

The Diffusion of Fishery Information in a Charter Boat Fishery—Guide-Client Interactions in Gustavus, Alaska

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Abstract. Charter sport fisheries present a situation where management information and regulations are disseminated from management agencies to charter guides who are expected to pass it on to their clients. This paper explores educative interactions that took place between guides and their clients in a charter boat fishery in Gustavus, Alaska. Guide-client interactions were framed in the context of power as described by Michele Foucault. Applying this framework to a tourist setting suggests that guides have power to control what clients see on a trip and the types of information disseminated; whereas, clients have the power to reject or accept a guide's activities. This interaction was observed between charter guides and clients. Charter guides encouraged clients to release halibut larger than 100 pounds and encouraged them to reduce the number of pounds harvested. Moreover, guides used a client's willingness to learn and their position of power when diffusing their conservation viewpoints. These findings suggest that guides have significant control over their clients behavior, the types of information disseminated, and that charter-guide client interactions follow a Foucauldian framework.

Introduction

Charter sport fisheries are unique in that management information is often not directly distributed to the angler (charter client) from management agencies. Instead, information is distributed through a mediating party: the charter guide. Thus, communication between management agencies and charter clients is dependent upon a guide's ability to disseminate accurate information and educate his or her clients about local resources.

Clients expect a guide to provide *information* and *interpretation* of the local environment and aide their participation in activities (Cohen, 1985). Charter guides are hired by clients for their expertise about a potentially dangerous environment and to lead them to their bounty (Cohen, 1985). Thus, a guide's expertise gives them a substantial amount of power over client behavior.

Charter Guide–Client Power

Interactions of power between guides and clients follow a framework described by Michele Foucault (Miller and Auyong, 1991). Foucault's power framework contains three elements (Foucault, 1978; Cheong and Miller, 2000):

1. Power is not a system of domination by one group over another. Power is the result of successive interactions occurring between two groups. Power modifies discourse between two parties (Foucault, 1978; Gordon, 1980);
2. Power is a fluid force between groups that is always in a state of flux;
3. Power and knowledge are wedded and cannot be separated when analytically explaining the influences of power on group interactions.

Foucault's designation of these three elements suggest that power explains most human affairs, power and knowledge are wedded, and power can be analytically studied. In this sense, Foucault assigned himself the role of a political scientist. This paper focuses on Foucault's concept of power and knowledge in a political science framework and is not concerned with his postmodernist thesis.

A dynamic power relationship that follows Foucault's framework is maintained between charter guides and clients as each group rejects or accepts imposed activities or inducements. Clients have monetary power over a guide's activities. Conversely, a charter guide's power lies in his or her ability to construct and manage a client's experience and expectations. Charter guides modify their clients behavior using a variety of methods such as marketing, determining the nature of fishing activities (location and species), interpreting regulations, disseminating knowledge and advice (e.g., recommending local businesses), and acting as a culture broker between clients and locals.

This study explores the use of power by guides and educative processes that influence guide-client relationships. Guide-client interactions are discussed in context with releasing large halibut, educational interests held by charter guides and clients, and displays of power.

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Methods

Study Setting

The Glacier Bay/Icy Strait Region (GBISR), located in Northern Southeast, Alaska, is a world class sportfishing destination. Anglers travel from around the world to pursue halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) and salmon (*Oncorhynchus spp.*) during spring and summer months (May–September). A variety of sportfishing charter companies and lodges operate in GBISR. Most charter companies in GBISR are based in one of the following communities: Elfin Cove, Gustavus, Hoonah, or Juneau. This study is focused on Gustavus and does not represent other communities in the region.

Charter boats based in Gustavus operate from a single dock (Gustavus Dock) that can moor up to 10 charter boats simultaneously. Most charter guides operate day trips that offer 8 to 12 hours of fishing for anglers staying at local lodges. Anglers staying at a lodge often book two or more consecutive days of charter fishing; however, a small number of single day charters are taken.

Research Methods

Data for this study were collected using two research approaches: social survey research (Patton, 1998) and Ethnographic Participant Observation (EPO). Social survey research was used to assess demographic questions and questions regarding education. Onsite EPO questions assessed the types of power used by charter guides and clients.

Social Survey Research

Survey questions were posed to charter guides operating from the Gustavus Dock two or more days a week and among randomly selected clients. Question format was modified from examples given in Patton (1998) and distributed to respondents in booklet form. Survey questions for charter guides and clients were embedded in larger questionnaires that took approximately 7-8 minutes to complete. Responses for both clients and guides were broken into multi-day (>1 day of charter fishing) and single day charter responses. This paper will only focus on multi-day fishing trips.

Charter clients were questioned about their interest in receiving fishing instruction, if their guide disseminated information regarding the release of large halibut (>100 lbs), and if they released a large halibut. Client attitudes were assessed using the following three questions: (1) how important is it for you to have your guide teach fishing techniques for halibut (9 point scale was used for rating); (2) did your guide encourage you to release large halibut (yes or no); (3) if your guide encouraged you to release large halibut, did he or she cite biological reasons (yes or no), consumptive reasons (yes or no), or logistical reasons (yes or no); (4) if you caught a large halibut, did you release it?

Charter guides were asked similar questions as the clients. Charter guides were questioned about their interest in teaching clients about conservation and fishing, their interest in encouraging clients to release large halibut, and reasons they cite while encouraging clients to release large halibut. A charter guide's desire to educate his or her clients was assessed using the following questions: (1) how much emphasis do you place on teaching your clients to fish (9 point scale was used for rating); (2) do you encourage clients to release large halibut; (3) when encouraging clients to release large halibut, do you cite biological reasons (yes or no), logistical reasons (yes or no), or consumptive reasons (yes or no).

Ethnographic Participant Observation

Ethnographic Participant Observation (EPO) techniques consisted of interviews and observations structured to assess the following variants of Foucauldian power: power through surveillance, education, and advice; and, clandestine, and peripheral forms of power. These forms of power will be described in the results and discussion section.

Results And Discussion

Social Survey Research

Response Rate

A total of 173 clients were randomly sampled between thirteen charter guides. Samplers evenly sampled clients among the thirteen charter guides. Less than 5 percent of contacted clients refused a survey and 14 percent of interviewed clients did not complete or return their survey. Non-respondent analysis was not conducted due to the small number of refusals and a demographically homogenous respondent group. Moreover, the random experimental design allowed all clients to have an equal chance of selection.

A census was completed for 13 charter guides who operated, on average, two or more times a week from the Gustavus Dock. All charter guides operating 2 or more days a week participated in the survey.

Survey Results

Clients generally acknowledged the requests made by charter guides to release large halibut. The majority (70 percent) of charter clients indicated that they were encouraged to release large halibut. Similarly, most (92 percent) charter guides indicated they encouraged clients to release large halibut. A significant positive relationship was observed between charter guides who encouraged clients to release large halibut and clients indicating they were encouraged (Cramer's $V=0.348$; $p<0.001$). Significant relationships were also observed between guides who cited biological reasons

for releasing large halibut and clients who indicated that their guide cited biology as a reason for releasing large halibut (Cramer's $V=0.308$; $p=0.001$). Most clients (90 percent) responded that their guide cited biological reasons. Guides also appeared to influence the number of clients who released large halibut: out of the 77 clients who released large halibut, 53 percent of them indicated that their guide encouraged the practice.

Relationships were observed between a charter guide's interest in educating clients, a client's desire to learn, and clients who indicated they were encouraged to release large halibut. Clients were more likely to indicate they were encouraged to release large halibut if their guide placed a high importance on teaching conservation ($\tau = 0.355, \rho = 0.131$) or fishing technique ($\tau = 0.565, \rho = 0.01$). Furthermore, a guide's influence was mediated by a client's desire to be taught fishing technique. Fishing technique refers to the methodology used to catch and land halibut. The greater a client's desire to be taught fishing technique, the more likely it was that their guides encouraged them to release large halibut ($\tau = 0.55, \rho = 0.02$).

Survey Discussion

The use of pressure placed on clients by charter guides and rapport developed between charter guides and their clients may have influenced the number of large halibut released. This was evident by statistically significant associations between guides who encouraged the release of large halibut and clients who understood a guide's message. This suggests that the behavior of many clients were influenced by their charter guide. It is possible that client attitude towards large halibut was influenced by several exogenous factors: locals in Gustavus; fishing peers previously exposed to the Gustavus fishing social world; and, personal experience. External sources of influences are impossible to eliminate; however, clients probably did not learn about the release of large halibut from management documents or marketing sources. The authors are not aware of any management documents that contain information advocating the release of large halibut and marketing for Alaskan sport fishing trips are often focused on the harvest of large halibut.

The flow of power between charter guides and clients was fluid as indicated by a guide's influence being mediated by a client's level of interest. This was evident by statistically significant relationships between a client's desire to be taught fishing technique, a guide's desire to teach, and a client's response concerning the release of large halibut. These results are consistent with education-orientated literature that suggests that the perceived "fruitfulness" of an educational activity is an important learning factor (Weiner, 1980; Hill, 1997). For example, ideas would be easily exchanged between a guide that is interested in teaching and an educationally engaged client. Conversely, a less interactive and less communicative guide would perhaps not pique client interests and an uninterested client would not pay attention to a guide's instruction.

Epo Research

Surveillance

Opposing groups observe each other to acquire knowledge about the status and attributes associated with the other group (Gordon, 1980, p. 104). Charter guides were observed placing judgments on client behavior and clients were observed placing judgments on charter guide behavior. This discourse provided a baseline that each group used to construct assumptions concerning how the other would react when exposed to different scenarios. For example, a charter guide used surveillance to determine a strategy that would most effectively encourage a client to release halibut. Surveillance is exemplified in the following statement made by a charter guide when a client decided to keep a large (150 lbs) halibut

"This is the part where they [the client] realize how much fish they have and try and figure out what they are going to do with it."

The charter guide's statement reflected a conversation the clients were having out of hearing range of the charter guide. The clients indicated that when they kept the fish they did not realize how many pounds of meat they had.

Charter guides also used prior knowledge gathered from surveillance to label a client's behavior. Labeling clients was a tactic used by guides to reduce the catch of large halibut. For example, clients who harvested large amounts of fish were often labeled "meathounds." These labels were developed and shared between charter guides without the client's knowledge. Guides informed these clients about the taste of larger fish and logistical issues before presenting biological arguments.

Education

Clients generally rely on charter guides for fishing and fishery information such as the types and sizes of fish to eat, biological information, environmental information, and information concerning ritualistic objects associated with fishing (i.e., rods, reels, boats, lures, etc.). Clients unfamiliar with the Gustavus fishery possessed limited information regarding the application of fishing related objects or specific biological issues. Clients expect a guide to be a source of accurate and honest information (Cohen, 1985). This was particularly true in situations where information is difficult to understand or changes rapidly. For example, regulatory information often changes annually and can be tedious to understand in a foreign environment. Thus, many clients rely on guides to inform and educate them about regulations as reflected in the following statements:

Interviewer: "Do your clients ever look at the regulation book?"

Guide: [laughing] "NO! They believe whatever we tell them"

Clients routinely asked guides about halibut regulations such as bag limits and minimum and maximum size restrictions. Most guides issued information about large halibut being females with high fecundity and are thus, important for the population. One guide even held a quick orientation before embarking on a trip:

I give an orientation the day before or day of the trip... it comes out there [releasing large halibut]. I talk to them about the spawners and consumptive concerns.

Advice

Guides are analogous to travel agents because, like travel agents, they are often the first or second point of contact for clients planning a trip, are viewed as locals who can provide information, are often perceived as experts, and may provide a sense of security in a foreign environment (Cohen, 1985). One aspect of power for guides lies in their ability “to create or limit opportunities for tourists” (Cheong and Miller, 2000). Clients often legitimize a guide’s trip plan because they are expected to be competent and knowledgeable about a destination or environment (i.e., fishing spots) (Johnson and Griffith, 1995).

Gustavus charter guides commonly issued consumptive and conservation advice concerning the amount of halibut clients harvested and the type of fishing clients are engaged in:

“Tomorrow we should probably go after salmon because you already have quite a bit of halibut”

Guides also issued advice about local businesses:

“You should have {local business name} do it, those little jobbers [personal vacuum packers] just do not do it. Besides, you won’t need to deal with it [in reference to packing fish].”

Clandestine

Guides often choose what clients see during a fishing trip or tour. (Schmidt 1979, p. 458-459; Cheong and Miller 2000) and focus a client’s attention on objects worthy of attention (Cohen, 1985; Fine and Speer, 1985; Cheong and Miller, 2000). Cohen (1985, p. 14) suggested that guides have control over what tourists do not see by selecting objects of interest in “accordance with his personal preferences and taste” or “the assumed interests of his party”. This places a guide in a position of power that allows the manipulation of client behavior in a clandestine fashion.

Two forms of clandestine power were identified in this study: interpretation and fabrication. Interpretation occurs when guides socialize clients to their agenda by disseminating inaccurate information (Nettekoven 1979, p. 142; Cohen, 1985, p. 15; Cheong and Miller, 2000, p. 384). A guide encouraging the release of large halibut to increase stock size is an example of clandestine interpretation. Fabrication consists of inventions or deceptions made by guides to

influence client behavior (Cohen, 1985). For example, guides could take clients to less productive fishing grounds to curtail harvest:

“Yesterday they [clients] caught a limit of large halibut. So today I took them to the chicken ranch”

The chicken ranch refers to a place where small halibut are caught. This guide was attempting to curtail the size of halibut caught and the total pounds of harvested halibut.

Peripheral

Group pressure is important when considering the power relationship between charter guides and their clients. People who have prior relationships or joint interests often influence each others actions (Masplet, 2003). Group pressure is also not unique to people with social ties, it can occur between strangers united around a central cause (e.g., sportfishing). Guides did not always actively exert pressure; rather, disagreements among clients on whether large halibut should be released or not were often facilitated through group pressure. On some occasions a client was ostracized through disapproval:

Guide: client’s “will raz each other about it [releasing large halibut]... one group member insisted on keeping a big one and all the others really gave him a hard time about it, group pressure took over”

Conclusion

Interactions of power between charter guides and clients can influence attempts by fishery managers and other organizations to distribute conservation, regulatory, and safety information. Furthermore, these findings suggest that dissemination of conservation and management information should focus on charter guides while acknowledging client needs.

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View from above Icy Point looking northeasterly across the southern Fairweather Range and Brady Glacier. (Photograph by Bill Eichenlaub, National Park Service.)