FISHING FOR MASCULINITY: RECREATIONAL FISHERMEN’S
PERFORMANCES OF GENDER

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INTRODUCTION

Against the tide of continuing deindustrialization and the decline of the male “breadwinner,” how do men in the Midwest continue to construct masculine identities? This study aims to address this question by examining the masculine social context of recreational fishing in Ohio. Recreational fishing is a widely-popular activity for men and an important contributor to local and state economies. Using qualitative, ethnographic methods of in-depth interviews and participant observation, I find that fishing is a unique non-work context in which men reconstruct and negotiate their masculinity. This study supports previous research on masculinity and confirms that men draw upon their recreational or other unpaid activities in order to feel like and to be seen as men/masculine (Duneier 1992; Messner 1992; Sherman 2009).

Millions of recreational anglers in Ohio spend money each year on gasoline, motel rooms, fishing equipment, and food during fishing excursions, thereby supporting the struggling livelihood of many small towns in America’s rust-belt. Overall, recreational fishing is a $82 billion industry nationwide, and contributes over $755 million to the Ohio economy alone (NOAA 2009). The state government of Ohio has an economic interest in preserving quality fisheries, such as Lake Erie, due to the popularity of recreational fishing and the accompanying tourism dollars.

Recreational fishing is important for both economic and social reasons in the context of continued outsourcing and deindustrialization. In the last few years, Ohio has
seen the closures of plants, factories and distribution centers such as Timken, Hoover, and Delphi. The recent controversy over the possible closure of the Hugo Boss factory proves that manufacturing is in a precarious position in Ohio’s history. Fishing has been a popular recreational activity among men working in manufacturing in Ohio. It remains a popular activity during deindustrialization owing in part to its affordability and ease of access.

Despite the ubiquity and economic importance of fishing, little is known about people who fish for recreation. Men comprise the majority of anglers (Yodanis 2000). The act of fishing, and outdoor sports broadly, has been constructed as an activity and space appropriate for men. Given the homosociality of recreational fishing, I find it an ideal context for the study of masculinity.

This paper converges on issues of culture, masculinity, class, and identity by shedding light on the fishing lives of working and middle class fishermen. Drawing upon ethnographic data from fourteen in-depth interviews and one fishing season (February to December) of participant observation in fishing locations and an online fishing forum, I ask, how is fishing a “manhood act” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe 2005)?

My data suggest that men construct fishing as a gendered activity. Men perform masculinity through fishing by (a) regulating fishing territory, (b) displaying and regulating expertise, and (c) using fishing for a gendered autonomy. Men use fishing to elicit deference from others and to escape the emasculating constraints of work and home. Thus, fishing allows men to feel efficacious and to see themselves as real men. This thesis contributes to our knowledge of the social world by providing an example of
how men, against the emasculating tide of deindustrialization, negotiate and achieve masculinity in the context of leisure. This is a performance of masculinity that is not tied to monetary “breadwinning” or formal labor. The study reveals much of the gendered content of fishing-related behaviors and expands our awareness of subcultures of masculinity and sport in an understudied empirical context.

In the pages that follow, I briefly examine the literature on masculinities as it pertains to men in leisure and sport before describing my methods and major findings. I then discuss how my findings fit with previous research and conclude with ideas for future research on gender and fishing. The literature makes clear that men perform acts of control to be seen as men, to maintain male dominance, and to feel autonomous and efficacious in their daily lives. Men frequently perform masculinity in non-work activities such as sports, which are sites in which men learn and perform the masculine values of the society at large. The research on fishing, while it has focused on the social world of the commercial fishing industry and not on recreational fishing, suggests that men and women construct fishing as a men’s activity related to control and efficacy.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender and Masculinities

Scholars view gender as a social construct (Lorber 1994; Bem 1993; West and Zimmerman 1987) that is both a social structure and an achievement produced through everyday activities (Connell 1995; Messerschmidt 1993; Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender guides and constrains behavior and choices such as to align them with one’s perceived membership in a sex-category (i.e. male or female).

Categories of gender (i.e. ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’) are comprised of "culturally established sets of behaviors, appearances, mannerisms, and other cues that we have learned to associate with members of a particular gender” (Lucal 1999: 784).

Accordingly, social actors internalize and maintain a gendered identity and presentation of self that is consistent with biological sex. In this way, individuals hold one other accountable to idealized forms of masculinity or femininity (West and Zimmerman 1987; Schwalbe 2005). While some theorists have seen gender in interaction as a casual or sparsely distributed optional “display” (Goffman 1978), it is more compelling to understand gender as pervading all interaction—real or imagined—even when it is being challenged or reconstructed. This is the mutual relationship between gender as a system of relations (structure) and as a performance (action) and is akin to Messerschmidt’s (1993) “structured action” or Gidden’s (1984) “structuration.” These theories situate all
action in a cultural and structural context. The action, in this case, is “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Over the past three decades, scholars have theorized and investigated men’s behaviors and the discourses surrounding them—or “masculinities” (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Duneier 1992; Grasmuck 2005; Lamont 1992, 2000; Messerschmidt 1993; Messner 1992; Pascoe 2007; Schwalbe 1996, 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Masculinity, as part of the gender order (Connell 1995), exists only in relation to femininity. Thus, cultural constructions of masculinity maintain a two-gender system. Connell (1995) has theorized a hierarchy of multiple masculinities. The multiple masculinities model helps us understand inequalities between groups of men and examine dominant and idealized forms of masculinity. Specifically, “hegemonic masculinity” is the most highly valued, dominant, idealized form of masculinity in a given place at a given time (Connell 1995; Conell and Messerschmidt 2005). Non-hegemonic constructions of masculinity, such as those pertaining to men of color and gay men, are marginalized or subordinated (Connell 1995).

Although scholars have used Connell’s (1995) theory to construct typologies of men (Pascoe 2007), masculinity has more recently been seen as the performance of “manhood acts” (Schwalbe 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). These acts are behaviors and discourses that demonstrate membership in the group “men” through indicating the ability to control and to avoid being controlled (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). They are necessary if men wish to enjoy the benefits afforded to them in a patriarchal system (Schwalbe 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). As such, they are interactional strategies.
Manhood acts exist as part of a larger cultural “toolkit” (Swidler 1986) for gender performance such that men are seen and treated as men in a given interaction.

The particular form that masculinity (and femininity, for that matter) takes is contingent upon cultural and historical contexts as well as the demographic makeup of the actor and audience (Duneier 1992; Lamont 1992, 2000; Messerschmidt 1993; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Thus, constructions and performances of masculinity vary by combinations of class, race, and subculture. In various cultural contexts, masculinity has been associated with emotional non-disclosure (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2001); reciprocity, responsibility, reliability, a strong work ethic, protecting one’s family (i.e. wife and kids), providing for one’s home (Lamont 2000); intellect, culture, financial success (Lamont 1992) and rationality (Schrock and Padavic 2007; Schwalbe 2005).

Summarizing such diverse findings, the theory of “manhood acts” argues that the defining attribute of masculinity in contemporary Western society is the ability to control, to elicit deference from others, and to resist being controlled (Schwalbe 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). The manhood acts perspective is a derivative of the “doing gender” perspective (West and Zimmerman 1987). Theorizing “manhood acts” developed as a means of reorienting masculinities studies to the interactional dynamics of accomplishing masculinity. Men, according to Schrock and Schwalbe (2009), must demonstrate in social interaction the ability to control, the ability to avoid being controlled, and to elicit deference from others in order to be seen as men.

Men’s performance or pursuit of control has been linked to their labor process (Gecas and Schwalbe 1983). Within the context of wage labor, workers do not control
their labor and are alienated from the final product of their work (Marx 1963 [1844]). Outside of alienated wage labor, however, the product of labor—whether material or immaterial—is a reflection of the self and a basis for the experience of agency, control, and efficacy (Gecas and Schwalbe 1983). For men, the performance of control is simultaneously a signifier of a “masculine self” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009) as well as a rejection of the emasculating nature of alienation. Men who are limited in their experience of autonomy and control at work must either create agentic “games” in the workplace (Burowoy 1979; Sherman 2007) or seek these traits in their (often limited) leisure time. The pursuit of control is not solely motivated internally; a cultural conception that men are able, rational, and autonomous “do-it-yourselfers” holds men accountable and limits their appropriate behaviors and narratives. Not wanting to be ostracized and denied the benefits of male membership, men have “stakes” in their identities as morally good men (Schwalbe 2005).

Over time, cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity change in response to shifts in the broader social structure (Connell 1995; Naison 1980; Kimmel and Mosmiller 1992). In times of little structural change, masculinity may not appear so aggressively hegemonic; however, in times of change, gender demonstrates its “crisis tendencies” (Connell 1995). During periods of structural change in economy or polity, dominant masculinity actively and overtly defends male dominance and female subordination. The economic shift from autonomous mercantilism to automated capitalism was an emasculating process in that it removed control from the laborer (Gecas and Schwalbe 1983; Marx 1963 [1844]). In addition, the women’s suffrage
movement at the turn of the 19th Century brought male laborers to push for the construction and protection of outdoor spaces for men’s activities amidst the rising cult of outdoorsmen (Connell 1995; Kimmel and Mosmiller 1992). More recently, middle- and upper-middle class men have fueled a different movement into the outdoors, that of “mytho-poetic men” (Schwalbe 2006). These men seek the outdoors as a refuge from performing hegemonic masculinity and favor outdoor male rituals in order to revive a primitive masculinity. The persistent trend of deindustrialization over the past few decades, replete with uncertainty about work and economic wellbeing, has seen men trying out new strategies for masculinity (Gerson 1992). The literature on sports reveals that, amidst economic and cultural changes that shake up the gender order, men often turn to sports and leisure pursuits in order to construct a masculine self (Naison 1980; Messner 1992). For this reason, I now turn to the relationship between masculinity, sports, and leisure.

Masculinity, Sport, and Leisure

Scholars have looked at men’s performance of masculinity outside of the workplace by examining the world of sports. Studies of men’s leisure activities typically revolve around highly commercialized men’s team sports such as basketball and football (Fasteau 1980; Grasmuck 2005; Messner 1992; 2009; Sabo and Runfola 1980). Boy’s identities are tied to sports as they are instructed in these games from an early point in their lives. Also, sport is a public arena in which the activities of men and the values of patriarchy are socially celebrated (Collins and Kay 2003). Sports constitute a way of life for men (Messner 1992; Sherman 2009). Sanctioned sport is an institution, and the rules,
regulations, and values of the game often reflect those of men’s workplaces. Just as identity and the “masculine self” (Schwalbe 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009) for men are tied to men’s work prestige and their ability to provide for their families (Sherman 2009), sport and work are essential in educating men toward an acceptable masculine self in their paid and unpaid activities (Messner 1992).

Sport as a site of doing masculinity varies in its import for men’s identities by race and class (Collins and Kay 2003; Lamont 1992; Messner 1992). Messner (1992) argues that sport participation is more central to working class men and men of color because it represents one of the only avenues for upward social mobility, and it is one of the only accessible means for leisure. Whether for leisure or for pursuing a higher standard of living, sport becomes the primary source of masculine achievement for these men (Messner 1992).

Men’s performance of gender in sports and at work is demonstrative of their identity stakes as “real” men (Messner 1992; Schwalbe 2005). However, there are non-work settings other than organized sport in which men must redirect or reconstruct the stakes in their masculine identities. When men are laid off or reach retirement, they experience a severe loss of identity and low self-esteem (Cottle 2001; Gecas and Schwalbe 1983; Messner 1992; Schwalbe 2005). To feel efficacious and maintain respectability among their peers, retired working-class African American men often imitate their work routines in their daily lives (Duneier 1992). Sherman (2009) found that rural working class white men who experience periodic or permanent unemployment reconstructed their gender performance around being good fathers who instilled
masculine values in their kids through fishing and hunting. Similarly, Messner (1992) shows that men who are retired from athletic careers became coaches of youth sport and refused to see themselves as “ex-athletes.” Thus, for many men, job loss and retirement are emasculating events. The free time that these events provide for men is not the same as that “earned” by middle- and upper-class men with steady employment, in which leisure is added proof of masculinity atop the masculine achievement of economic success.

Masculinity for unemployed, underemployed, and retired men must be replicated or reconstructed after leaving the workplace. Fishing may be one such recreational arena in which many retired, unemployed, working class, and middle class men in Ohio perform a masculine self. Because fishing rarely requires the strength and stamina embodied by basketball, football, and similar sports, its accessibility is seldom impeded by age or disability. Fishing also contains multiple “modes” including more economical versions such as fishing from the bank of a pond to those requiring specialized gear for trolling or fly-fishing. Fishing, because of its accessibility and versatility, may therefore include diverse populations of men in the context of recreation. However, sociology has largely failed to see recreational fishing as a means to achieve masculinity despite fishing’s popularity among men.

Fishing as a Gendered Leisure Pursuit

Seeing fishing as a gendered phenomenon is critical to understanding men’s performances of gender through fishing. To the extent that there exists a sociological literature on gender and fishing, studies have emphasized small commercial fishing
operations and the communities dependent upon their success (Mederer 1995; Skaptadóttir 2000; Yodanis 2000; Smith et al. 2003). In this context, women have been complicit and active agents in defining fishing as the exclusive domain of men. However, the same women continue to make fishing a successful enterprise by netting, cleaning, and selling the fish that men catch (Yodanis 2000). Thus, fishing is characterized by a gendered division of labor where men’s primary task is the finding and catching of fish. Women’s construction of fishing as masculine shows how these women hold men accountable for doing “fisherman” masculinity appropriately. Additionally, Smith and colleagues (2003) found that the prohibition on the use of nets by small-scale commercial fishermen in Florida generated marital conflict and negative mental health outcomes in both men and women. Among their traumas, men in the study reported not feeling able to fulfill a traditional breadwinner role. Thus, both women and men in the world of commercial fishing construct fishing as a manhood act.

Although the majority of studies on recreational fishing utilize quantitative survey analysis to assess the social and economic value of public resources (Brown and Toth 1997; Chi-Ok and Ditton 2006; Floyd et al. 2006; Hunt and Ditton 2001; Hunt et al. 2002;), scholarship has shown that sporting in the outdoors may be related to men’s control, autonomy, and efficacy. For example, Hunt and Ditton (2001) found that fishermen commonly referred to the “challenge” of fishing as their primary motivation for partaking in acts of recreational fishing. The construction of fishing as a rational “challenge” highlights the control and domination of Nature that feminists have argued, as well as men’s presentation of a rational and agentive self. Indeed, one author argues
that hunting represents men’s desire to dominate and conquer an effeminate Nature (Kheel 1995). However, in the case of British fly fishermen, a more gentle and peaceful construction of masculinity predominates (Bull 2009). The middle and upper-middle class men in Bull’s study create an idyllic imaginary through photographs of their fishing locations, thereby constructing their masculinities in relation to the natural environment.

The current project explores how middle-class, as well as working class, underemployed, and retired, men use fishing to present themselves as men who are experts and in control of their environment. In brief, my data suggest that fishing allows men to elicit deference and exercise control during their leisure, especially when work is uncertain or unavailable to them and therefore an unsafe ground on which to base the masculine self. Whether they keep fish or release them, recreational fishing appears to be a pursuit of control, deference, and autonomy. Fishermen demonstrate autonomy by using fishing as a context for escaping the emasculating aspects of their work and home lives. While fishing, men control the knowledge and tools to catch fish, and they use this capital to control aspects of the fishing culture—from the knowledge and skills required to catch fish to the people who are present in fishing spaces.
METHODS

This study is an ethnography of recreational fishermen in Ohio. I use a combination of participant observation and in-depth interviews with fourteen men who fish to investigate the ways in which men use fishing to perform manhood acts. I recruited interviewees through snowball sampling as well as from a public online forum on which fishermen post their reports. To analyze the data, I use open and focused coding in a “grounded theory” approach (Charmaz 1983; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Fieldwork

I did the fieldwork for this study at a number of popular sites for recreational fishing in Eastern Ohio. Ohio is a Midwestern “rust-belt” state with scattered, deindustrialized towns and rural, agricultural expanses. The shadow of a once-prosperous industrial working- and middle-class life remains throughout much of the region where the men in this study fish for recreation. The manufacturing industry continues to weaken in the area, most notably in the closing of large employers such as Timken Ball Bearings, Hoover Vacuum, and Delphi Electronics. Ohio as a research site provides an ideal context for studying fishing behaviors due to the numerous popular sites for fishing, the variety of gamefish species to pursue, and the prevalence of a male-dominated fishing culture. Additionally, the dependence of small towns upon the spending of anglers and boaters fishing in the “Walleye capital of the world” speaks to the importance of the fishing industry in the area.
I began fieldwork at one river, below a dam, that I will hereafter refer to as Bradshaw Spillway. I was first introduced to Lake Bradshaw (the reservoir above the dam) and the Spillway by Keith (an interviewee) two years prior to the study. After talking to the men that fish Bradshaw, I quickly realized that the population was highly transient; most anglers fished at a number of lakes, reservoirs, and rivers throughout Northeast Ohio, including Lake Erie. Like the men that I studied, I expanded my sites to include a number of fishing locales popular among these men. Driving to various fishing destinations is a normative behavior in the culture of these men, and I followed along to understand how they go about their fishing routines. I frequented four fishing spots in total for ten months from February to December 2009.

I conducted participant observation at the various locations from March to November 2009. IRB approval was granted for the observations and interviews in March 2009 from my home institution. During each period of participant observation, I took “mental”- and “jotted notes” (Lofland and Lofland 1995). After fishing, I immediately typed up full fieldnotes at home, my office, or nearby library. Over 100 hours of participant observation translated into roughly 100 single-spaced pages of field data. Observations focused on casting and reeling in fish, and verbal and non-verbal interactions between anglers.

In addition to the on-site fieldwork, I participated in an online community that I call FishingOhioOnline (FOO). The public site has more than 20,000 members—most in Ohio—who post their fishing reports and share their fishing advice and photos through the online forum. I became aware of the site through informal conversations with anglers.
during my on-site fieldwork in popular fishing locations. A handful of male anglers told me that they were members of the site and asked if I was a member. I joined in Spring 2009 to understand how these fishermen interacted online. The site operates through the posting of “threads” or conversations on particular topics. These topics included boasting, sharing fishing expertise, debates over fishing laws, jokes, do-it-yourself projects, and the meaning of fishing. Thus the website served as a place where a somewhat diverse array of fishermen with internet access could convene and interact. In these interactions, the boundaries of fishing, masculinity, and the meanings attached to these cultural constructions were negotiated. For this reason, I include as data a selection of comments posted on the site. In cases where I incorporate these data, I make every effort to conceal the identities of the members. When I provide usernames, I utilize pseudonyms that attempt to capture the connotations of their original screen names. I purposefully minimize the presence of these usernames, and in some cases paraphrase data in a narrative format to avoid direct quotation. While I only identified as a researcher in my first few months on the site, I only use data from threads in which I did not take part. The website is a public forum that can be viewed by non-members as well as members. Members have full discretion over the personal information they present on the site.

Interviews and Sampling

To supplement participant observation, I conducted fourteen in-depth semi-structured interviews with fourteen anglers. By race, twelve of the men identified as white, one as black, and one as Hmong. All respondents were male, fished often (two to five times per week), and named fishing as their favorite pastime. Seven of the fishermen
identified as working class, and seven as middle class. Three of the men are currently unemployed; two are periodically employed steelworkers; two are retired; two are college students who work low-wage summer jobs; five of the men work full time. Interviewees ranged in age from 19 to 72 years old. The mean age for interviewees was 42 years at the time of the interview. On average, the men had roughly 31 years of fishing experience after learning to fish at an average age of 11 years old.

Interviewees were recruited through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. I find this to be a strong sample in that it captures a wide array of men with respect to age, class, and employment. This characteristic of the sample can potentially provide more breadth on how these variables interact with the meanings of fishing for men. However, the sample is not diverse by race. Early in the study, interviews were conducted with two young (under 25) white male members of my pre-existing personal social network of anglers. Five respondents were recruited at various fishing sites, largely through snowball sampling. Finally, seven interviewees came from the FOO online fishing community. I first posted a call for interviewees in the “saloon” section of the site, which prompted only two responses (one from an administrator of the site).

After posting the results of my own fishing excursions, I began to privately email users who fished in one of the sites under study and resided within a commutable (less than one hour) drive from either my home or office. Emails to anglers described my research interest in fishing, the purpose of the study, and the assurance of confidentiality. Respondents first responded with an email in which they demonstrated interest in participating. Then, we moved to arranging a time to meet for a face-to-face interview in
a site of their preference. All anglers who did take part in the interview received $10 compensation upon completion of the interview. Two of the interviewees refused the compensation. Both of these were retired middle-class white men.

Interviews lasted from one to three hours, and took place in a location convenient to the respondent, which included private homes, local coffee shops, and fishing sites. Interview questions focused broadly on how men approach fishing, the role that fishing plays in their lives, why they fish, and the qualities of being a good angler. For demographic information, I asked the men about their work status, subjective class position, marital status, and education. To ease our entry into conversation, I started the interviews by asking the men what they did for a living. This allowed the men to talk about something central to them—work, or the lack of work. The men spoke openly about their work and leisure pursuits, while also discussing family and friends important to them.

After completing each interview, I immediately ”wrote up” fieldnotes about the setting, my rapport with each interviewee, and the dominant themes of the interview. Once I arrived at home, I typed these jotted notes into full fieldnotes. The process of writing interview fieldnotes allowed me to immediately reflect on the emerging themes of the interviews, and therefore to alter the interview questionnaire slightly each time and probe into particularly salient topics during subsequent interviews.

I had little difficulty achieving rapport with respondents. We enjoyed swapping fish stories before, during, and after the interviews. Many of the men have stayed in touch by phone or through email (via the FOO website). That said, race, class and gender
affected my ability to achieve rapport with some of the men. As Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2007) write, men who interview men face a balancing act between paying deference to the interviewees and still being seen as a legitimate man by the interviewees. As a newcomer to qualitative research, my interviews were often riddled with moments of gendered tension in the balance between deference and authority. The men generally treated me as a novice or a non-fisherman at the start of the interview. However, in moments where my own expertise surfaced, some appeared confused as to the purpose of the interview and my role as interviewer. Perhaps needless to say, in these moments, I struggled to perform gender. Instead of playing the student, my presentation of a “fisherman” masculinity while interviewing men may have reinforced the unequal power relations embedded in the interview process.

Analysis

In this study, I take an inductive to data analysis that falls within the broad definition of extended case method. After completing the data collection from interviews and fieldnotes, I transcribed the interviews and read over the fieldnotes and my early memos. Initially, I used an “open coding” (Lofland and Lofland 1995) strategy to assess the many themes in the data. Among these were a variety of men’s actions toward each other, their families, and fish, as well as discourses about themselves and others. While continuing to memo on this array of codes, I omitted and collapsed redundant and superfluous codes. As I refined the codes, the central theme of men’s control, autonomy, and efficacy through fishing revealed itself. I then systematically recoded all data
searching for these salient themes. To support this stage of refined coding, I used Microsoft Excel to organize data by code.

Throughout the processes of data collection and analysis, I heeded the advice of Howard Becker (1998) in “turning people into activities.” Consistent with a tradition among symbolic interactionists (e.g. West and Zimmerman 1987), I seek to reveal what men do rather than who they are. This is supported by contemporary theorists of masculinity as “manhood acts” (Schwalbe 2005; Schrock and Padavic 2007; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). These scholars argue that an interactionist perspective that underscores men’s actions is necessary to seeing and understanding masculinity and the consequences of the gender order.
FINDINGS

Those who fish for recreation occupy a masculine social terrain. Before moving to describe how men perform masculinity or “do manhood acts” through fishing, I find it necessary to provide a context for these activities and interactions. That context is a masculine world created and maintained by both the consumer marketplace of the recreational fishing industry and the men who fish for recreation. In this section, I give some examples of how the recreational fishing industry and the men themselves produce a masculine environment. In so doing, I situate the behaviors and attitudes of the fishermen in this study in their subcultural context as well as contribute a partial answer as to why men occupy the cultural and geographic spaces of fishing more than women.

The Masculine Social World of Recreational Fishing

Over the past several decades, recreational fishing as a sport has become increasingly commercialized. Recreational fishing is quickly becoming tournament fishing. In the United States, fishing tournaments with large cash prizes have flourished and diversified. They now exist at national, state, and regional levels. These tournament circuits each focus on one species of fish. In freshwater, “Bass fishing” was the original and sole tournament style of fishing, but now Walleye, Catfish, and Muskie tournaments are quickly solidifying as institutions within this context. Tournament fishing has affected non-tournament recreational fishing in three ways: it has a) increased the visibility and
popularity of fishing; b) increased consumer marketing toward potential fishing populations; and c) it has promoted and reinforced the values of competition and technical competence in fishing. The latter has presumably allowed fishing to enjoy a more proper “sport” status. Indeed, Collins and Kay (2003) argue that competition and technical competence are “masculine” goals of sport. In fact, some members of the FOO website brought up the question of whether fishing was a sport. All replies agreed that fishing was either a sport, a “way of life,” or both. One user’s response captured the intersection of tournament fishing, visibility, and sport status:

MasterBassAngler: If its covered on espn... Its a sport and it definitely is covered on espn!

Tournament fishing has made recreational fishing a lucrative industry. Fishing is generally marketed to men and cultivates a particular masculinity around control, domination, and technical competence. For instance, a new fishing rod is advertised as “stout” and able to “manhandle big fish.” A popular lure company is “Bomber,” and the tagline of their new heavy-duty lures reads “Built to Dominate.” Finally, Mustad calls their new lineup of hooks the “Slow Death Hooks.” There is no subtlety in the marketing of these and other fishing products toward men, playing upon their attempts to have power over fish. As women are now entering the world of recreational fishing full-steam, companies have generated a few products that specifically target women, such as Pflueger’s “Lady Trion” series of rods and reels. These products tend to sport bright pink or purple colors, treat women as “girls” or “ladies,” and are generally of poorer quality and cheaper price. The recreational fishing market is still overwhelmingly a fisherman’s world.
In addition to the influences of tournament fishing and the consumer market of fishing supplies, men who fish construct fishing as a heterosexual masculine culture and their fishing grounds as masculine space. Congruent with the fishing industry’s language of domination in their marketing, men use similar language of domination and conquest in talking about fish. When describing days in which they caught many fish, men online and in-person frequently use lines such as “We slayed them.” Often, they replace “slayed” with “killed,” “clobbered,” “annihilated,” or a host of other words connoting mass-murder or total destruction. Perhaps ironically, these words are used even by those men who do not keep their fish. Even though they carefully release their fish alive, they present the act of tricking and fighting fish with rod and reel as a dominating and even murderous act. The effect, intentional or not, maintains fishing as a manhood act, an act of control and power, that reinforces the conception of fishing as the domain of men.

Men who fish also expect other anglers to present a heterosexual masculine self. Fishermen are accountable for being straight men. One story from the online fishing site (FOO) makes this point clearly. A member of the site with an androgynous username (“FishingAddict”) and no avatar photo posted a request for fishing tips and info for an out-of-state trip. In this post, the member began by referring to “the guy I’ve been dating.” Shortly thereafter, another user (“HogMan”) told FishingAddict to look for an online dating site for “alternative lifestyles” unless he was looking for “straight” things to do out of town. As it turns out, FishingAddict was a woman, not a gay man as HogMan assumed. In her next post, FishingAddict told HogMan she was a straight woman, and even added a photo of herself with long blonde hair as her avatar. This example reveals
the accountability one faces for presenting a gendered identity, as well as the heterosexual masculine normativity of the site.

Men also construct the physical, geographic space they occupy while fishing as masculine. A prime example is the ubiquity of urinating outdoors at the fishing site. I noted this behavior several times at heavily populated sites during my fieldwork. Men usually face a tree or some other obstruction when urinating, but are nonetheless visible during the act. Perhaps it is enough to say that being in the woods with a few dozen men who occasionally expose themselves to urinate publically is not the most inviting social space for a woman. Evidence from the online community drives the point home; one user posted a complaint that there was nowhere to urinate (privately) at his favorite fishing location. He writes:

“Too many people around for the woods. The last thing I need is some little girl catching a glimpse of the river momath [mammoth] and getting a sexual indecency charge!”

Another angler responds:

“But your [you’re] a man... unzip your pants fire your weapon and put it away.. There is always a place to piss ;)

To further exacerbate the masculine social context of fishing, men casually use vulgar language and at times consume alcohol. A final example of how men construct fishing space as masculine is through the defense of territory. They use threats and violence to maintain their “rights” to fishing spots both on shore and on the water. This point will be discussed more fully below.
Men’s construction of fishing as an act of domination and their construction of fishing culture and space as heterosexually masculine works jointly with the fishing industry’s marketing toward men to make fishing a gendered sport. The increased presence and visibility of tournament fishing have introduced and institutionalized competition and technical competence as masculine values of fishing as a sport. These are the forces that generate a masculine social world for men who fish and serve as the backdrop to their performance of masculinity.

That said, fishing can also be inclusive of a variety of men, and at times, women and children. There is no single way to fish, and the different modes of fishing help explain why it is such a popular activity. Small ponds in municipal parks and canals along bike- and walking paths are spread throughout urban and suburban areas, allowing easy and visible access to fishing opportunities. In Ohio, there are also larger bodies of water such as Lake Erie, the Ohio River, and hundreds of inland lakes and small rivers. These areas are mostly inaccessible except by boat or by navigating heavily wooded areas. The exception are a few small state parks and bridges that abut the waterway, providing public access. Regardless of access, fishing is still an activity more popular among men, and its popularity can in part be explained by its flexibility. The different modes or ways of going about fishing, as well as the diverse settings in which it occurs, allow men of all abilities, economic resources, age, and class to participate in activities of recreational fishing.

In the pages that follow, I describe the “manhood acts” that men perform through fishing. These are gendered performances that allow fishermen to see themselves and be
seen by others as “men.” That is, they express their membership as men by “doing
gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987). Specifically, men defend their fishing spaces as
territory they must control and maintain; they draw upon their own fishing expertise and
experience to elicit deference from others; and they use fishing as a route to autonomy,
particularly when they have limited avenues for achieving masculinity and autonomy
elsewhere. I argue that these are negotiations of masculinity within a broader context of
structural emasculation, including, but not limited to, ongoing deindustrialization in the
Rust Belt.

Defending Territory

Recreational fishing often takes place in a masculine social environment. As I
argue above, men actively construct the geographic, physical locations they occupy as
masculine. One way they do this is by graphic activities of public urination, using vulgar
language, and consuming alcohol. These actions create a social space where men
construct and reinforce masculinity. There are times, however, when conflicts arise,
usually in relation to men’s use of space and territory. Of course, there are practical
reasons for allowing space between anglers on a crowded shoreline; lines and hooks can
cross, creating a time consuming and inconvenient set of tangles. However, there are also
socially constructed meanings attached to space in the fishing context. Men’s reactions to
transgressions of spatial norms reveal the masculine control that is at stake on the
riverbank. Men use verbal and physical attacks on other men who quite literally “cross
lines.” Moreover, beyond the interaction and debates over who arrived to a spot first,
some fishermen feel an entitlement to certain fishing spots in a more abstract sense. They
feel that some locations should be well kept secrets, and that their control over the
secrecy of these spaces is under constant threat. Below, I examine the use of space among
anglers and give specific examples of conflicts over territory.

It is important that we first understand the dynamics of space in a fishing scene.
There are patterns to how men aggregate and spread apart while on a shoreline. In my
fieldwork, I noted many occasions in which fishermen fished close together. The most
common physical grouping of men was the two or three friends that came to fish
together. While they spaced themselves out for practical purposes, they kept themselves
close enough for casual socializing. Fishing for these men was a social activity, and they
chatted while casting and reeling repeatedly. Spacing between groups on the river bank,
however, was rigidly maintained. That is, if one were to have a bird’s-eye view of a
crowded shoreline, one would see distinct pods of two or three men spaced out. Even
when men fished alone, they would ensure considerable distance between themselves and
other anglers. Only interactions with non-anglers or friends could occur within the
territory carved out by an angler.

At the Bradshaw Spillway, race was a factor in men’s territoriality. The Spillway
consists of a narrow stream (fifteen to twenty feet across) flowing from a large concrete
dam. White male anglers are the predominate occupants of this space, with the frequent
presence of Asian anglers. One racialized difference in spatial dynamics that I observed
was that while Asian anglers would readily assume space near white anglers, whites
never moved to be next to Asians. When Asian anglers moved near whites, the whites
almost always left for a more distant spot. The mere presence of Asian anglers alongside
them evoked a change in location for white fishermen. In formal and informal interviews, I was informed as to why this racialized dynamic occurred. Ian’s dad told me while fishing at a separate location, “You ever been down there [at Bradshaw Spillway] when them Filipinos are there? They’ll come and fish right up next to you. They’ll cast over your line…” It appears that in the case of the Bradshaw Spillway, the maintenance of space for white fishermen was simultaneously about one’s personal control over space and whites’ control over good fishing grounds.

Ian (20, white, informally employed) told me a story that exemplifies the connection between space, race, and masculine control at the Bradshaw Spillway. Ian and his friend were fishing below the dam one evening, while three men believed to be “Filipinos” fished on the opposite bank. According to Ian, the Asian men were casting across the stream purposefully to fish the water along Ian and his friend’s feet. Fed up with what he felt was antagonism and disrespect, Ian’s friend walked around the dam to the other bank, came up behind the Asian fishermen, and kicked each one into the water.

This story exemplifies the threat that white male anglers felt to their entitlement to fishing space. It shows how a male angler took control over what he felt was his space by physically attacking the Asian fishermen. Not only did he react to an assumed transgression of spatial norms, the white angler did so in an immediately violent manner, asserting his physical prowess and imbuing the punishment with hegemonically masculine meaning. Both the form (i.e. regaining control over territory) and the content (violence) speak to the importance of performing masculinity in the fishing context.
Another story of violent defense arose when I walked back to my car talking to Hank, a seventy-two year old working class Black angler who is retired, but helps local churches with minor accounting. We had just fished along a concrete wall below a dam on the Ohio River. The water here is deep and rages from the dam. The wall upon which anglers fish is some twenty feet above the white water below. Hank tells me he has seen a handful of fights among men on the wall lately. In two instances, men were severely beaten by two or three other men for “casting over their lines” and “tangling them up.” On one occasion, Hank feared the violent fishermen were going to throw the transgressor into the water, but they did not.

Conflicts over territory among men are not limited to the shoreline. Even those who have the resources and privilege to fish from a boat and change locations at a whim do not see themselves as immune from the threat of invasion of their space. The online forum on FOO is a place where men can relate stories of transgression and defense. One conversation had over 40 replies, many of which were stories similar to that of the original post. The original complaint reads:

This guy who must have been 105 years old motors up by us in his [boat] and stops about 20' west of us. Then he puts out his drift sock, and starts heading right towards us. So he dosnt say nothin til he is about 5' away. Me and my buddy are just starrin at each other like WTF? Then he asks if we are gonna move. I stood up and pulled my knife out. By that time he was close enough to where I could grab his bow. I told him he was either gonna lose his drift sock, start his engine and get away from me, or i was gonna board his boat! So he decided to call me an a-hole and told me to move. So I had my buddy start the motor up. I made short work of his sock line, and my buddy tossed a pee bottle with no lid on it onto the dudes boat. There is no excuse for unsafe behavior on a boat like that. I never drift within 50' of someone.

When another fishermen questioned his use of a knife in the interaction, he replied:
The knife was for cutting the rope that his drift sock was attached to, not to stab him...I respect my elders, but I would hand out a weapon-free a$$whoopin to an older guy just as quick as a younger guy.... Am I dangerous to myself?? No....To others??...Maybe. I just don't like stupid people...Yes I take stuff into my own hands, and yes in seems like drastic measures... But that's how I deal with stuff...Besides, you don't think ignorant boaters are dangerous? More dangerous then me in fact....!!!! How can you expect idiots to stop being idiots, if you don't teach them how not to be an idiot??

This example highlights the importance that fishermen place on space while fishing and the deference they expect from others by respecting reasonable boundaries around such territory. The fisherman quickly resorts to violent, masculine symbolism in threatening the older man with the knife. He then proceeds to vandalize the man’s boat by cutting his rope and tossing an open bottle of urine on board. The fisherman clearly demonstrates his ability to control through the use of force. By calling other anglers “idiots” and “stupid people,” he positions himself as superior to the older man and to all anglers who do not defer to a fisherman’s territory. His comments are a reminder that to break the unwritten rules about space is to subject oneself to fishermen’s attempts at regaining control and superiority. These acts are attempts to demonstrate that they are “real” men who are not to be controlled.

Why do men go to such lengths to defend their fishing spots? The severe reactions described above suggest that men feel momentarily that their masculinity is threatened by others who do not grant them the deference and respect that a decent man deserves. But what larger social forces influence their defensive behavior? A brief example of the defense of territory on the FOO website provides a case in which the larger territoriality and control that men possess over their fishing spots is threatened by technological
advancement. After ChasesFish23 posted a picture of himself in real time with a fish
captured on a popular river, an upset fisherman responded:

Posting pictures like that and giving out locations are the reason
why the next day the spot is packed. Some of you guys love to
learn the hard way. BTW [by the way], It's a public forum, so deal
with it....

The defensive response unearths a paradox in fishermen’s display of masculinity.
They must delicately balance macho boasting about big fish with the need to maintain
control over fishing locations. It also shows how social networks—mediated and
exacerbated with contemporary technological advancement—can threaten and spoil
fishermen’s well-guarded fishing spots. The pervasiveness of social networking
technology is out of the anglers’ control, so they are expected to minimize its effects as
much as possible. ChasesFish23’s picture posted on a public website was seen as a
flagrant dismissal of territoriality and control over space by the upset responder. Instead
of challenging the norm of control, fishermen who saw this conflict and responded
simply poked fun at the angry response because the spot was not clandestine but easily
accessible and visible. Thus, their responses suggest that other spaces may well be worth
keeping private, but not those that were easily visible to begin with. In fact, in other
fishing reports on the site, fishermen made frequent use of alterations to pictures in order
to mask their fishing spots. Some erased all of the background before uploading a
photograph, while others admitted that they drove their boats to other locations before
taking the picture. Prior to the ubiquity of the Internet and cellular phones, fishermen
themselves were the gatekeepers of fishing grounds. The best spots were not revealed to
loose-lipped members of the social network, and one had to know someone who knew someone else in order to be shown a good spot.

The removal of control over the popularity of a fishing spot by technology is a form of structural emasculation for men who take pride in being gatekeepers or in the social-network-as-gatekeeper model. A good fishing spot is protected like private property, a place the fisherman owns and that he cherishes for recreation. Fishermen do their best in this climate to balance bragging and controlling their favorite places to fish. However, technology is only a partial answer to why men feel defensive of their fishing spots. The dominant values of fishing have shifted toward competitiveness and technical competence (evidenced by catching fish) due in part to the growing popularity of tournament fishing. Fishermen may have a difficult time fishing within visible range of each other without feeling competitive and challenged by the other’s presence. Space, in this light, may be a proxy for the fish that occupy it, as they are the rewards for technical competence and angler superiority in the competitive model. Fish are the proof of masculine accomplishment.

In this section, I have described how fishermen use and defend space both on the shore and on the water. Although the examples given were largely second hand, the predominance of such stories serves to remind fishermen of what is at stake in protecting space and what they can expect if they infringe upon it. Space is constructed as symbolic of men’s control and respectability, and the men who occupy it expect that others defer to them. Because defending men’s fishing territory is about control and deference, it is clearly a “mahlhood act.” Other ways in which fishing is a manhood act and how men
perform masculinity through fishing are discussed below. I now consider how men use fishing as a source of expertise and how expertise relates to deference and control for fishermen.

Displaying Expertise

Men who fish not only control space, they possess and control specific knowledge and skills garnered through fishing. If one’s goal when fishing is to catch fish, one may frequently be disappointed that the fish “just aren’t biting.” For many, fishing is not about catching fish as much as it is spending time with people or, as I will discuss in the next section, about getting away from other (gendered) obligations. Still, for many fishermen, the primary goal of fishing is to catch fish consistently, and these men frame fishing as a riddle to be solved. The solution to the riddle lies in matching skill and knowledge to fishing scenarios. Many fishermen who approach fishing in this way do not keep their catch, revealing that the challenge of finding fish and predicting their behavior is the source of their enjoyment in fishing. As Keith (24, white, working class) puts it, “I enjoy the puzzle of trying to figure out fish—what makes them do what they do and what I can do to catch them.” To complete the “puzzle” of fishing, specific knowledge about fish, their habitats, and how a host of variables affect their behavior is required. Spend time with men who fish frequently and one will hear what sounds like a farmer’s almanac of fishing axioms. Folklore laced with lay biology is a common form of verbal interaction among anglers both online and while fishing, and can be used as a marker of status among fishermen. The same can be said of talk regarding the technical competence of using fishing tackle as an instrument for luring and catching fish. Fishing can thus be a
source of expertise among men who fish. Expertise about fishing can be used for performances of gender because it allows men to exercise control and discipline, as well as to elicit deference from others.

Before describing the ways that expertise is used as an interactional strategy for eliciting deference, it is necessary to see what fishing expertise looks and sounds like. Keith, quoted above, explains the importance of fishing expertise and technical competence:

**TA:** Does fishing take skill?

**K:** A certain amount. That’s not to say you have to have skill to catch fish. But you have to have certain skills to catch fish more often. I would say, um…and a lot of it is stuff you can learn rather quickly—at least the basics. But I’d say it takes many years to perfect anything.

**TA:** So what are the “basics?”

**K:** Fish behavior…as how they live in their environment, and how they react to stimulus like weather and water temperature and stuff. Just basic ability to fish, you know. You have to be able to cast, tie knots, you have to be able to make reasonably accurate casts and make your presentations look somewhat alive, unless you’re fishing dead bait. But then you have to be fishing in the right spot, so that kind of bridges the gap between fish habitat and angler skills.

In this example, it is obvious that fishermen such as Keith present fishing as an activity that at a minimum requires a complex combination of skills and specific knowledge.

Similarly, Randy (44, white, working class) says:

**R:** You see bass fishermen, and they’re better than regular fishermen.
TA: Skill-wise, or what?
R: Yea, they have better equipment or whatever. But it don’t matter how big your boat is, you know, and how fast it is, as long as you can use a boat, you can get fish. But sometimes, you know, it’s better to have certain equipment than other stuff.

TA: Why? When would it be better to have it?
R: Well, down at the river, you know, there’s been times, I’ve used certain colors [of lures] and if they [the fish] weren’t hitting [biting] ‘em, they wasn’t hitting ‘em. ‘Cause you know white, down there, is a main color. If you don’t have it, then you can’t catch ‘em I guess. Or they just won’t hit ‘em.

These examples show that many fishermen see some threshold of technical competence and lay biology as necessary to achieve the goal of consistently finding and catching fish. This approach to fishing as a complex puzzle with the goal of catching fish with regularity sets men up for unequal relationships with other fishermen. That is, inexperienced or unknowledgeable fishermen seek to fish with and learn from more experienced and learned fishermen. The latter become gatekeepers of a form of fishing “capital,” an expertise that affords them status among fishermen. Fishermen who possess and display expertise have their masculinity confirmed on two fronts—by the deference paid to them by other men and by catching many fish. Thus, advanced fishermen control the intimate knowledge and skills that newer anglers desire.

The result of this power imbalance over the means of catching fish through expertise results in paternalistic relationships among men. I asked Keith how someone would go about learning the “basics” as he described them above.

K: Yea, I would definitely say if you know someone who fishes, you’re better off learning, you know, learning from
somebody who already has the experience. That definitely takes a lot of the guesswork out of it.

Fishermen who cannot display expertise themselves seek out fishing-based relationships in which they encourage other men to demonstrate their superiority in fishing knowledge and technical competence. That is, they pay deference to “expert” fishermen. Jimmi (25, Hmong, unemployed) adds, “I think it’s just a part of that guidance…I know, my friends think I’m weird when I tell them I’m going [fishing] with an older guy I met online.” “Guidance,” as Jimmi explains it, is a form of mentorship in which knowledge about fishing and the outdoors is passed on from one generation to the next. Thus, because experience and expertise are accumulated over the years, intergenerational mentorships among fishermen are common. In my fieldwork, in interviews, and online, such relationships among men were normative and commonplace. The FOO website even has a section called “Angler’s Legacy Program,” in which willing participants can seek out mentoring relationships with each other. These relationships are venues structured around deference to more knowledgeable, experienced anglers. Although men often fish together to keep one another company, these relationships are more common among those of similar expertise. Still, men in relationships with relative equals may perform displays of expertise in moments where they feel that they should be deferred to.

Fishermen’s intergenerational relationships take the form of father-son ties. Fathers display expertise in masculine subjects and are the gatekeepers to men’s recreation while sons defer to their fathers and emulate them in skill and value (Messner 1992, 2009; Sabo and Runfola 1980; Sherman 2009). Sometimes, the lessons are hard learned. For example, Keith often fishes with Sam, a man more than fifty years Keith’s
senior, in order to learn more about a species of fish called “Muskie.” Keith told me informally about the first time he fished with Sam. “You know how old men are,” he tells me, (impersonating Sam) “Fishing isn’t what is was back in the ‘50s and ‘60s; We’d catch so many fish…” (Switching roles again) “Dude, I don’t care. I want to catch fish now.” His first time fishing in Sam’s boat, “We went from here to [there] and he had a fish on. Ten minutes later—another fish. Are you kidding me? He ended up with two fish caught, two lost, and I got [a bite]. That’s more Muskie than I’ve seen in my entire life.”

With the wages of expertise being deference, experienced fishermen are often eager to confirm their masculinity through male relationships. Frank (70, white, retired middle class) told me a story about the formation of one of his intergenerational fishing relationships as we drove back to his home after a day of fishing for Walleye.

You see that little steakhouse there? Well, my wife and I went in there for dinner a few years back when he first opened. You want to talk about a good steak—you should try his! So anyway we went and I ordered the fish. The waitress brings it out, and I immediately called her back and said, “What is this?” It was gummy and gamey and nasty. “This isn’t fish. You want fish? I’ll show you fish!” Well, I happened to go Walleye fishing the day before so I had a limit of nice big Walleys at home. I went home and picked a few big, beautiful fillets out and took them to the chef. They cooked them up in ten different ways and invited my wife and me back to try them. We entered and right away the best waitress in the house came up and said, “You’re the Walleye guy, right? I’ll be your waitress this evening.” So I took one bite of that fresh Walleye the way the chef prepared and boy, I tell you, I never had fish taste so good. Well, anyway, the chef came up and said, “I’ve never seen such beautiful fish fillets. You’ll have to show me how to catch my own.” And so I took him fishing and ever since he keeps calling me up, “When are we gonna catch some Walleye?”

Frank’s story clearly exemplifies the deference he receives from the male chef in exchange for his demonstration of expertise (about fishing and fresh food). He also elicits
deference from the waitress and the restaurant as a whole when he draws upon his
dexterity to make a scene about the bad fish and when he returns to sample the fish he
supplied. This is evidenced by the waitress’ recognition of him as “the Walleye guy.” The
story, as Frank tells it, is packed with presentations of a masculine self-deserving of
defERENCE.

Another story of how expertise is used by fishermen reveals the interactional
dynamics of “displays of expertise.” One cold October morning, a large public pond was
stocked with Trout, and many elderly white men showed up to try to catch them.
Standing out from these fishermen were a pair of men who fished next to me. One was
chubby, Asian, and appeared to be over fifty years old. The man with him was white,
looked to be in his mid twenties, and wore baggy urban attire. It was clear that the Asian
man was teaching the younger white man how to fish. Almost immediately after settling
next to me, the white angler catches a Trout before his mentor even makes a cast. The
young man holds his fishing rod vertically, bent over with the fish dangling on the line,
and takes some pictures with his cell phone. The older Asian angler scorns him not taking
precaution, “The fish could fall off into the water. They good at that.” In the following
minutes, the young angler repeatedly remarks how easy it was to catch the fish. The
Asian man scorns him again, this time for not putting their fish basket (a wire cage to
hold caught fish) in the water. The Asian man continues to lecture the young white angler
with a variety of fishing knowledge through statements like, “The problem with a small
hook is that it cuts the line easier. The fish takes the hook and bites the line.” The young
white angler is quiet; he simply spits frequently on the ground.
This story shows how a more experienced angler used displays of expertise at strategic moments to reorient the young angler to the proper hierarchy of their relationship. He was the expert and teacher, and the young white man was the student. New to fishing, the young man resisted many of the experts’ lessons. Nonetheless, the Asian fisherman appears to have used fishing expertise as a means to elicit deference from the younger angler. These examples show how fishermen use expertise to attempt to reposition themselves as superior and elicit deference from others. Displaying expertise is, in this sense, a “manhood act.”

The paternalism of fishermen’s unequal relationships is most evident when men teach children to fish. Indeed, the majority of men I interviewed learned to fish from their fathers or male relatives. In these scenarios, men have an essentially captive audience for their fishing expertise. They use their fishing knowledge to elicit deference from kids. One primary social context for men teaching children is “kids’ fishing derbies.” These are events held at state- or municipal parks, usually at a small pond that has been stocked with fish specifically for the derby. Adults are typically not allowed to fish until after noon when the “winners” have been announced. Many men volunteer at these events, seen derbies as a good cause and eager to display their expertise. Kids’ derbies are structured around men’s values in fishing; the emphasis is on competition and specific fishing knowledge. Thus, they are a prime location for fishermen to elicit deference from children and parents.

Randy (44, white, working class) shares his and his male friend’s experience teaching the kids at the fishing derbies:
TA: You think it’s important then, to share fishing with kids?

R: Yea, I really do. ‘Cause there was times down there, you know, like my one buddy, he does it [volunteers at kids’ derbies] for [Mosquito Lake]. Tells ‘em what to use, you know, so do I. Try here, try moving your bait around, you know, stuff like that, just to get them to bite. And he was showing ‘em how to tie a knot, and how to take the fish off, and they learn. And they, you know, they watch you. And they always thank you. “Thanks for helping!”

Randy and his friend make efforts to display their expertise and technical competence to the children. The fact that Randy ends his response by telling of and imitating the kids’ gratitude highlights the importance of deference to male anglers’ interactions with kids. This gratitude is a form of deference that the men attempt to elicit by controlling the knowledge and techniques used to catch fish. That is, fishermen act as gatekeepers. Their control over the means of fishing as a recreational pursuit extends beyond these interactions in which they display masculine expertise; men, to a great extent, act as gatekeepers to the social world of fishing, regulating who enters and how much they fish.

Fathers do this when they decide to take their kids fishing with them or not. Jimmi (25, Hmong, unemployed) relates his experience:

- TA: So who taught you how to fish?
  - J: My uncles, actually.
- TA: Did your dad fish?
  - J: He did. He went fishing every weekend; he just never took us with him.

Similarly, the a member of the FOO posted this comment:

“I too wish my dad would have taken me fishing when I was young...He was not an outdoor person... My next-door neighbor
taught me how to hunt...And my fishing did not come until I was in my twenties and a good friend got me started fishing and have loved the sport since…”

While some fathers do not involve their children in fishing, many do. Indeed, many fishermen believe that today’s youth spend too much time indoors and are too distracted by videogames or computers. This is the reason Bill (45, white, middle class) gave me for why he feels it is important to teach kids about the outdoors and take them fishing.

Another FOO member claims:

“It’s nice to see the kids out enjoying the outdoors. I’m trying hard to keep my son away from the TV and video games.”

In the example above, it becomes clear that recreational fishermen feel that postindustrial technology can pose a threat to the future of fishing. While men may be genuinely concerned about having their children perform the same recreational activities that they enjoy, fear that technology will distract youth (particularly boys) is strikingly similar to the sentiments of early 20th Century men who thought their sons were being too feminized at home and at school. These feelings resulted in the creation of National Parks as outdoor recreational spaces and the institution of the Boy Scouts to teach young men how to “rough it” (Kimmel 1996). Thus, while fishing is an acceptable arena for men’s parenting behaviors, their interactions and relationships with children are paternalistic and revolve around the masculine values and skills of fishing. Teaching children to fish may be a form of caretaking, but fishermen use the opportunity to perform manhood acts. Instead of sitting passively with children as they fish, they take an active teaching role that highlights the men’s accumulated fishing expertise. By teaching, men elicit
deference from children and demonstrate their manhood. More broadly, fishing is used by fathers to prevent children’s feminization by technology.

Fishermen may also extend the same control over fishing expertise toward the women in their life. Interviewees who had seen women fishing argued that the women anglers were always with a husband or boyfriend. In this way, women’s participation in fishing was seen as largely a “sponsored” phenomenon. Ian (20, white, informally employed) told me about occasionally taking his girlfriend fishing, and he framed this story around his own expertise:

My, well I’ll call her my “ex-girlfriend”—we haven’t talked in a while—but, I used to take her fishing a lot. I got her to the point where she could somewhat cast a baitcaster [an advanced fishing reel]—with the cast control turned up of course. I got her into it, but she really didn’t know what she was doing; she was just repeating what I was doing. She didn’t know anything about water temperatures or [fish] habits, she was just using a jerkbait [lure] like I was doing. She really didn’t know why. She caught a couple [fish]. The first time she really got able to use a baitcaster without getting a birds’ nest [tangling the line], she was using an X-rap [lure] and actually caught 2 catfish on it (laughs).

Ian’s story highlights the importance fishermen place on their expertise. His girlfriend’s achievements are perceived to the accomplishments of Ian’s own expertise, which he shared with her. He does this in two ways: by (a) emphasizing his influence in statements like “I got her to the point” and “I got her into it,” and (b) downplaying his girlfriend’s fishing knowledge to point where it sounds like she was simply unable to learn such complex and masculine things. Ian, like Keith and other fishermen, see knowledge about “water temperatures and habits” as basic fishing know-how. Placing high regard on this expertise, they position themselves as experts who deserve deference and as gatekeepers
to others’ fishing experiences. Ian and other fishermen see this as a masculine expertise that women are unable to fully appreciate or refuse to learn. Here is Ian’s rationale for why he thinks women do not fish as often as men:

A lot of women, when they hear “fishing,” they’re like “Ughh!” Or they think you’re like some nerd, or “Eww, gross.” Do you think a woman’s gonna touch a fish to save her life? I mean, come on… [Fishing is] sportier; men are into things that have a little bit sportier feel to it. Women are into, (imitating a dainty woman), “Oh,” the sportier, that might mess of their look; they might break a nail. I’m not trying to be harsh about it, but…

Through statements such as this, fishermen construct fishing as a natural domain of men. This is the intersection of gender and fishing expertise. Fishing expertise used in two simultaneous ways to reinforce masculinity; displays of expertise both elicit deference from others within interactions and control the flow of fishing information and access more broadly. Women’s and girls’ interest in fishing is not cultivated to the extent that boys’ and men’s interest is. The former is seen as unnatural or not genuine, whereas fishermen construct the latter construct as proper. Messner (1992; 2009) found the same to be true of fathers and coaches who taught mainstream team sports to boys and girls.

In review, fishermen construct fishing as “puzzle” or riddle to be solved. The solution requires years of experience combined with specific knowledge about fishing. Fishing is thus a source of expertise for men. While the Internet may threaten men’s monopoly over fishing expertise, they remain gatekeepers to fishing knowledge and access. They perform control through this gatekeeping, as well as elicit deference from other men, women, and children who look to them for expertise. Displaying fishing expertise is therefore a performance of masculinity on multiple levels. One way
fishermen are seen and treated as men is through the exchange of expertise. However, there are other ways in which men use fishing for gendered reasons and for gender performances. I now turn to how men use fishing to regain control and achieve a masculine self-regulation through the pursuit of autonomy.

Seeking Autonomy

In the context of fishing, I see the pursuit of autonomy as a manhood act. Men perform masculinity by exerting control over their activities and presenting themselves as active agents who resist external demands. For the fishermen in this study, fishing is a masculine source of autonomy that emerges out of emasculating situations such as gendered conflict at home or work instability. These situations result in struggles to regain control and to experience the freedom that autonomy provides. By “autonomy,” I refer to an individual’s ability to regulate their activities, occupations, and bodies in ways that make them feel agentive and in control. To seek and display autonomy is to avoid being under someone else’s control. Autonomy is thus the successful avoidance of others’ control upon the self, or one’s “uncontrollability” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

In some cases, pursuing autonomy through fishing may be a way for men to avoid demands to perform masculinity in other contexts. However, as an action that displays an inability to be controlled, fishing for autonomy is a manhood act. The content of fishermen’s pursuit of autonomy—fishing—is a masculine behavior in a masculine environment. Accountable for “doing” masculinity, these men find autonomy in an activity that is socially constructed as an appropriate male behavior.
I first met Ian (20, white, informally employed) during my time on the FOO website. When I sat down for an interview with him, he told me that he walks hours each day just to fish. Ian has a medical condition that legally prohibits him from obtaining a driver’s license, and even from working a cash register (both are considered operating machinery). Fishing is one of the few masculine activities that Ian can partake in without upsetting his injury. In this way, Ian’s story sheds light on how fishing can be a source of autonomy for men.

The more I learned about Ian, the more I realized his limited avenues for achieving masculinity and autonomy. His medical condition is a critical source of powerlessness and failure to be seen as a real man. With only a high school diploma, Ian’s medical condition blocks him from most formal labor opportunities otherwise available to him. He cannot legally drive, operate machinery, work at high elevations, or even use a cash register. These restrictions impede Ian from employment in both the shrinking industrial sector and the dominant low-wage service economy. He also cannot enlist in the military—his primary occupational goal—because of the same medical condition. This is an especially stressful limitation for Ian as a young man, since all of the men in his family have been members of the armed services in their lifetimes. “It’s just what we do,” he says. Despite being extremely savvy in the mechanics of fishing equipment, Ian prefers to wait until he can receive training from the military rather than enroll at a local university two miles away. He currently lives with his dad and stepmom in a trailer. Ian constantly lives with the feelings of emasculation brought about by his
medical condition. An excerpt from our interview demonstrates the link between this condition and Ian’s sense of himself as masculine:

TA: So you were talking about a SEAL, that you trained with a Navy SEAL…

Ian: Oh, yea, well he trained in Jit-Kun-Do. I don’t know if you’re familiar with it. It’s what made Bruce Lee famous. And I trained with him for seven years. I got pretty big. I was into football—I was outside linebacker. I got up to 184 pounds. But after I got sick, I lost it all. Quickly, too. But I don’t wanna talk about the stuff my health impacted too much.

As Ian tells it, his sudden change in health interrupted his previously solid performance of masculinity, which he relishes. His final statement shows an effort to downplay his victimhood and to prepare his performance for a more agentive self.

Similarly, Ian told me that kids in high school called him a “dork” for having such a profound interest in fishing. Instead of quitting fishing, he refers to those classmates as “idiots” and claims to have removed himself from their influence. Now Ian has no male friends his own age that like to fish. Ian’s only source of appraisal for his gender performance is his father, his stepmother, and an older male tackle shop owner about whom he talks frequently.

One of the only ways that Ian can express autonomy is through fishing. Although his favorite places to fish are hours away, Ian leaves his trailer on foot almost every day to fish. By leaving home to fish, he leaves behind the pressures to perform inaccessible masculinities and the emasculating feelings that accompany them. His father told me one day when the three of us were fishing together and Ian was being talkative, “He’s not right. He had an accident. He’s not usually like this.” Ian could hear his father make this
remark. The remark offended me a bit, and I could only imagine how Ian and his father struggle with the frustrations of Ian’s health.

While Ian may be resisting the masculine expectations of him at home and in society at large, Ian still performs masculinity through fishing. By going fishing, Ian resists the external controls upon him and reasserts his own control over his body and actions. Thus, by definition, recreational fishing is a manhood act for Ian. There are other ways, specific to fishing, that make resisting control and pursuing autonomy a performance of masculinity. As argued throughout this paper, fishing is seen as a masculine activity. Ian’s choice of fishing over more feminine or passive behaviors allows him to continue to be seen as a man. Indeed, because masculinity is often achieved through work or high-impact sports, Ian is excluded from most channels to a masculine self. Fishing’s flexibility to be performed regardless of one’s bodily or economic handicaps permits men like Ian to see themselves as men and have others concur. Ian also derives technological competence and expertise from fishing. He could lecture for days on the differences in engineering between dozens of fishing reels or how to catch fish in cold water, for example. This is a specific knowledge valued by other men in the context of fishing. Finally, Ian can perform the role of a “good son” by keeping fish for his father to eat. Ian himself feels a moral obligation to release fish. “I don’t want to do something to [fish] that I wouldn’t want done to me,” he told me during our interview. However:

Ian: I prefer to throw everything back. My dad, he likes to keep any, anything he can, any Perch, Walleye, Crappie. He gets mad when I throw them back in, but occasionally I do have to put a few on the stringer so he’ll be happy. I mean, he is the one paying the gas and taking me [fishing].
Ian crosses his own moral boundary to perform masculinity according to his father’s expectations. He uses fish to pay his father deference for his “provider” masculinity. The example above shows how keeping fish allows Ian to be seen as a good son and how fishing is a source of deference for Ian’s father. When I first met Ian’s dad, he complained about how Ian refused to help fillet some ninety fish one day after he took Ian and another man fishing on Lake Erie. Bemoaning to me his son’s failure to perform masculinity appropriately, Ian’s father emasculates Ian. Fishing may therefore be an escape from gender expectations at home. However, Ian’s pursuit of autonomy through fishing is nonetheless a manhood act. He performs masculinity while escaping the gendered pressures that haunt him at home.

Other fishermen saw fishing as a masculine route to autonomy and resistance from being controlled. On the FOO website, a fisherman reports:

“Was out all night hitting different spots (actually a result of big fight w/the missus). Nary a bump [didn’t get any bites], but was better than being at home...”  (emphasis added)

A reply to this post read:

The only time its worth it to get in a fight with the misses is to go fishing.

These men’s comments suggest that fishermen can use fishing for regaining control after a gendered conflict with one’s spouse. Arguing with one’s wife means she is not doing femininity, but rather challenging her husband’s masculinity by exercising action, control, and competitiveness and resisting subordination. Men recover from these emasculating events by going fishing. Fishing provides them a masculine activity and
space to experience the autonomy that their home life does not always offer. When I asked Ian why men fish, he replied:

“To get away from the women…That’s why my dad did a lot of fishing. He’d be like, “Nancy, watch your shows; I’m going fishin’.” That’s half the reason I can think of.”

A final story supports the argument that men use fishing to experience autonomy and resist control. Shark (the only name he ever gave me, which he also uses as his handle on the FOO site) is a 51-year-old white steelworker who is periodically unemployed. The company he works for makes metal lockers for local middle schools and high schools. Shark’s employment depends directly upon the passage of new school levies which translate into new construction jobs for companies like his. With the recent recession, work is infrequent for Shark. He used to be active on the FOO site, but now he can only post reports on the weekends when he makes it to the library for Internet access. In addition to his work being unstable, Shark expresses some resentment for the growing presence of Black youth in his neighborhood. He sees the deindustrialized urban area he currently lives in as dangerous, even refusing to have an interview with me in his home for fear of danger caused by occupants of the street. He says he wants to move near his favorite fishing lake, which is surrounded by a white, rural expanse. Shark has three children with his live-in girlfriend of over ten years. His “old lady,” as he refers to his girlfriend, is terminally ill with cancer. Shark admits that he and his girlfriend “don’t get along real well anymore.” In fact, he says he makes her sleep on the couch. At work, in his neighborhood, and at home, Shark faces multiple fronts of emasculation. His labor-
and recreational ways of life are eroding before his eyes, and his relationship is strained and complicated by illness.

Fishing is a means of autonomy for Shark. At least for the day, he can remove himself from the competing and unstoppable demands of work, neighborhood, and home life. Deindustrialization, economic recession, racial integration, and cancer are out of Shark’s control. He exercises control and autonomy where he can. One of these places is the negotiation of his fishing schedule and gendered home life. As he puts it:

“A lot of guys, I ask them if they want to go fishin’. Well, they can’t go ‘cause they got ‘honey-do’ lists. Let me tell you, my old lady doesn’t tell me what to do. I tell me what to do. There is no ‘honey-do’ list.” (Emphasis added)

The term “honey-do lists,” which Shark evokes in this example, is demonstrative of men’s perceptions of being emasculated by a controlling female spouse. As in Shark’s comment, men use these phrases as justification for reasserting their control—control over themselves and their female partners. In this case, control and the ability to avoid others’ control is displayed by leaving the home to fish all day. Even though Shark typically fishes with one other fishermen at a time, and not alone, his actions still attempt to demonstrate that he is in control—if only for a day.

The stories in this section shed light on how fishing is used as a recourse for masculinity by recreational fishermen. Fishing can be a source of masculine autonomy for men who wish to escape the confines of emasculation at work, in the neighborhood, or at home. This autonomy represents an act of manhood, as men use it to regain control and recover their masculinity. For Ian, fishing is one of the only legitimate routes to masculinity and autonomy with all the odds against him. Through fishing, he escapes
some gender demands while struggling to still be seen as man. In the case of Shark, the traditional bases for men’s dominance (i.e. work, house/neighborhood, and heterosexual relationship) are suffering large-scale erosion. Fishing holds the prospect for regaining power and autonomy in masculine ways. He hopes to achieve those more completely by someday moving near his favorite lake, to a simpler—and whiter—life.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding sections, I demonstrate that recreational fishing is a masculine subculture and can be used in various ways for the performance of masculinity. Fishing is an accessible and widely popular sport that individuals from diverse social locations can partake in. The different modes of fishing provide a flexibility for individuals to use fishing for different social purposes. I argue that men in Ohio use fishing to experience autonomy and control, and to elicit deference from others. In this light, recreational fishing can be seen as a “manhood act” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Men define and defend physical space as their masculine fishing territory. They accumulate a specific knowledge that acts as an expertise and elicits deference from others. Fishermen control this expertise in order to act as gatekeepers of the fishing world. Finally, fishing can be a source of autonomy for men who face external constraints at work and at home. Thus, fishing can be an avenue for achieving masculinity when aspects of work and home are unstable bases for displaying a masculine self. Fishermen, at least momentarily, regain some control over emasculating situations by going fishing.

Although I emphasize in this paper the ways in which fishing is a manhood act, I do not mean to claim that all of fishermen’s activities are hegemonically masculine. For example, men who teach children to fish may intend their actions to be caring, nurturing, and community-building. Men did not present their actions significantly in this way, instead giving me and other fishermen on the FOO website accounts of children’s
deference. These interpretations are not mutually exclusive, however. Fishermen’s relationships with women, children, and less experienced male anglers take on a paternalistic character and highlight men’s expert status while men simultaneously may feel that they are spending quality time together. Fishermen may be caring or resistant to hegemonic masculinity, but they do so through manhood acts that reproduce the gender order.

The problem with emphasizing deference and control stems from the limitations of the manhood acts perspective. In this theory, men display their membership as men through acts of control, avoiding control, and eliciting deference. Simplifying masculinities to these three characteristics overlooks the ways in which men renegotiate masculinity in more “feminine” ways. It also does not sufficiently explain the overlap in men’s and women’s behaviors, particularly on issues of control and autonomy. Many would argue that women can pursue self-regulation or autonomy without performing masculinity. The manhood acts perspective implies that women cannot take control without doing an act of manhood, which is undertaken to display membership as a man. As it currently stands, the manhood acts perspective is rigid in its view of masculinity.

The findings in this paper are important because they reveal a unique process by which a diverse population of men negotiate and perform masculinity in non-work settings. In a time of ever-shrinking industry and previous ways of life for men, fishing is a source of expertise, deference, control, and autonomy. It provides an enjoyable and accessible means of displaying one’s masculine self. In terms of human-animal relations, fish are used for men’s gender projects as symbols of masculine achievement. Previous
studies of men’s sports and gender identity have been limited to high-impact team sports that require an athletic physique (Messner 1992; 2009; Sabo and Runfola 1980). These studies contain a selection bias towards men who embody the hegemonic masculinity of the “athlete.” This paper addresses this issue by examining fishing as a sport that includes a variety of men by age, education, and physical ability. Fishing is both an individual and a social activity. This unique quality makes fishing a productive source for studying gendered sport. This study also contributes to our understanding of masculinity at the interactional level by investigating and contextualizing manhood acts. Beyond demonstrating how men enact control or elicit deference while fishing, I argue that these acts construct fishing as a space for manhood amidst structural and cultural erosion of industrial masculinity in the Rust Belt.

In the broader social context of economic restructuring and the loss of an industrial, masculine way of life, manhood acts tied to fishing are in fact “gender strategies” (Hochschild 1989). Gerson (1993) writes that the shift to a service economy that almost necessitates a dual-earner household model has left men without a clear path to the achievement of masculinity. Men now show diversity in their orientations toward masculinity and must explore strategies for realizing new gender ideals. The stories presented in this paper suggest that fishing is one arena in which men can refocus their masculine ideals and identities. When facing emasculating circumstances at work or home, men can draw upon fishing to avoid others’ control and to be seen as real men.

Previous research has shown that men who experience permanent or periodic job loss may reconstruct gender roles to avoid strain on the home front (Sherman 2009).
Sherman (2009) observed that rural men facing deindustrialization reorganized their masculinity around being good fathers who invested time in their children’s lives through outdoor activities and sports. My data support that men actively seek out involvement with kids and less experienced fishermen in ways that value their own masculine expertise. However, fishing as a gender strategy extends beyond the paternalistic relationships of men with each other and with children. In the face of deindustrialization and even retirement, fishing emerges as a part of men’s cultural “toolkit” (Swidler 1986) for gender performance—not only through fatherhood, but alone as a refuge for men in different gender locations. Recreational fishing’s accessibility and flexibility makes it a resource for men that is not limited by age, education, or ability.

In this view, fishing, and sports more generally, may act as a cultural shock absorber for a changing gender landscape and for gender struggles on an individual level. Scholars have suggested that men’s reconstructions of masculinity outside of work serve to prevent destructive family behaviors such as domestic violence or mental illness such as depression (Sherman 2009). Not only does fishing have the potential to prevent these social problems by providing a space for men, it may also keep a mass of unemployed men busy from behaviors such as crime and reclusive isolation. Indeed, Messerschmidt (1993) found that men turned to criminal behavior as a route to masculinity when other avenues were scarce. While my data cannot make claims as to whether men had better or worse gender relations at home due to fishing, men in my study did tell me that fishing kept them from doing illicit drugs, loitering the streets, and spending too much time
indoors. In many ways, fishing keeps men busy and distracted from more destructive pursuits of masculinity.

In arguing that fishing may be a shock absorber, I do not intend to imply that the men in this study are gender-progressive or critical of rigid gender norms. To the contrary, I argue that men are active agents in maintaining fishing as an exclusive masculine domain. They demonstrate efforts to control the flow of access and information regarding rewarding fishing experiences. Women’s participation in fishing is growing in visibility, and although boyfriends, fathers, and husbands are the male sponsors of this population, some men already show resistance toward including women fully in the social world of fishing. This includes an unequal distribution of resources such as mentorship, knowledge, and equipment on the basis of sex category. Men directly and indirectly exclude women by using fishing as a manhood act and constructing fishing space as masculine. That is, they reserve fishing as a means of exiting gender conflicts on the domestic front, leaving women in the home while they remain outdoors. This is symbolic of rigid ideals of gendered space in the public/private dichotomy. While fishing, men often curse, consume alcohol, and urinate visibly. This creates a potential deterrent against women’s presence in the outdoors and participation in fishing. The construction of the outdoors as a man’s place and as a refuge for masculinity dates back to early 20th Century fears of boys’ feminization (Kimmel 1996). Men in my study not only constructed outdoor spaces as masculine, but also expressed fear that today’s youth are feminized by videogames and technology.
To argue that fishing can be a manhood act and that fishermen seek to exercise control and receive deference is not to critique them morally as individuals. Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) remind us that men (and women) grow up in a social environment where two categories of gender identity exist, and that one is more heavily rewarded. Boys and men, unlike girls and women, are not punished for aspiring to reap the benefits of portraying masculine identities. Instead, boys and men are rewarded for pursuing and displaying a masculine self. The problem therefore lies in a system that distributes power and material goods unequally on the basis of gender membership. Individuals reproduce this system because they have stakes in their identities as good men or women and they are accountable for maintaining gender in its current construction (Schwalbe 2005).

There are several limitations to this study. As a small, qualitative project, the findings reported here are not generalizable. There are also several limitations related to sampling. By only selecting the voices of men, this study cannot speak to women’s meanings given to recreational fishing and their participation in the sport. The same is true for children. My sample also inhibits me from examining the intersectional effects of race, class, age, and gender on the meanings of fishing because it is not sufficiently diverse by race. Given the lack of racial variation in the sample, I am also unable to draw any conclusions about important differences in the experience of recreational fishing for different social groups.

These findings also may not hold true for areas that are socially and geographically different from Ohio. In large, dense urban areas, access and opportunities for fishing may be more limited and regulated. “Getting away from it all” may not be as
possible or may have different meanings for urban residents. Other geographic areas are admittedly not as blessed with the vast number of waterways that Ohio can boast. Opportunities for incorporating fishing into recreational activities for individuals and families abound in this area. Recreational fishing is part of the broader cultural habitus in Ohio. Residents are predisposed to fishing by the geographic and cultural landscape of the region. Meanings of fishing may not be as actively or defensively reconstructed as in contexts where fishing is more rare.

Future research on recreational fishing and gender should examine the meanings and uses of fish and fishing for specific groups not captured here. In addition to fleshing out class and race differences, we need to learn more about women’s experiences in recreational and tournament fishing. Women are now entering the world of fishing at a fast pace, and they are writing how-to books and starting women-only fishing groups such as “Ladies Let’s Go Fishing” and the “Fishing Ladies of Ohio.” What fishing means to women and how women experience fishing in their lives deserves much deeper investigation. A historical approach to women’s fishing participation may unearth a strong but invisible participation in this outdoor activity. Finally, on the topic of fishing, how men construct fishing as masculine at the level of political discourse may make important connections between gender and environmental law. This would help us show the institutionalization of fishing as a gendered social phenomenon.

Research should also seek to complicate and contextualize the theory of manhood acts as gender performance. Although the theory developed as a means of condensing the vast amount of empirical findings on masculinities, the theory does appear unnecessarily
rigid in its definitions of the masculine self. I argue in this paper that autonomy and expertise are forms of control and ways of eliciting deference. However, this may not be the case in other settings or for other populations. More research is necessary to tease out manhood as a set of acts to perform masculinity and the relationship of these acts to the body. That is, while some have argued that women can do masculinity (Pascoe 2007), to what extent can and do women perform “manhood acts?” Further, to what extent do men’s and women’s intentions matter in the performance of acts that elicit deference or entail control? We can achieve a better grasp on gendered behavior and the reproduction of gender inequality when we begin to answer these questions.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Table 1: Demographic Information of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Self-Reported Social Class</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Work Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
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<td>Seasonal</td>
<td>Some college</td>
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<td>Certification</td>
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