goods, services, and techniques. This information may be transmitted through various media including printed materials, television programs, video, and personal appearances at trade shows. Professionals/commodity agents often share information in the context of commodity promotion for which they receive some form of reimbursement.

Amateurs/publics may also provide information to professionals/commodity agents. Professionals often compete on unfamiliar lakes and rivers. Their chances for success are enhanced if they are able to acquire information regarding the body of water on which they are scheduled to fish. Much of this information is produced and transmitted by local amateurs/publics who are familiar with the lake or river.

An additional aspect of the relationship is the emulation of professionals/commodity agents by many amateurs/publics. Stebbins (1992) noted that professionals in many serious leisure activities emerge from the amateur ranks. This was also true in tournament bass fishing. Most professional tournament bass fishermen attain their positions after fishing at the amateur level for several years.

Many members of the bass fishing clubs expressed a desire to advance from the amateur ranks to the professional level. One of the older members stated that fishing at the professional level was "every guy's dream." Greg, when speaking about fishing in an elite professional tournament said, "That was the proudest moment in my life. Walking out with those guys. Guido, Rick Clunn, Roland Martin, and all of them [well-known bass fishing professionals]." Fifty percent of the men in the bass fishing clubs indicated on the survey they had considered becoming professional bass fishermen at some time.

An important aspect of the relationship is the influence on the purchases of commodities exerted on amateurs/publics by professionals/com-

modity agents. Several men acknowledged that they sometimes purchased fishing commodities because they were endorsed by their favorite professionals. Larry, a long-time club member, said he often watched fishing professionals use particular fishing tackle on television. "It's just natural to try it too. Cause if it worked for them, hell, it's bound to work for me too." Larry also offered his opinion on the consumer behaviors of other bass fishermen. "There's a lot of guys who even wear the same clothes that their quote, unquote, idol wears. You know, whatever it takes to catch fish, guys will do it."

The professionals/commodity agents' influence on the consumer behaviors of amateur/publics recorded in interviews was supported by survey data. Seventy percent of the men indicated they were influenced at least a little by the endorsements of professional bass fishermen. Ten percent indicated their purchases of fishing equipment were either influenced much or very much by professional bass fishermen.

While there are many positive aspects of the relationship between professionals/commodity agents and amateurs there is also considerable conflict. Some professional tournament bass fishermen disparage the skills of their amateur counterparts. An ex-professional tournament bass fisherman noted that many professionals:

> look down at the weekend bass fisherman and laugh. . . . They [amateurs] may think they are pretty good, and they may do O.K. in the club tournaments, but it's a different world in the big tournaments. . . . I'll tell you what, for most club fishermen it's mostly luck if they catch any fish at all. They just toss a lure out and crank it in. Sometimes they just get lucky and get a hit.

Such an attitude is similar to that found in Stebbins' (1981) research of astronomers and archaeologists. Amateurs were belittled because professionals believed they produced an inferior product. Stebbins suggested that for astronomers such an attitude may have reflected the lack of opportunity for interaction. This is not, however, the case in the social world of tournament bass fishing. Considerable interaction exists between amateurs/publics and professionals/commodity agents. Concerted efforts are made to facilitate the interaction between the two groups by the organizers of fishing events and producers and distributors or fishing commodities. Pro/Am tournaments are increasingly popular events that place an amateur angler in the same boat with a professional angler.

At the same time, some amateur tournament bass anglers lack respect for professionals/commodity agents. Much of this conflict arises from the professionals' association with the producers and distributors of fishing commodities. Ex-amateur tournament bass fisherman, Virgil, said, "Well, it's pretty bad when some of those guys [professionals/commodity agents] come on T. V. I lost a lot of respect for Hank Parker when he came on advertising those colored hooks. Now you know that's a bunch of nonsense."

Some amateurs showed little respect for professionals in the sport because they were perceived to use unscrupulous tactics and operate with a

different perspective. Several amateurs indicated that professionals resort to tactics they would not use. One referred to professionals as "cut-throats who would do anything to catch a fish." Amateurs also believed that professionals used fishing guides illegally. One amateur confided that he knew professionals hired scuba divers to explore the waters on which tournaments were scheduled. Another amateur expressed his belief that professionals had no special talents, but they did have special opportunities. "You can't tell me that most guys wouldn't be just as good as those guys if they could get on the water 250 days a year."

Many amateurs indicated, however, that questionable tactics and perspectives were adopted by professionals because they had a greater investment in the sport. If they failed to do well in competition, they would lose sponsorship and might be forced to cease participation. They understood that professional tournament bass fishermen were businessmen involved in a vocation, not an avocation.

The relationship between professionals/commodity agents and amateurs/publics in tournament bass fishing is complex and dynamic. Both entities invest their own particular resources. In return, both parties receive specific dividends including financial support, information exchange and role support. These serve as powerful incentives for continued participation. The relationship is not, however, free of conflict. Different perspectives and interests within which professionals/commodity agents and amateurs/publics operate are the source of the friction. The result of these differences is occasionally manifest in a mutual lack of respect by both groups.

*Relationship Between Commodity Agents and Amateurs/Publics*

Finally, there is a complex relationship between commodity agents and amateurs/publics in tournament bass fishing. While there are many functional aspects of the relationship, there are also significant elements of conflict. The functional aspects include financial, informational, and structural.

The financial relationship is based on the regular purchase of bass fishing commodities by amateur tournament bass anglers. Without a large number of tournament bass fishermen routinely purchasing boats, motors, tackle and related equipment the sport could not exist in its current form. Schwartz (1989) noted that freshwater sport fishing in the United States is a nineteen billion dollar industry. A large portion of this economic activity is attributed to tournament bass fishing (Laden, 1992).

The fishing industry exerts tremendous influence on the sport. The originator of the modern bass tournament has boasted that he used anglers' tendency to copy other anglers and "what followed [his success and the growth of the sport] was a simple case of marketing" (Smith, 1985, p. B30). Forrest Wood, president of Ranger Boat Company, noted his company's influence on the activity. "We started 18 years ago with a glorified john boat. We added refinements as they were requested by fishermen or as we thought of them" (Wohlwend, 1986, p. H4). In speaking about depth finders and

fish locators, one advertising executive stated "We created a gap, and we filled it" (Hyatt, 1989, p. 98). At other times, however, commodity agents claim to respond only to the expressed needs of tournament bass anglers.

The highly visible professional tournament bass fishermen has become an effective component in the public relations campaign undertaken by commodity agents. Realizing that amateur tournament bass fishermen often emulate their professional counterparts, the fishing industry has attempted to increase the interaction between amateurs/publics and professionals/commodity agents through trade shows and Pro/Am events that pair professional bass fishermen with amateur bass fishermen for specific events.

Some amateur tournament bass fishermen recognized the influence of the fishing industry and its commodity agents and expressed their appreciation of it. One amateur told of his experience with fishing equipment producers at a tournament:

> I mean I literally walked up to my room with two armloads of fishing stuff. Those guys really help us. I don't think we realize all they do for us. They gave me. . . heck, they gave all of us a ton of stuff. They donated prizes and money for the tournament. I'll tell you, without them I don't know how we could do it.

Anglers are not simply passive consumers of fishing commodities. Following the initial purchase, some anglers appropriated or made the commodities into something special or unique. Several made physical modifications, and some used commodities in ways for which they were not initially designed. The color patterns of lures were changed to be more effective. Lures were modified to dive deeper when retrieved. In a similar vein, Bud explained how he used his knowledge of boat marketing to purchase his current boat:

> See, they churn boats. . . . There's only so many customers out there for a bass boat. So they got to change things every now and then. So about every four or five years, especially if you run a marina, you got to change. Of course, every one they handle is the best boat, the fastest, blah, blah, blah. I made a good deal on mine cuz they were pushing Gamblers [a new boat model] and I bought last year's boat.

Commodity agents contribute to the social world of tournament bass fishing by supplying information as well as equipment. This includes information about new goods and services, techniques, reports on past fishing events and upcoming fishing events. Most men in the clubs received news about their sport on a regular basis. The men who were members of the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (80%) received BassMaster Magazine monthly. Several subscribed to additional fishing magazines, and others watched weekly bass fishing shows on television.

Producers of bass fishing magazines, television shows, videos and trades shows, claim that the primary purpose of advertising is to help participants fully enjoy their sport. Danny, a five year member, announced at the club's regular meeting that one of his friends was publishing a monthly newsletter.

The publication could be purchased for $20.00 a year and contained information about upcoming fishing events in the area, reports on past tournaments, and advertisements for fishing commodities. He asserted, "The only reason he [the publisher] does this is to help you, the amateur bass fisherman." Most club members agreed that this information was of value to them in their effort to become better bass fishermen.

The relationship between commodity agents and amateurs/publics fosters the development and maintenance of the sport's unique ethos. In return, the relationship is supported by the social world that develops around the ethos. Commodity agents depend on amateurs/publics to consume their products. Amateurs/publics depend on the producers to supply them with goods and services they believe are necessary for participation.

Some amateur tournament bass fishermen are also commodity agents. Twenty percent of the members of the clubs indicated they were involved in the manufacture or sale of equipment used in tournament bass fishing. The fishing businesses in which club members were engaged ranged from boats sales to the manufacture and sale of fishing tackle. Some commodity agents/amateurs were unable to participate in some fishing tournaments because they were obligated to appear at trade shows. The decision to promote their products rather than fish in a tournament was difficult for some anglers.

The fishing industry, in alliance with tournament promoters and other commodity agents, influences the sport through the generation and diffusion of rules. Rules are adopted or imposed for a variety of reasons including the safety of participants, to make the sport more attractive to spectators (the vast majority of whom are amateur anglers) and to preserve the resources on which the sport depends. Few rules address boats, electronic fishing equipment and other tackle, although some tournaments limit the size of motors. Tournament bass boats can be and usually are equipped with a dazzling array of fish finders, electronic temperature gauges, pH meters, communications systems and navigational systems. Few tournaments limit the number of rods, reels and tackle boxes that can be taken on the boat.

A general lack of restriction on use of high-tech equipment in tournament bass fishing is in contrast to other sports in which rules are formally or informally created to preserve an uncertain outcome. Hummel and Foster (1986), comparing the use of equipment in trout and bass fishing, concluded that, "it is craftsmanship in trout fishing versus technology in bass fishing" (p. 46). Tournament bass anglers have been criticized because they appear to be gaining an unfair advantage over their prey with increasingly sophisticated equipment. However, the fishing industry, tournament promoters and other commodity agents have shown little interest in regulating the use of high-tech fishing equipment in the sport. It is obviously not in the economic interest of commodity agents to restrict the use of high tech equipment in this particular sport.

While there are many functional aspects of the relationship between commodity agents and amateurs/publics in the social world of tournament bass fishing, there is also considerable conflict. Much of the conflict is the

result of the different interests held by commodity agents and amateurs/publics. Commodity agents are primarily motivated by the opportunity to sell goods and services and realize a profit. Amateurs/publics, on the other hand, do not share the profit motive. Rather, they are interested in companionship, competition and acquiring skills and knowledge.

The marketing of fishing lures exemplifies the different motives of various groups within the sport and the subsequent exploitation that may take place. Lures are a crucial piece of bass angling equipment, and there is a strong desire to have the most effective lures possible. The lures' effectiveness vary according to climactic conditions, fishing pressure and the skill of the user. Therefore, most tournament bass fishermen are eager to accumulate a large and diverse collection of fishing lures. Producers of lures, as well as some consumers of lures, recognize the existence of a convenient and dependable market for fishing lures. Several fishermen mentioned during interviews that "some lures are made to catch fish and some lures are made to catch fishermen." Lou, an older fisherman in a club, related that a tackle dealer at a trade show guardedly confided to him, "When you're fishing you really need only two colors of lures—white and chartreuse. We make 200 other colors, but we just make them for the fishermen, not the fish."

A degree of resentment was exhibited toward commodity agents by amateurs/publics. The survey asked bass fishermen to respond to comments made by Ray Scott, the originator of the modern bass tournament. Scott had attributed his success to his recognition of anglers' propensity to copy other anglers' behaviors and a strong marketing plan. Some anglers were angered by Scott's remarks. One wrote, "Ray Scott has made a fortune selling that idea. He is a parasite!" Resentment of commodity agents was also evident on the local club level. Ron, a long-time member of one of the clubs and producer of his own line of fishing tackle, often promoted his products in the club's monthly meetings. Some club members showed their displeasure with Ron's continual efforts to sell his products in the club. Survey results did not indicate that amateurs/publics' anger toward commodity agents was widespread, although some anglers did report particularly strong negative attitudes. Interviews indicated greater resentment and feelings of exploitation.

Some men believe the sport has become too complicated as a result of a heavy emphasis on fishing commodities. In referring to the use of a particular type of fish locator, Bud exclaimed, "Hell, I want to be fishing, not reading the damned charts!" In response to a question in the survey, 19% of the men said they believed that tournament bass fishing had become too complicated. Thirteen percent of the men in the clubs reported that they thought the use of elaborate fishing equipment reduced the enjoyment of the sport.

## Conclusion

Tournament bass fishing is an ideal background against which to investigate serious leisure, social worlds and the commodification of leisure—

issues with vital consequences for contemporary Western societies. This research contributes to the understanding of these three interrelated topics by directly examining them in the actual lived experiences of individual actors. In particular, a more comprehensive picture of the organization and the relationships in serious leisure is attained.

The organizational model of serious leisure activities is insufficient to explain this sport. Stebbins (1992) has posited the existence of three groups in serious leisure activities—professionals, amateurs and publics. Tournament bass fishing consists of three primary organizational groups as well, but the groups are significantly different. Commodity agents, an influential collection of producers, promoters and distributors of fishing commodities, must be added to the existing model for this activity. Subsequently, the recognition of commodity agents provides a foundation for the hybridization of Stebbins' other organizational groups. In tournament bass fishing professionals are replaced by professionals/commodity agents. In addition, amateurs and publics of the conventional serious leisure model are collapsed into one organizational group. The organizational model for this particular leisure activity consists of commodity agents, professionals/commodity agents and amateur/publics.

The substantial research on serious leisure indicates that the part-time pursuit of an activity by amateurs is transformed by the amateurs' professional counterpart. By recognizing the existence of professionals/commodity agents in tournament bass fishing and modifying the organizational structure, this research explains much of this transformation. Amateur tournament bass fishermen are influenced as much by the producers and distributors of fishing commodities as by tournament bass fishing professionals. When producers and distributors employ professional bass fishermen to market their goods and services, and thereby create an influential group of professionals/commodity agents, the sport is transformed in ways that greatly benefit commodity producers and distributors.

The conversion of individuals from amateur to professional status may involve conflict. In tournament bass fishing the transition is most often from amateur to professional/commodity agent. The activity is most demanding on the professional/commodity agent level, especially for those anglers who haven't yet established themselves at the new level. Anglers' fishing performance as well as their "marketability" are evaluated by current and potential corporate sponsors. The necessary sacrifices of time, effort and money are incredibly high, but as one aspiring angler said, "Hey, no one is gonna sponsor you if you're not a winner."

Finally, the tension that exists within the social worlds of some activities must be more thoroughly examined. While tournament bass fishing is not imbued with conflict, it does exist at the elite, middle and club level. Much of the conflict can be attributed to different interests operating within the sport. Commodity agents, professionals/commodity agents, and amateurs/publics operate from different perspectives and have different motives for participation in this particular social world. The conflict from these differ-

ences is evidenced in some amateurs/publics' allegations of inequities and their sense of exploitation by fishing equipment producers and distributors.

Producers and distributors of fishing commodities and promoters of bass tournaments greatly influence this serious leisure activity. The activity simply would not exist in its current form without the wide range of high-tech commodities and the complex alliance of commodity agents that provide those commodities. The originator of the bass tournament concept has boasted that he "created the market and now satisfies the need" (Smith, 1985, p. B30). Bass boat manufacturers speak of "pioneering the sport of competitive fishing" (Fagerstrom, 1977, p. 62). Advertising executives for sonar fish finders announce that "We created a gap, and we filled it" (Hyatt, 1989, p. 98).

This study, based on various types of information gathered with different research methods, has demonstrated that commodity agents benefit most from leisure activities that are commodity intensive. Tournament bass fishing has achieved its current status not because fishermen desired a highly structured competitive fishing activity dependent on high-tech fishing equipment, but because commodity agents invented the basic format and have since exerted considerable control over the sport through competitive formats, commercial techniques and marketing schemes.

Tournament bass fishing is a powerful reminder that the influence of the modern capitalist economic system cannot be ignored in studies of leisure behavior. Elements of the commodification of leisure are evident in the sport. Promoters of tournaments and the manufacturers and the distributors of bass fishing commodities have been instrumental in the development of tournament bass fishing. Indeed, the man given credit for the development of the sport has boasted that it was "a simple case of marketing" (Smith, 1985, p. B30).

Leisure participants, whether involved in serious leisure or less structured leisure pursuits, cannot be treated as isolated individuals unaffected by society's institutions—especially the society's economic system. Rojek (1987) noted, "the relations of leisure cannot be studied meaningfully in isolation from the power structure of capitalist society" (p. 7). Kelly (1991) has contended that when leisure is marked by the consumption of commodities it is less a tenet of the human condition and more a factor of production. Leisure, under such conditions, is a powerful tool in the struggle for domination and exploitation. Genuine freedom in leisure can provide for individual growth, but commodified leisure based on the consumption of things is a "psuedo-freedom" that may lead to alienation and a preoccupation with possessions (p. 17-18).

Care must be exercised in making inferences from these findings to other serious leisure activities and their social worlds. Tournament bass fishing may be unique, or at least uncommon, in its combination of competition, organizational groups, demographics, preponderance and role of commodities, and shared attitudes and beliefs. Additional research must be undertaken to determine the existence of the aforementioned phenomena in

other competitive, commodity intensive serious leisure activities and in serious leisure activities that are less commodity intensive.

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