

**Fishing-Dependent Communities on the Gulf Coast of Florida:
Their Identification, Recent Decline and Present Resilience**

by

Yu Huang

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Their Identification, Recent Decline and Present Resilience

by

Yu Huang

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Anthropology
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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RAP

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FISHING-DEPENDENT COMMUNITIES ON THE GULF COAST OF FLORIDA:
THEIR IDENTIFICATION, RECENT DECLINE AND PRESENT RESILIENCE

Yu Huang

ABSTRACT

U.S. fisheries legislation requires National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to attend to the critical social and economic issues surrounding the definition and identification of fishing communities, and to the effects that changes to the physical environment and regulatory decisions can have on such communities. To fulfil their mandate, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) sponsored the research entitled “Identifying Fishing Communities in the Gulf of Mexico” to study the economic, social and cultural status of potential fishing communities along the Gulf of Mexico.

NMFS contracted the research project to Impact Assessment, Inc. to study 80 plus potential fishing communities in the Florida Gulf Coast. I worked as an intern in the research and visited the communities with other team members. The task of our project was to provide NMFS with basic profiles of fishing communities for NMFS to develop a culturally appropriated intervention. Research methods include Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP), semi-structured key informant interviews, participant observation, and archival and secondary research mainly for community histories.

Apart from my internship research, I also conducted some additional interviews and observations for my thesis. My findings indicate that fishing communities along the Florida Gulf Coast encounter with challenge from increased regulation, “dumping” seafood imports and virtually uncontrolled waterfront development. By a comparison of three groups of fishing communities, i.e., “diminished communities,” “residual communities,” and “resilient communities,” the thesis explores how communities respond to the challenges and encourages fishermen to take action to preserve their generation-long fishing tradition.

In conclusion, the thesis suggests that a solution to ease the decline of fishing communities requires cooperation of all parties concerned, including the fishery regulatory agency, commercial fishermen, and the federal and local government.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

My internship titled “Identification of Fishing Communities on Florida West Coast of the Gulf of Mexico,” is sponsored by Impact Assessment, Inc., under contract from National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS), a federal agency administered by the Department of Commerce. Federal-level fisheries management is required by U.S. fisheries legislation to attend to the critical social and economic issues surrounding the definition and identification of fishing communities, and to the effects that changes to the physical environment and regulatory decisions can have on such communities. This concern is most clearly and recently reflected in the Magnuson-Stevens Act National Standard 8 (Section 301 (8)), which requires that:

Conservation and management measures shall, consistent with the conservation requirements of this Act (including the prevention of overfishing and rebuilding of overfished stocks), take into account the importance of fishery resources to fishing communities in order to (a) provide for the sustained participation of such communities, and (b) to the extent practicable, minimize adverse economic impacts on such communities.

“Sustained participation” means “continued access to the fishery within the constraints of the condition of the resources.” However, “the long-term conservation and/or rebuilding of stocks may require limits on particular gears and the harvest of specific stocks.”

National Standard 8 currently defines the term “fishing community” as

a community that is 1) substantially dependent on or substantially engaged in the harvest or processing of fishery resources to meet social and economic needs, and includes fishing

vessel owners, operators, and crew, and fish processors that are based in such communities; 2) a social or economic group whose members reside in a specific location and share a common dependency on commercial, recreational, or subsistence fishing or on directly related fisheries-dependent services and industries (for example, boatyards, ice suppliers, tackle shops). [National Standard 8, Section 300,345, part 3]

The fishing-dependent “communities” (hereafter to be called simply, “fishing communities”) include those reliant on both commercial and recreational fishing industries, but the legislation and mandates are vague in defining their interests or making this distinction. Communities are described as being “substantially dependent” or “substantially engaged,” but the levels of dependence on and engagement in a fishery are still subject to NMFS’ discernment. Furthermore, the fisheries management is mandated to measure their dependence and engagement not solely in economic terms, but also to incorporate “other social, cultural, and economic assessments specifically focused on the harvesting, processing and fisher-support industries” (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration 1998).

1.2.Objectives of the Research

To perform their legislated tasks, National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Region, sponsored the project of “Identifying Fishing Communities in the Gulf of Mexico.” Based on fishing permit registration, NMFS proposed to study more than 300 potential fishing-related communities along the Gulf of Mexico coastlines of Florida and Louisiana.

Given the lack of specificity of the Magnuson Act, it is necessary to assess how the definition of fishing community empirically related to potential fishing communities in the region of the Gulf Coast in terms of their economic, social and cultural status. Does

the definition need to be revised to address the dynamics and implications of fishing communities who have to respond to the changing social and natural environments? Has NMFS, as a federal fishing management agency, adequately performed its role of attending to the critical social and economic needs of the fishing communities after the recent implementation of regulations which significantly restrict commercial fishing? In attempting to answer these questions, the research was to 1) describe fishermen in social, economic, sociocultural, and socio-demographic terms; 2) delineate the nature and boundaries of local and/or regional fishing-related communities, and 3) provide qualitative reports of the experiences and relationships of fishery participants in those communities.

The final report to NMFS, prepared by the contract agent Impact Assessment, Inc., was to describe local geography, history, economy (especially fishing-dependent industry) and recent changes of the fishing-dependent communities. Furthermore, it will also develop an analysis of the causes of changes, document their impacts on the community composed of fishermen and other fishing-dependent personnel, and also record community members' responses towards these changes. The contract also called for the report to include a Geographic Information System (GIS) map incorporating fishery license and trip ticket data, community history with fishing specific description, current demographic and economic conditions and trends, and a summary discussion addressing community involvement and dependence on fishing related activities.

The objective of my thesis is to explore the impact of the NMFS' regulations. However, my objective focuses more on the changes in the fishing communities,

especially why some communities manage to maintain their fishing tradition in the face of adversity while others fail to survive the challenges.

1.3. Internship Setting and Timeframe of the Project

National Marine Fisheries Service contracted the project to Impact Assessment, Inc., a California corporation, which is, devoted to social impact studies. Founded in 1981, the agency has conducted a broad range of social, economic, environmental and health research under contracts from the California Department of Health Services (CDHS), Mineral Management Services (MMS), Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC), etc. In summer 2002, I was working on a project to write up ten county profiles along the Florida Gulf of Mexico to provide basis information for MMS to assess the potential impacts of offshore drilling.

I was working on my internship in this project to fulfill the requirement of the master's program in Applied Anthropology at the University of South Florida. After completion of the required courses, students enrolled in the program are required to commit the equivalent of a full time effort for at least one academic semester on his or her internship to gain experience as a professional applied anthropologist. With the coordination of Dr. Alvin Wolfe, my major advisor, I was able to choose my internship setting in Impact Assessment, Inc. and work with various potential fishing-dependent communities in Florida. Apart from fulfilling NMFS' contractual requirement, I hope that this applied anthropology research will shed light to marine policy-makers by voicing grassroots community interests which are often ignored or minimized by the bureaucracy.

My internship was made possible with the coordination of Dr. Edward Glazier, manager of Impact Assessment, Inc., and my thesis committee members from the Anthropology Department of University of South Florida, including Dr. Alvin Wolfe, Dr. Susan Greenbaum and Dr. Kevin Yelvington, who provide guidance on literature review, method design and final write-up processes.

In this project, Impact Assessment, Inc. assigned several social science teams to do the fieldwork. Two teams were supposed to work in the Florida Gulf, one in the Panhandle and the other in the mid- and south- Gulf Coast. I am a member of the second Florida team along with two other members: Michael Jepson, a well-known maritime anthropologist who has many publications on research conducted in Florida fishing communities; and Stacy Ellis, who received her MS degree in Family, Youth and Community Sciences from the University of Florida in 2002 and is a PhD student of Education at the University of Florida.

Our team was assigned with 80 plus communities to study in the middle and south Florida Gulf Coast. The community listing is as follows:

Table 1.1 Community Groupings

County	Community
Dixie/Levy	Jena, Old Town, Suwannee / Chiefland, Gulf Hammock, Inglis, Yankeetown
Citrus/Hernando	Crystal River, Hernando, Lecanto, Inverness, Homosassa Springs, Homosassa/Brooksville, Spring Hill
Pasco	Airpark, Hudson, Port Richey, New Port Richey, Anecdote, Holiday, Odessa

Table 1.1 Community Groupings (Continued)

Pinellas	Tarpon Springs, Crystal Beach, Ozona, Palm Harbor, Oldsmar, Dunedin, Belleair, Clearwater, Indian Rocks Beach, Redington Beach, Madeira Beach, Gulfport, Treasure Island, Tierra Verde, Largo, Seminole, St. Petersburg
Hillsborough/Polk	Lutz, Tampa, Dover, Brandon, Riverview, Gibsonton, Apollo Beach, Ruskin / Lakeland
Manatee	Terra Ceia, Palmetto, Bradenton, Cortez, Anna Maria Island, Bradenton Beach, Holmes Beach, Longboat Key
Sarasota	Sarasota, Osprey, Nokomis, Venice
Charlotte	Englewood, Placida, Boca Grande, El Jobean, Port Charlotte, Punta Gorda
Lee	North Fort Myers, Alva, Fort Myers, Cape Coral, Matlacha, Bokeelia, St. James, Pineland, Fort Myers Beach, Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Estero
Collier	Marco Island, Goodland, Royal Palm Hammock, Copeland, Everglades City, Chokoloskee

Our field visits lasted four months from mid-January to mid-May 2003 and the final report will be submitted to NMFS by the end of August.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Community Study

Community study was a popular subject in social sciences from the 1950s to the 1970s. Arensberg and Kimball propose three elements that are essential in addressing the meaning of community (1972: 3). First comes the social aspect of community. The notion of community “as a master system” encompasses “social forms and cultural behavior in interdependent subsidiary systems (institutions).” The second element centers on the cultural identity of community. “Each form of community utilizes geographic space in a characteristic fashion, called its settlement pattern.” The last element is environment, including both physical environment and social environment.

The authors emphasize the close association between community and culture: on one hand, communities serve as “transmission units for human culture” (Arensberg 1955: 1143), and on the other hand, each culture has its characteristic community. The authors explore how different community patterns in the U.S. correspond with different communal traits and spirits. The “Yankee tradition” of New England hailed the egalitarian culture, because community members came from different backgrounds as farmers, artisan, shop keepers, merchants, seamen & fishermen, who required to build a community “without distinction or segregation either in community membership, political right, or use of living space” (p.104). The southern county, on the contrary,

epitomizes the two-class division and white supremacy. “Negro slavery, Anglicanism and Methodism, ‘Bourbonism’ and Fundamentalism” are culture traits unfamiliar to the New England town. They have recognized the county seat as the community center, a place to gather “nobles into the king’s place and capital” from the dispersal rural area. The “open-community neighborhood” of the great American Middle Country, however, reflects a culture that is “loose, open, Dionysian, kin-based, *famille-souche*, and subsistence farming rather than commercial- or urban-minded, egalitarian through isolation and personal honor rather than through conscience and congregational control (p.111). The primordial communities underwent great transformations at the Industrial Revolution as more and more mill towns and factory cities were developed. Now the industrial community is characterized by a set of dichotomies, such as the co-existence of both metropolitan glamour and city ghettos and a discontinuation of “age, class and ethnicity.”

In *The Little Community*, Robert Redfield extrapolates the characteristics of little communities and the methods of studying them. He defines the little community as a “distinctive,” “small,” “homogenous,” and “self-sufficient” community.

Wellman et al. look at “*personal communities*,” or “the ways in which networks of informal relations fit personas and households into social structures” (1988:131). As they studied the East York community, a residential area of central Toronto, they looked for the traditional community identifiers, e.g., “neighbors chatting on front porches, friends relaxing on street corners, cousins gathering for Sunday dinners, and storekeepers retailing local gossip” (Wellman et al. 1988: 130). When they “found few signs of active neighborhood life,” they did not immediately draw the conclusion that community life has vanished in the densely populated town. Instead, they argue that community ties in

East York were still robust, but were just represented in a way that does not conform to the stereotypical model.

Until the 1960s, scholars were divided into three groups in terms of the extent of community life, which was greatly transformed by the large-scale social changes. Some asserted that community had been “lost,” because “individuals had become isolated atoms in a ‘mass society’ --dependent on large bureaucracies for care and control” (Wellman et al. 1988: 134). Contrary to this belief, some scholars maintained the “Community Saved” argument, evident by “abundant” and “strong” neighborhood and kinship groups that “acted as buffers against the large-scale forces, filled gaps in contemporary social systems by providing flexible, low-cost aid, and provided secure bases from which residents could powerfully engage the outside world” (p. 134).

Wellman et al., point out the defaults of the two dichotomous views that both defined community as a “solidary,” “local,” and “kinship-like” group, and disregarded “widespread preindustrial individualism, exploitation, cleavage, and mobility.” Going beyond the traditional short-distance community ties, some scholars find a “Liberated” community, which is comprised of relationships beyond local areas offered by cheap and convenient transportation and communication services.

Using a network model, the authors find that beyond the empty streets, East Yorkers still maintained community ties in small clusters --“through meetings in private homes and on the telephone”—“and not in large, palpable bodies gathering in public squares, cafes, and meeting halls.” Through the strands of ties and networks, the East Yorkers got and expected to get “companionship,” “emotional aid,” and “small services”

both in daily life and in crisis (Wellman et al. 1988: 163). The author analyzes the functions of networks:

First and foremost, the networks provide havens: a sense of being wanted and belonging, and readily available companionship. Second, they provide many “band-aids”: emotional aid and small services to help East Yorkers cope with the stresses and strains of their current structural locations. Third, the outward linkages of network provide the East Yorkers with ladders to change their situations (jobs, houses, spouses) and levers (animal welfare, local politics, food additives) to change the world. [Wellman et al. 1988: 174-175]

In conclusion, Wellman et al. argue that the East Yorkers’ ties and networks could not be explained with any single model of either Lost, Saved, or Liberated. Their personal networks do not conform to the Lost model, but some community patterns fit with the Saved model (e.g., women maintain close local relations with kin and men with workmates), and some patterns correspond to the Liberated model (e.g. several middle-class men use co-worker ties to climb up the occupational ladder). Although the traditional densely knit solidarities are far and few, East Yorkers have managed to maintain their networks and community ties and seem to be satisfied with the support and reciprocity from them.

Although the gurus have provided me with useful direction and guidelines, I still find it difficult to define a community, because the components of the community are not always bounded nor fixed, at least not so for the fishing communities I visited. Community Study is “a method of observation and exploration, comparison and verification” (Arensberg and Kimball 1972:30). If the fishing communities of our study fit Redfield’s identifiers in the 1950s, they do not now. First comes the quality of distinctiveness. Before I started this project, I expected to work on communities that are small, rural and filled with a fishy smell. Coming from China, my image of a fishing

community was the small fishing village, which was remote from any urban hub. My misconception was soon corrected by my major professor Dr. Wolfe, who carefully reviewed my IRB application forms and suggested that the term “village” might not be appropriate to describe the status of fishing communities in Florida. During the visit, I gradually found that the primordial “fishing villages” basically no longer exist, but have either transformed into an urbanized/suburbanized dwelling site in which fishing is still able to reserve a corner of activity, or fishing submerges in the bigger sea of tourist/retiree dominance. Therefore, the difficulty in defining a fishing community on Florida’s Gulf Coast is enormous, in that the fishing communities of the 1950s were easily recognized by tracking the fishy smell and hanging nets, but most of the communities in our list reside in unincorporated areas and it is hard to tell where the community begins and where it ends. Only in very few places, like Cortez, does an outside observer detect the dominant fishing consciousness of community members, as the sign “Cortez Historical Fishing Village” claims (Figure 2.1). In most places, the distinction of commercial fishing has been more or less subsumed in the larger pictures of tourism and retirement industry. In Tarpon Springs, fishing boats decorate the background of the sponge dock, which has attracted tourists from all over the world to see sponge diving shows and to taste Greek ethnic food such as gyros, mousaka, etc. (Figure 2.2). In the Everglades, an outsider can tell immediately that one is in a fishing community from the sponge traps that stretch miles along the bank, but tourists also easily find numerous airboats and wonder whether the fishermen’s group consciousness of independence has been compromised as they entertain the guests in the airboat for extra income (Figure 2.3).

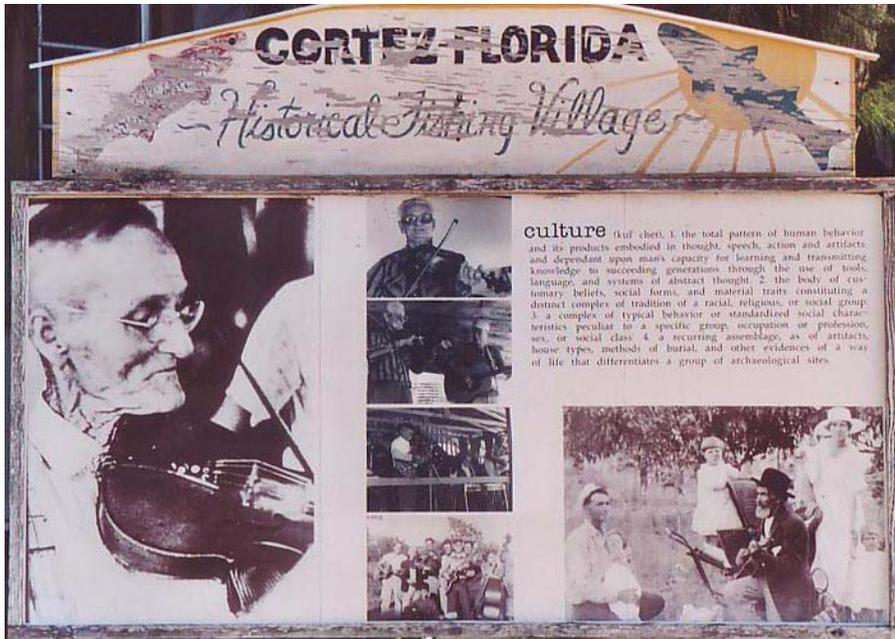


Figure 2.1 Cortez Historical Fishing Village



Figure 2.2 Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks



Figure 2.3 Stone Crab Traps in Everglades

Secondly, the community of Redfield's concern was so "small" that "some part of it, a unit of personal observation, could fully represent the whole" (Redfield 1956:4). This may be true in the sense that the study of fishing practices and culture along the Florida Gulf Coast can be reviewed by the observation of a small community like Hudson. However, the problems that confronted one community might not be the worries for fishermen from other communities. For example, casino boats in Port Richey have occupied fishermen's dockage and forced them either to quit fishing or to relocate. This problem is not so devastating in most other communities.

Thirdly, Redfield's "little community" is homogenous. Commercial fishing used to be an activity homogeneously repeated from generation to generation. In the twenty-