

The Social Construction Of Claims-making: Bahamian Anglers Vs. Non-resident Sports- fishermen

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THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CLAIMS-MAKING:
BAHAMIAN ANGLERS VS. NON-RESIDENT SPORTS-FISHERMEN

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2006

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

On January 1, 2007, the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources in the Department of Marine Resources of the Bahamas promulgated significant revisions to their sports-fishing regulations. While the new laws were designed to benefit the Bahamian fisheries, they caused a vociferous uproar among non-resident anglers who frequent the islands of the Bahamas to sports-fish. Of particular concern are the new regulations that limit the maximum weight and number of fish which non-resident anglers may keep on their boat. My research examines the claims-making activities made by American anglers on four different sports-fishermen/cruising forums. The analysis focuses on the motifs, rhetorical idioms, counterrhetorical strategies, and styles among sports-fishermen who fish the Bahamas.

I dedicate this to my parents, Michele and David Neuenschwander. Throughout my life, they have provided me with their unconditional love, unwavering support to accomplish my goals, encouragement to follow my dreams, and have always inspired me and it has made all the difference. This is for you.

I would also like to dedicate this to John Hoskin, for all the knowledge and support he provided throughout this process and the encouragement not to give up. I would not have made it without you. Thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For many years, Americans, in particular Floridians, have crossed the Gulf Stream in fishing vessels to enter an island oasis, the Bahamas Islands. For many, a day or weekend trip to the small island of Bimini became a mundane vacation. The island of Bimini is only approximately 50 miles east of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Thus, what many anglers refer to them as, “weekend warriors,” would take weekend trips to fish the Bahamas Islands. In fact, some charter captains from Florida would take their charters over for a day to fish the waters around Bimini.

Sports-fishermen, a key word used throughout the paper, is defined as someone who is not commercial (no sale of fish is involved); who harvests fish for personal use and consumption only; and/or someone who fishes for fun, pleasure, relaxation, or challenge (Pawson, Tingley, Padda, and Glenn 2004). With that said, sports-fishermen enjoyed catching beautiful dolphin (which is called Mahi Mahi in stores and restaurants), wahoo, marlin, grouper, snapper, and tuna, to name a few, which usually are consumed on their vacation or given to the locals on the islands.

Families or groups of people would take the journey over to the Bahamas in their personal boat excursions, which would in effect contribute to the Bahamian economy. A week trip to the islands could cost anywhere from \$5-6,000 on upwards to \$20,000. Despite the high prices vacationers have to pay to enjoy the Bahamas, the experience and memories made there surpass the economic strains. In truth, the waters in the Bahamas are far different than what you find in Florida. There are many tropical reefs, some only 20 yards off the coast of some islands, which provide opportunities to snorkel

and/or spear fish and lobster. Also, the deeper water, which is important in catching big game fish such as marlin, dolphin, and wahoo, are found only a short run off the coast of the islands.

During 2006, a great deal of hype was generated around the sports-fisherman world about proposed new laws that would limit the amount of caught fish that might go into effect January 1, 2007. For some, this decision emerged over environmental concerns of the fisheries in the islands of the Bahamas. In fact, it is widely acknowledged that fisheries around the world are presently under enormous stress (Molenaar 2003). According to an article in the Bahamas News, these new laws were being implemented partly because of the fears of food scarcity and the depletion of the marine resources in the Bahamas (Pinder 2006). In addition, much of the economy in the Bahamas survives because of the abundant marine life. Many legislators and citizen groups are concerned about depletion of marine resources and its impact on Bahamian's livelihood. However, many non-Bahamian sports-fishermen feel that the new regulations imply that the "fears of food scarcity and the depletion of marine resources" (Pinder 2006:1) are because of Floridians coming over and raping and pillaging the Bahamian waters. In truth, these new laws restrict non-Bahamian fisherman's catch limits (a catch limit is the number of a certain species allowed on the boat at one time) in the Bahamas.

As one columnist put it, the Bahamian government changed the law from "per person" limits to "per vessel" limits, and the writer indicated that "[t]hat's a huge change" (Brownlee 2007:1). Indeed, the change from "per person" to "per vessel" is what is causing the most controversy throughout the fishing community.

The old “per person” limits were as follows:

- Six pelagics (migratory fish such as dolphin, tuna, wahoo, etc.) per person
- Twenty pounds of demersal fish (bottom fish such as grouper and snapper) per person

The new amendment of sports-fishing regulations (Regulation 48 of the Fisheries Regulations), reads as follows (new law is verbatim):

- Any migratory fishery resource that is caught shall not in total consist of more than six (6) Kingfish, Dolphin, Tuna, or Wahoo per vessel and any resource not intended to be used shall not be injured unnecessarily but be returned to the sea alive;
- No vessel shall have on board any conch, turtle, or more than twenty pounds of demersal fishery resources (groupers, snappers, etc.) per vessel at any time and excluding not more than six crawfish per vessel. *This new regulation is going to be the most difficult for sports-fishermen because if you pull up a 23 pound grouper, you must throw it back. Unfortunately, when bottom fishing, especially deep dropping, pulling a demersal fish that far off the bottom could kill it anyway, and thus, you have to throw away an already dead fish.*
- The limitations specified [above] [...] shall also apply to a Bahamian vessel engaging in fishing for purposes other than commercial by persons who are not Bahamians;
- [...] no vessel shall have on board any fish unless its head and tail is intact (Department of Marine Resources 2007).

As mentioned, most of the hype and excitement arose before the new fishing laws were even put into effect. Many of the concerns were voiced through internet forums. Fishing forums were used to proclaim anglers concerns over the new fishing regulations. The forums also provide a unique way to study the claims-making activities of sports-fishermen. In fact, these online fishing forums proved to encompass useful information in regards to claims-making activities.

My research examines the construction of a social problem between Bahamian locals and American anglers over new sports-fishing regulations in the Bahamas. In the chapters that follow, I present an overview of the constructionist approach to social problems and claims-making. Next, I explore the Bahamian and American sports-

fishing controversy by examining the claims-making activities of American sports-fishermen. My examination focuses on the motifs, rhetorical idioms, counterrhetorical strategies, and styles that were displayed throughout the various fishing forums (see Appendix A for the definitions of key concepts).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Constructionist Theory

Social constructionist theory stems off of the phenomenology approach developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) and symbolic interactionist theory offered by Herbert Blumer (1969). The heart of social constructionist theory is the “process by which any body of ‘knowledge’ comes to be socially accepted as ‘reality’” (Berger and Luckmann 1966:3). In fact, social constructionist theory investigates

the process whereby people continuously create, through their actions and interactions, a shared reality that is experienced as objectively factual and subjectively meaningful. (Wallace and Wolf 1999:277)

Just as important is the study of social problems, as an aspect of social constructionist theory. From this approach, social problems are not merely applied or withheld, or even independently enforced, but rather emerge from interaction, talk, and negotiation (Holstein and Miller 2006).

Although sociologists like Blumer, Berger, and Luckmann established the foundations for social constructionist theory, others like Malcolm Spector and John Kitsuse developed the social constructionist approach to the study of social problems. In Spector and Kitsuse’s book, *Constructing Social Problems* (1987), they demonstrate how past approaches, such as the functional, normative, and value-conflict, are not appropriate for the study and explanation of social problems. In fact, they suggest that social constructionists should study the claims-making activities instead.

An important idea that Spector and Kitsuse (1987) stress is that social problems need to be examined as a type of *activity*, which they coin as a claims-making activity. Spector and Kitsuse (1987) define social problems as “the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions” (p. 75). Just as important though, to study social problems, social constructionists must examine how people define social problems. In fact, the significance of an objective condition is the assertions made about them, not the validity of the assertions. In other words, the existence of some condition is not central to the study of social problems, but rather the definitional process of some problematic condition is crucial to the construction of a social problem. In the end, the claims-making activities and the responses to them are the subject matter of the study of social problems (Spector and Kitsuse 1987).

According to Spector and Kitsuse (1987), claims-making activities always take the form of interaction. The theoretical work that constructionists should concern themselves with is clarifying the conceptual features of the interpretive practices, joint activities, conventional presuppositions, rhetorical devices, and the variety of forums that are involved in the production of social problems discourse (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993). Furthermore, the interactionist approach goes back to Herbert Blumer (1969) when he suggested that if during interaction there is a “confusion or misunderstanding, [...] communication is ineffective, the interaction is impeded, and the formation of joint action is blocked” (p. 171). When this type of disagreement occurs, the claims-making activities may begin by one party making a demand to another party that some action

needs to be taken about some putative condition. Claims are often associated with terms such as gripes, demands, requests, and complaints (Spector and Kitsuse 1987).

Spector and Kitsuse (1987) present a four stage model of the natural history of social problems. Stage one consists of a claims-maker establishing and defining a condition as problematic, which in effect transforms the condition into a public issue. The second stage involves the recognition, legitimation, and acceptance from an institution, agency, or official organization. Key to the success of a claim making it past this stage is the intervention and involvement of an institution that deals with the claims-making process. Furthermore, stage three emerges as members begin to express dissatisfaction with the established procedures for dealing with the social problem at hand. Participants do not approve of how the social problem is being handled, and in fact are claiming the official response to the problem is a problem itself. Lastly, in response to stage three, stage four emerges when members develop alternative procedures in response to the problematic procedures discussed in stage three. These four stages form a natural history model and are mutually exclusive. However, while a social problem may pass through all four of these stages, most become locked into a particular stage.

As Spector and Kitsuse's theoretical approach gained recognition among students of social problems, internal debates over their theory emerged (e.g. Pawlich and Woolgar, 1985a, 1985b). Perhaps the more widely known debate focused on strict versus contextual constructionism (Miller and Holstein 1993). In the strict constructionist approach to social problems, the focus is on "how" claims are articulated (Ibarra and Kitsuse 2003). To some extent, the strict constructionist approach is

rooted in the ethnomethodological idea that motives are contextualized accounts rather than objective causes of action (e.g. Wallace and Wolf 1999). In contrast, the contextual constructionist approach focuses on understanding claims maker's motives and audience's values as a critical component of their research (Best 2003). To date, the debate has not been fully resolved (Miller and Holstein 1993).

In an effort to refine the constructionist approach, Peter Ibarra and John Kitsuse (1993) revisited claims-making activities in their book chapter, *Vernacular Constituents of Moral Discourse: An Interactionist Proposal for the Study of Social Problems*, with a further emphasis on the approach in their later 2003 book chapter, *Claims-Making Discourse and Vernacular Resources*. Although Spector and Kitsuse outlined a fundamental approach to social problems in their writings, Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) focus their attention more specifically on the discourse and languages that parties use to make claims and counterclaims about a specific condition-category. In fact, Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) state that

[...] the theory directs attention to the claims-making process, *accepting as given and beginning with* the participant's descriptions of the putative conditions and their assertions about their problematic character, [...] [and that] the research questions concern not how those definitions are produced by the sociohistorical circumstances in which they emerged, but rather how those definitions express the members' conceptions of "the problem." (P. 24)

Furthermore, Ibarra and Kitsuse (2003) note that

[i]n this approach, definitional activities are central to the subject matter, and precedence is given to members' interpretive practices because social problems are possible strictly as assemblages of members' activities. (P. 18)

A condition-category refers to the definitions and meanings used by claimants and counterclaimants to identify and classify the subject of the social problem claim.

Condition-categories are terms used by the members to suggest what the social problem is actually “about.” Even more important, condition-categories are “units of language.” In other words, when studying claims-making activities, we are studying the process of a language game, in which the actions are interpreted, for the public, into legible expressions (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993). All in all, the condition-category is central to the claims-making activity.

As the title reveals, *Vernacular Constituents of Moral Discourse: An Interactionist Proposal for the Study of Social Problems*, the vernacular discourse of claims-making processes is important to the examination of social problems. Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) identify the different types of vernacular resources one can expect to find in the study of social problems, and they define vernacular resources as:

the conventional means through which members realize claims. Thus, they can refer to forms of talk, frames of interpretation, and contexts for articulation inasmuch as these effectively organize and circumscribe members’ social problems discourse. (1993:29)

One type of vernacular resource Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) discuss are motifs. Motifs are recurrent figures of speech and themes that highlight or summarize a central element of a social problem. These themes or figures of speech are located by analyzing the condition-category or the response to it. Motifs are a generic form of vocabulary used in claims-making activities, and include morally permeated phrases and metaphors. Some examples of motifs are: crisis, abuse, scandal, and conspiracy, and the metaphor of a “*ticking time bomb*” is often used as an example of a motif. Whether motifs are studied for their utility or “grammar”, they provide social constructionists a way to examine claimants’ actions and meanings as they assert claims and define problematic conditions for the audience (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993,

2003). Just as important, it is vital to focus on how some motifs are important in claimant's vernacular while other motifs are avoided, which Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) call "*symbolic currency*." Using these types of vernacular resources presents to the audience of claims-makers the magnitude of the claim being made.

Rhetorical idioms, a type of vernacular resource, are morally embedded ways in which the "problematic status [of a condition-category] is elaborated" (p. 31). Also, the domain of rhetorical idioms revolves around moral reasoning, and thus rhetorical idioms operate as moral vocabularies which help to signify the claim being made (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003). Given that premise, claims that are considered to be "idiomatic" possess a kind of "readability," when the language being exercised is both morally competent and symbolically coherent. There are five types of rhetorical idioms presented by Peter Ibarra and John Kitsuse: the rhetoric of loss, entitlement, endangerment, unreason, and calamity. Each of these rhetorical idioms serve as a kind of narrative kit that articulates a condition-category as justifiably treatable and socially problematic (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993).

The first rhetorical idiom, the rhetoric of loss, is commonly used during claims-making activities to express the concern of a valuable object or image's existence being in jeopardy, and humans must protect it or the value of the object or image could lose its value. The message conveyed by claimants using this idiom is that an object or image needs to be protected because it is unable to protect itself. In doing so, humans are transformed into guardians or custodians of the object or image and often depicted as being a *rescuer* or acting in *heroism*. The concept of protecting an object or image is central to this idiom's vocabulary during claims-making activities. Also, the rhetoric of

loss is said to be most idiomatic when discussing objects, or condition-categories, that are described to be in a form of perfection. Positive terms that are commonly used with the rhetoric of loss's moral vocabulary are nature, cleanliness, innocence, purity, and legacy. Negative terms associated with this idiom's vocabulary are decadence, sin, chaos, and pollution.

The rhetoric of entitlement is a type of idiomatic claim that focuses on the concept that everyone (animals and plants included) should have equal access to institutions and unrestricted freedom of self-expression. Also, this claim encompasses egalitarianism because of claims made about groups of people being discriminated against. The idea of expanding a service, right, or good for the benefit of all members in society is central to the moral vocabulary of this type of claim. With that said, gender, class, disability, and race-based inequality are the most commonly used typifications that help build condition-categories in many realms of a social problems arena. Positive terminologies associated with this rhetorical idiom are terms such as choice, diversity, tolerance, lifestyle, and empowerment. On the other hand, the negative terminologies are related with the act of discrimination, and therefore are associated with terms like racism, intolerance, sexism, and oppression (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003).

Next, the third rhetorical idiom presented by Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) is the rhetoric of endangerment. This idiom is applied to conditions that are threatening the safety and health of individuals. Even more, this idiom is similar to the rhetoric of entitlement because individuals using this idiomatic vocabulary claim to have the *right* to be safe and healthy and the right to "choose how to live." In fact, medical or other

scientific knowledge is very influential with the rhetoric of endangerment used during claims-making activities, and employing the rhetoric of endangerment during claims-making is most idiomatic in these forms. With that said, the positive terms related to the rhetoric of endangerment are fitness, hygiene, nutritiousness, and prevention. Conversely, the negative terms related to this idiom are risk, disease, epidemic, contamination, and pathology.

The rhetoric of unreason implies that there is a relationship among knowledge and the self, but then there is an instance when the relationship between the two is either destroyed, undermined, or distorted. The terms such as brainwashed, manipulated, or taken advantage of highlight the concerns conveyed in this rhetorical idiom. Subliminal messages, powers of advertising, hidden forces, and conspiracies are “common evocations in this rhetoric’s lexicon” (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993:36; Ibarra and Kitsuse 2003:31). The concept of education, or the lack of education, is a central theme to the rhetoric of unreason. Along with the idea of being uneducated, other terms associated with the rhetoric of unreason are uninformed, innocent, vulnerable, and naïve (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003).

The last rhetorical idiom presented by Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003), the rhetoric of calamity, deals with the images of a disaster or catastrophe, and is often associated with moral panics. Claimants that use the rhetoric of calamity in their claims-making activities will sometimes adopt other claimant’s condition-categories and claims to help demonstrate and support the significance of the claim they are making. For example, poverty influences drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, urban crime, and poor schools. In truth, by claimants borrowing or adopting other claimant’s condition-

categories, it puts multiple claimants in what Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) call a “symbolic umbrella,” which assists in the building of a coalition.

If claims are morally competent and symbolically coherent to the members that are culturally similar have the option of accepting or rejecting the claim being made. In other words, members of the community in which the claim is being made will either be sympathetic to the claim or unsympathetic to the claim. In fact, rhetorical idioms are used to justify and amplify a claim, and also sway other members to be sympathetic. In contrast, the process of calling to action or blocking the attempted classification of the condition-category, or both, counterclaimants develop counterrhetorics, which help to obstruct the condition-category’s significance. The two strategies, sympathetic counterrhetorics and unsympathetic counterrhetorics, are developed in response to claims-making activities.

Sympathetic counterrhetorics accept, either in whole or part, the claim that the condition-category is a problem, but they do not feel that remedial action is necessary. There are several different “moves” that counterclaimants can do when being sympathetic to a claim. First, *naturalizing* occurs when the counterclaimants accept problematic condition-category, but reject the call for remedial action by indicating that the condition-category is rendered contingent and problematic was inevitable anyway. The next sympathetic counterrhetoric deals with *the costs involved*. The premise of this strategy revolves around the concept of that “‘benefits’ do not outweigh their ‘costs’” (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993:39; Ibarra and Kitsuse 2003:35). Contributors of this sympathetic strategy feel that the condition-category will just have to be lived with instead of adapting the claimant’s measures of action. Third, the concept of *declaring*

impotence entails expressing one's sympathy toward the condition-category but at the same time pointing out an impoverishment of available resources in dealing with the problem. Examples of this concept are not having enough authority, energy, or time to improve the condition-category. The fourth sympathetic counterrhetorical strategy Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) discussed is *perspectivizing*. This strategy focuses on the idea that everyone is entitled to their opinion, and the counterclaimant has the right to his/her opinion, even if they acknowledge a condition-category as problematic. The last sympathetic counterrhetorical strategy discussed is *tactical criticism*. Here the critics of this strategy accept that condition-category as being problematic, but reject the means the claimants want to employ to solve the problem.

In contrast, unsympathetic counterrhetorics do not accept the notion that the condition-category is a problem, and thus do not feel that remedial action is necessary either. The first method of occupying an unsympathetic counterrhetorical strategy is the notion of *antipatterning*. Counterclaimants propose that the claim is not actually a "full-scale social problem," but actually only "isolated events." Second, *telling anecdote* occurs when a counterclaimant invalidates a claim by indicating a specific incident that he/she experienced that contradicts the claim. Next, when using the *counterrhetoric of insincerity* a counterclaimant either declares or suggests that the claimant's claim of a social problem is actually a "hidden agenda" on his/her part. Lastly, the *counterrhetoric of hysteria* occurs when the counterclaimant deproblematizes a condition-category and is considered unsympathetic because the claim is said to not be made in a "sound" assessment but rather the condition is influenced by "emotional" or "irrational" factors.

Counter rhetorical strategies and the vernacular resources needed to fulfill them are useful in examining claims-making activities (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003).

Claims-making discourse can also involve different styles to help make a claim. In fact, Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) state that claims-making styles are not only central to the study of social constructionism, but that they are also the “constitutive character of claims-making activities” (p. 45). Claims-making styles have been neglected in past research, but styles are very important in the understanding and study of claims-making activities. For instance, styles make evident the different groupings of a claimant’s sensibility, bearing, membership category, and tenor to inform how the claim is to be interpreted by auditors, the specific content of the claim, and also the general appearance of the claim. The styles discussed by Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) are civic, legalistic, comic, and subculture styles. In many instances more than one style is used during claims-making activities, and these styles are often used to reach different varieties of audiences.

The civic style often composes of members participating in claims-making out of outrage or strict moral indignation. Also, participants using the civic style often appear sincere and/or honest, but the claim often looks *unpolished*. Even more, those who use the civic style to make a claim want to be seen as a normal citizen, and therefore, they do not want to look too organized, or they could be labeled as part of an interest group. On the other hand, the legalistic style of claims-making often involves some aspect of law and justice. Typically, a claimant is speaking on behalf of a different party, sometimes a plaintiff or defendant. The comic style is commonly found when member’s discourse has a sense of sarcasm, exaggeration, or irony in it to emphasize

the significance of his/her claim. The use of this style also points out the hypocrisies and absurdities of a claimant's or counterclaimant's, or both, claim. An example of the comic style would be political cartoons and forms of caricature. Lastly, when diverse segments of society, whether based on gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, race, or other self-defining characteristics, evolve their own ways of commenting on the socially, larger world, it is defined as the subcultural style.

Motifs, rhetorical idioms, counterrhetorical strategies, and styles are aspects of vernacular resources that strict constructionists examine in their social problems research. Just as important, the theory of social constructionism provides a framework for examining social problems in an alternative way by allowing researchers to observe how social problems arise (Loseke and Best 2003). In sum, the theory of social constructionism has "become the leading theoretical approach for sociologists and others studying social problems" (Loseke and Best 2003:ix). My research will examine how the issue of new sports-fishing regulations between local Bahamians and American sports-fishermen in the islands of the Bahamas was constructed as a problematic condition.

Sports-Fishing, Claims-Making, & the Bahamas: An Introduction

There are no groups or individuals, or organized settings that are more appropriate to study social problems discourse. In fact, social problems discourse can occur anywhere that *problems* can be interpreted, and even more precise, “settings where problematic and troublesome behavior” is commonly found can produce social problems discourse (Holstein and Miller 2006:86). With that said, online forums, posts, and blogs have increased in popularity as technology has dramatically grown. These internet settings have opened a new door for social problems discourse, and thus have given social constructionists a new arena to study social problems.

Online forums have allowed many to communicate, discuss, and share a vast amount of information on various topics or interests. However, there is also another style of communication that is evident on online forums: claims-making. The use of the internet and online forums give users the ability to voice their concerns about a problem they deem necessary for discussion. In the case of the online sports-fishing forums, the forums are a way for individuals to vent and express their feelings on the new fishing regulations in the Bahamas, and clearly they took full advantage of this ability. In fact, as Lynxwiler and DeCorte (1995) indicate that hard core rap songs are not just entertainment or background noise but instead also an activity of claims-making, the online fishing forums are not only a way of communicating with other individuals with similar interests, but also the forums become a way of voicing their claims.

What's more, a multiple stage process of claims-making is sometimes apparent in the claims-making activities; for instance, the concept of an initial claim being made, followed by a counterclaim. In the case of the online sports-fishing forum, there is a

three stage process of claims-making and counterclaims-making activities. For example, the first stage of the claims-making activity occurred when the Bahamas claimed that there was a depletion of the fish stock and marine resources, which inevitably led them to propose the new fishing regulations. In response to this claim and the new fishing regulations, the Americans counterclaimed by defending themselves and claiming that these new regulations were unfair and unjust, that they were not the ones to blame and, instead, pointed the blame to the local Bahamians and other big fishing vessels, such as those that come over from the Dominican Republic to fish the Bahamian waters. Then, in response to the Americans' claims against many local Bahamians, the local Bahamians then counterclaimed and lashed out against the Americans, defending themselves and their country and, once again, blaming many Americans for the damage and depletion of the marine resources.

Despite the fact that this research focuses on the sports-fishing regulation change for non-Bahamian anglers in the Bahamas, it is pertinent to point out that recently the Government of the Bahamas revised the fisheries regulations approximately a year after they were changed. In fact, the Minister of the Bahamas indicated in a press release that many of the sports-fishing tournaments that are held in the Bahamas during the summer months in 2007 were "thrown into disarray." Also, many family-owned hotels and marinas reported a significant reduction in the number of reservations and visitors. The Minister also reported that even though the initial provisions would be made so that the new changes would not have a negative impact on the sports-fishing tournaments held in the Bahamas Islands, this was not done as intended. Thus, the re-revised sports-fishing regulations in the Bahamas now state that

demersal fish, such as grouper and snapper, now have a catch limit of sixty pounds or twenty fish per vessel. Pelagic fish, such as Tuna, dolphin (Mahi Mahi), and Wahoo have increased to a catch limit of eighteen fish per vessel. Additionally, the crawfish limit is now ten per vessel. The Minister also stressed that the Bahamas Government promotes and supports the activity of sports-fishing by visitors in the Bahamas (Devaney 2007), and the revisions of the regulations further supports their claim. Despite the announcement of the sports-fishing regulations being revised during my research, I do not consider these changes and the effects of these changes in my research, which examines the claims-making activities made by American anglers and Bahamian residents found on online sports-fishing/cruising forums.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In my research, I use a qualitative approach to examine the specialized vocabularies (Coffey and Atkinson 1996) that take place in online sports-fishing forums between Bahamian residents and American sports-fishermen. This is appropriate because qualitative analysis is used to uncover patterns of relationships and fundamental meanings through nonnumerical assessment and interpretation of observations (Lofland 2005). My analysis focuses on the regularities, themes, and patterns (Coffey and Atkinson 1996) of the discourse, while also adopting Ibarra and Kitsuse's (1993, 2003) framework for studying claims-making activities. In particular, I attempt to locate the themes and patterns that reveal the types of rhetorical idioms used in constructing claims made against the revised sports-fishing regulations in the Bahamas. The examination of rhetorical idioms are useful in social problems discourse because they help identify the problem and the claims-makers, as well as bring to light the culture and audience that influences claims-making discourse. Rhetorical idioms are composed of metaphors, themes, language, and motifs, which can be used to analyze idioms found in claims-making discourse (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003: see Appendix A).

The data for my research were collected in the fall semester of 2007 and spring semester of 2008. An online search of fishing forums was conducted, using keywords such as *fishing*, *Bahamas*, *new fishing regulations*, *law*. Because many of my acquaintances are personally involved with online fishing forums, I used a snowball-type method to locate the forums through casual conversations.

My search for online fishing forums that had posts related to the new fishing regulations in the Bahamas produced four different websites: *OutdoorsBest Forums*, *Cruisers Forum*, *Hatteras Owners Forum & Gallery*, and *SFC Sport Fishing Forums*. Two of the forums, *OutdoorsBest* and *SFC Sport Fishing*, are based in Florida. However, that does not mean that all of the members are from Florida. In fact, there were several members who were located in the Bahamas. The *Hatteras Owners Forum and Gallery* website had two primary locations: North Carolina and Florida. But once again, that does not mean that the members are only from these two areas. Lastly, the *Cruisers Forum* consisted of members from various areas, such as Ontario, Massachusetts, and Florida.

I conducted a content analysis of the sports-fishing forum's online discussions to examine the vernacular resources that encompass the claims-making rhetoric of sports-fishermen toward the new fishing regulations in the Bahamas. Part of the analysis recorded the recurring phrases and words that the anglers used to describe their thoughts and feelings toward the new fishing laws. Instead of trying to decipher any true meaning or nuance of the postings, the coding of the postings was based on what the phrase or term denoted. This approach was explained by Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993), when they suggested that the sociologist should observe and interpret the members as engaging in the construction of "social conditions as moral objects" (p. 22). Thus, the definitional activities are central to the study of social problems, and the member's interpretation and perspective of the social condition is pertinent to understand and explain social problems discourse. Therefore, the data were coded in this fashion to facilitate an assessment of how claims are entrenched in the postings

rather than the content or potential meanings of the claims. For example, when one angler made a claim such as “With Cuba’s new leader coming up, maybe it will change a few things, for the good” (SFC Sport Fishing Forums 2007) he did not clearly state that he would vacation to Cuba instead of the Bahamas, but the nature of this claim signifies that he would, and thus, was categorized as making reference to Cuba. Also, one man stated “Catch ‘em up, brother, they’re all yours!” (SFC Sport Fishing Forums 2007). Once again, he is not directly stating he will not return to the Bahamas, but the tone of the phrase indicates that he will not, and thus is classified as boycotting the Bahamas to fish.

After analyzing these four forums, the final sample contained the following: 130 pages of posts, 210 different posts, and 75 members in all. From *OutdoorsBest Forums* (2007), there were 15 pages, 36 posts, and 27 members. Then, the *Cruisers Forum* (2006) consisted of only 8 pages, 17 posts, and 14 members. Next, the *Hatteras Owners Forum & Gallery* (2006) forum had a total of 15 pages, 21 posts, and 9 members. And lastly, the *SFC Sport Fishing Forums* (2006), which was the largest, contained 92 pages, 136 posts, and 25 members. It should be pointed out however, that there were a handful of members who posted on several different fishing forum sites, and thus, the number of members posted may have been over counted. Lastly, I have adopted pseudonyms for the member’s screen names found on the forums. Thus, I have changed the member’s screen names from the original that I found online to different fishing pseudonyms to protect any concerns of identity.

On a final note, it is important to locate myself as a participant in sports-fishing. I have been part of the sports-fishing world for nearly four years. I have primarily fished

out of the Cape Canaveral, but I have frequented the Bahamas to sports-fish. Although my experience might be novice compared to many anglers, I have excelled quickly in the sport of fishing. My knowledge has grown and I have become a competitive lady angler. Because of my involvement locally, and across the sea, I have been considered part of the “sports-fishing family.” Therefore, I share a common knowledge of culture, language, and morals with members of the sports-fishing community. With that said, I was personally affected by the revisions of the sports-fishing laws in the Bahamas. While I cannot fully bracket my involvement with the sports-fishing community nor my personal reactions to the law, by adopting a strict constructionist approach to my analytic strategy, I have attempted to minimize the impact of my experiences as a participant of sports-fishing.

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology used to examine the claims-making discourse between Americans and Bahamian locals found on online sports-fishing forums. Using Ibarra and Kitsuse’s (1993, 2003) concepts of vernacular resources, I will examine the rhetoric posted on online sports-fishing forums by Americans sports-fishermen to identify the motifs and thematic elements of the claims-making activities which are key components of the rhetorical idioms. The following chapter will present and discuss the findings of my research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Claims-Making Motifs

According to Ibarra and Kitsuse (2003), motifs are figures of speech and recurrent thematic elements that are found throughout and within claims-making discourse. In particular, motifs are “morally imbued” phrases and themes. Motifs help construct images that underline the problematic characteristics of a condition-category for the claimant and/or counterclaimant. As such, they are critical for understanding how claimants and counterclaimants attempt to transform a condition-category into a social problem (Lynxwiler and DeCorte 1995).

To examine the motifs of the postings made by non-Bahamian sports-fishermen, a content analysis recorded recurring figures of speech and phrases found on the four online fishing forums. The data were compared and grouped into thematic categories based on the similarities of their references. This produced the following seven motifs: (1) boycotting and/or canceling trips (words and phrases that suggest they will not vacation or spend any more money in the Bahamas); (2) financial (reference to the new regulations hurting the Bahamian economy); (3) discrimination (any mention of the new regulations being discriminatory toward non-Bahamian anglers, i.e. Floridians); (4) vague laws (any reference to how unclear and misleading the new regulations are in the Bahamas); (5) politics/government (any indication that the new fishing laws are part of a political ploy); (6) passing the blame (words of phrases that suggest that the local Bahamians are the ones that are depleting their marine resources, not Americans); and (7) Cuba (reference to Cuba opening up for sports-fishermen). The results of this descriptive analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes and Motifs of Online Sports-Fishing Forums

	Name of Forums				
Themes/Motifs	OutdoorsBest	Cruisers	SFC Sport Fish	Hatteras	Total
Boycotting	10	0	22	4	36
Financial	1	1	24	3	29
Passing Blame	4	2	13	7	26
Politics/Gov't	4	0	11	3	18
Discrimination	1	0	10	0	11
Cuba	0	0	7	2	9
Vague	4	0	2	1	7
Total	24	3	89	20	136

As Table 1 reveals, the sports-fishing forum's members present their claims using a set of unique themes. The most common motif reflects the themes that make reference to boycotting and/or canceling trips to the Bahamas to sports-fish (n=36). Next, the motifs of financially hurting the Bahamas because of the new laws (n=29) and passing the blame unto the local Bahamian anglers (n=26) followed not far behind. The motifs of the new regulations being in occurrence with political/governmental strategies (n=18), discriminatory toward Americans (n=11), reference to Cuba (n=9), and the new fishing regulations being vague (n=7) also seemed to be common throughout the vernacular discourse of the forums.

The most common motif presented in Table 1, boycotting and/or canceling trips to the Bahamas, was found in three of the four forums. Also, the motif of boycotting/canceling trips was commonly found in the postings, especially in the forum SFC Sport Fishing (n=22), where almost three-fourths of this motif was found. The thematic elements varied in how they were voiced throughout this forum, as well as the others. Many of the members of the SFC Sport Fishing forum mentioned multiple times that they would not return back to the Bahamas to fish. For instance, as member *Yellowfin* stated, "I love the island and go over 2 to 4 times a year. But now I will be thinking about more [K]eys trip instead." Here, the forum member is referring to boycotting the Bahamas and instead vacation to the Florida Keys to sports-fish. Later on in the forum, *Yellowfin Tuna* indicated that the "keys are [their] new destination" and "[s]o I will miss my friends in the islands but you will not see me again till your Govt comes to there senses" (sic). Just as interesting, *Bluefin Tuna*, a member of the SFC Sport Fishing Forums (2006), stated for example, "I doubt seriously if many will make

return trips to catch less than the legal limits.” *Bluefin Tuna* then later stated in response to another post,

Tell you what... Instead of trying to convince me/us that your new regulations are realistic, I have a better idea. You stay over there and fish and I'll stay over here and fish. As far as I'm concerned you guys can keep every dang one of your 6 fish and I will keep my US dollars at home where it helps my economy.

In fact, many references of keeping American money at home were made on the fishing forums. For instance, *Sailfish* stated that “[t]hese regs are ridiculous. Making the crossing just won't be worth it. Will be keeping a lot more of my money in the states” (SFC Sport Fishing Forums 2006).

Moreover, the *OutdoorsBest Forums* (2007) also had thematic elements of boycotting and/or canceling trips to the Bahamas (n=10). As *Blue Marlin* indicates,

[...] now even more clear reasons why myself nor thousands of other anglers will not spend a cent there anymore. [...]. This on top of the real-estate market imploding over there and those people are going to be in for a very rough few years. I feel bad for the people over there but to hell with the Bahamas until they change.

In contrast, as for canceling already made trips to the Bahamas, *Kingfish* stated that “[m]any of the ‘big boat’ folks I know have cancelled several trips already.” Finally, after *Wahoo* made his thoughts clear about the new fishing regulations, he ended his post by stating that

[t]he US fish better beware, as I will have thousands of dollars of Fuel to burn and about four times as many days on the water for my \$\$\$ on this side of the stream. And if I wake up and it's windy, I might go to work. (*OutdoorsBest Forums* 2007)

The second most common motif found throughout the forums, which in fact was found in all four of the forums, was the thematic element of financially hurting the

Bahamas' and its economy. One member of the SFC Sport Fishing Forums (2006) claimed that "LOOKS LIKE THEY ARE GOING TO STARVE WITHOUT US GUY'S MAKING THE TRIP ACROSS THE SEA!!!" Furthermore, *Blue Marlin* from the OutdoorsBest Forums declared that "I just hope we can hurt them financially hard enough this summer to make them change their minds about the new regulations by next summer." This motif was stated more directly than other motifs found in the sports-fishing forums. For example, *Barracuda* from the SFC Sport Fishing Forums (2006) stated that "[m]aybe the Ministry will figure it out when they notice their coffers aren't as full as they once were" (sic). In addition, *Dolphin*, a member of the Hatteras Owners Forum & Gallery (2006), remarked,

I'll leave it to the Bahamians to decide if they really have the makings of depleting fish stocks, but this is going to really hurt them boat-tourism-wise. Pretty as it is over there, the scenery alone won't get people making the efforts they need to.

The third most common motif, passing the blame, was also a common theme in all of the forums. Typical of this thematic element, one comment made by *Red Snapper* from the Hatteras Owners Forum & Gallery (2006) made the claim loud and clear:

The NATIVES are the ones who do the most damage; don't ever let the bleeding hearts over here convince you otherwise. I'm no racist, but I get a little tired of the rich Americans always being to blame for Bahamian resources woes.

Just as interesting, there are three quotes from the SFC Sport Fishing Forums (2006) that sums up many of the non-Bahamian angler's feelings toward the new fishing regulations:

"You know who does more damage to the local fishing there. I have fished with dozens of locals over the years and can say each time they kept more fish [little ones] conch, lobster and even tropicals then any one else I ever fished with." – *Yellowfin Tuna*

“I would like to see the blame put where it is due!” – *Gray Grouper*

“Do you think, even for 1 minute, that the American fisherman who comes over there 3 times a year are decimating your fish stock? Wouldn't logic dictate that the thousands of Bahamians who fish every day and take whatever they want are more likely the culprit?” – *Bluefin Tuna*

Next, three of the four forums had thematic elements relating to the motif of politics and/or governmental association (n=18). Some of the members on the forums indicated how the new fishing regulations were due to political/governmental events. As *Amberjack*, a member of the Hatteras Owners Forum & Gallery (2006) clearly stated, “[t]here is also some political motivation as well.” Likewise, *Skipjack* from the OutdoorsBest Forums (2007) stated in response to his conversations with officials of the Bahamian Fisheries, that

[t]he good news is the reports I'm getting that come from one on one conversations with folks at a much higher pay grade than Mr. Braynen, keep saying that the regs will be changed again after the May elections. Kinda like polotics here, talk tough to get the votes, and then take care of the ones who have the \$\$\$\$.

The next three motifs were not as common as the previous motifs found in the postings of the online fishing forums. Discriminatory claims were evident in eleven (n=11) postings on two of the four forums. Many members indicated that they wanted the new laws to be equally distributed for all of the anglers, both Bahamian and non-Bahamian. Because the new laws only applied to non-Bahamian anglers, many felt they were being discriminated against, and many made this claim heard. *Flounder*, a member of the OutdoorsBest Forums (2007), cried out

I have no problems with these laws if they are for everyone, Bahamians included. Last time I checked our laws and regulations stand for everyone not just residents or non-residents. Hmmmmm, this may be a case of reverse discrimination. (sic)

Also, the motifs of the new laws/regulations being vague (n=7) and the reference to Cuba (n=9), were found in several of the postings.

While the vague laws motif was found in three of the four forums, the Cuba motif was apparent in only one of the four forums. On the OutdoorsBest Forums (2007), one of the members indicated that after the new regulations were posted online, he felt that he had clear answers. However, most did not agree that they had clear answers. In response, *Skipjack* stated “[c]lear answers? Where did you see those?” He further went on in the post questioning many of the new regulations, and more precisely, the wording and phrasing of the regulations. The Cuba reference was only found on the SFC Sport Fishing Forums (2006). Despite that this motif was only located in one forum, many of the members were making claims through the statement such as, “I cannot wait until Cuba opens up” (SFC Sport Fishing Forums 2006).

The motifs presented in the claims made by sports-fishermen toward the new Bahamian regulations help construct images that highlight the claims-making activities. The claimants offer descriptions of the condition-category through the method such as motifs. The motifs presented above help paint a picture of the condition category and help support the connotation of the condition-category being a social problem. Next, rhetorical idioms, a type of vernacular resource, give insight into how the sports-fishing forum’s claims-making discourse is morally embedded in the condition-category. That is, they provide a means to examine how claims found on the sports-fishing forums define the law as problematic. I present how the motifs discussed above are used by claimants to adapt a certain rhetorical idiom (or more) to help their claim be heard and accepted by members in the audience.

Claims-Making Rhetorical Idioms

According to Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003), rhetorical idioms are distinguishing ways of elaborating the problematic status of the condition-category during claims-making activities. Rhetorical idioms are not so much concerned with the magnitude or existence of the condition-category, but are actually more concerned with the moral reasoning of the condition-category. In fact, rhetorical idioms are a type of moral vocabulary and they furnish claimants, and in many cases, counterclaimants, with “value-laden themes and narrative formulae” which help express the significance of the claims that are being made. Just as important, rhetorical idioms also shape and drive the final claim by distinguishing certain guidelines on how to structure the claim. The online sports-fishing forum members developed their claims into ways that other members would understand, and in effect would support the claim of the condition-category being labeled as a social problem. The members organized their claims by using rhetorical idioms to gain support in the claim about the condition category (i.e. new sports-fishing regulations).

As discussed previously, Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) identify five rhetorical idioms – the rhetoric of loss, entitlement, endangerment, unreason, and calamity. A sixth idiom, the rhetoric of requital, was formulated by Lynxwiler and DeCorte (1995) in their analysis of hard core rap music. Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) state that when identifying rhetorical idioms used in constructing a claim, claims-makers may rely exclusively on one type of idiom. However, my analysis of the claims made by American and Bahaman anglers has located the use of two types of rhetorical idioms. With that said, the final analysis of claims-making discourse of sports-fishermen as

found on on-line fishing forums located two rhetorical idioms: the rhetoric of entitlement and unreason. The relationship between the motifs found in the online sports-fishing forums and the rhetorical idioms that Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) claim is important in the study of social problems is presented in Table 2.

The rhetoric of entitlement was evident in the claims-making of the Americans toward the Bahamas and the new fishing regulations. The rhetoric of entitlement suggests that equal access and freedom should not be denied to any group in society (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003). Here, the Americans are claiming to be the vulnerable group that is being denied equal access and equal rights to sports-fishing in the Bahamas. American anglers' reasoning for feeling this way is because of the new fishing regulations only being directed toward non-resident anglers, and not local Bahamian anglers. Indeed, many Americans indicated that they felt discriminated against and they just wanted equal rights to fishing. The motif of discrimination (n=11) is an obvious aspect of using the rhetorical idiom of entitlement to support their claim of a social problem. Americans claim they will result to drastic measures, such as the motif of boycotting the Bahamas (n=36), in hopes of making a point which will optimistically result in revisions of the sports-fishing regulations in the islands of the Bahamas. Americans are also claiming that because of the unequal access to fishing in the Bahamas, they hope Cuba will soon open (n=9) for Americans to sports-fish there and they will instead fish the waters in Cuba. Another important factor that Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) point out is the concept of expansion and how it is used in the vocabulary of claims-making. They suggest that if a claimant expands the distribution of a good, right, or service, in this case fishing, then the benefits for all members of society

Table 2: Motifs found in Rhetorical Idioms

RHETORICAL IDIOMS

Entitlement	Unreason
<p><i>Claimants adapt this rhetoric by asserting claims that the social problem exists because equal access and freedom is being denied to a group in society (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003).</i></p>	<p><i>Claimants adapt this rhetoric by asserting claims that the social problem exists because a group or individual is being manipulated, brainwashed, or taken advantage (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003).</i></p>
<p>The motif of Boycotting denotes that Americans will boycott fishing vacations to the Bahamas because they are being denied equal access to sports-fishing.</p>	<p>The motif of Passing Blame denotes that because of Bahamians being unaware or uneducated, they are supporting the new fishing regulations and support the idea that American's are to blame for the depletion of marine resources in the Bahamas.</p>
<p>The motif of Discrimination denotes that Americans are claiming that they are being denied equal rights to fishing in the Bahamas, and thus discriminated against.</p>	<p>The motif of Politics/Gov't denotes that the local Bahamians are being manipulated by an interest group, and in this case the Bahamian government, and that the political ploy being demonstrated is only made by a self-seeking interest group.</p>
<p>The motif of Cuba denotes that because the unequal access to fishing in the Bahamas, Americans plan on fishing the waters of Cuba when it possible.</p>	<p>The motif of Vague Laws denotes that because the Government of the Bahamas is acting as a self-seeking group, they have changed the laws and made them vague and difficult to understand.</p>
<p>The motif of Financial denotes that because the Bahamians are not expanding the right of fishing (i.e. denying equal fishing rights to all), the Bahamian economy will be negatively impacted by American boycotts.</p>	

will be greater. For instance, the Americans are claiming that equal fishing rights will bring them back to the Bahamas, which will in effect benefit the Bahamas Islands' economy. Here, the motif of hurting the Bahamas financially (n=29) was used in the claims-making activities of the idiom of entitlement.

The second rhetorical idiom located on the sports-fishing forums, the rhetoric of unreason, is evident in the claims-making activities of the Americans toward the new fishing regulations, and particularly the Bahamian government. Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) state that the rhetoric of unreason encompasses the ideas of one being manipulated, brainwashed, or taken advantage of. The concept of the "self and the state of knowing," and then the moment in which this relationship is being damaged, distorted, or destroyed, is central to this rhetorical idiom. The claim against the local Bahamian government not thoroughly assessing and researching the new fishing regulations before passing them is an example of the motif politics/government (n=18), which is a characteristic of this rhetorical idiom. Here, the Americans feel that the Bahamian's are the unaware or innocent group that is being manipulated by the government, who is acting as a self-seeking group. In fact, numerous Americans felt that the Bahamian government did not research the depletion of their marine resources, but decided to blame the Americans instead. Many Americans expressed the motif of the Bahamians passing the blame (n=26), or scapegoating, and express their feelings of how unreasonable the condition category (i.e. new fishing regulations) is.

Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) also indicate that the idea of education is an important component within the idiom of unreason. For instance, as a means of solving a social problem, and in this case the depletion of the marine resources in the

Bahamas, education plays a major role in the sense that “knowledge leads to a wiser action” (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003). The response to this rhetorical idiom was made evident because many Americans claimed that the Bahamians were not educated enough to make the decision on the new fishing regulations and also pass the blame unto American sports-fishermen. *Bluefin Tuna* from the SFC Sport Fishing Forums (2006) clearly stated his concerns about the education of the Bahamian fisheries and government:

The Bahamas should've had some semblance of a biological impact study to help them tighten up their fishing laws to a reasonable level. Instead, the only thing they really tightened was the noose around their tourism neck.

The motif of the new fishing regulations being very vague (n=7) was prominent throughout the Americans' claims while adapting the rhetoric of unreason to help make their claim of a social problem be accepted. Many of the postings on the sports-fishing forums claimed that because the Bahamian government is acting as a self-seeking group, they have changed the fishing regulations. In doing so, the new fishing laws are very vague and difficult to understand and interpret.

In sum, my analysis revealed that the motifs found on the four sports-fishing forums collectively constructed two rhetorical idioms. Earlier I noted that rhetorical idioms include both symbolic and moral components (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003). Symbolically, idioms provide a coherent and meaningful structure to the problem that allows claimants and their audiences to define and discuss it in a collectively shared manner. That is, everyone who embraces the idiom “sees” the problem the same way, and thinks about it in the same way. Morally, idioms establish the values that will be

used to collectively experience the problem as wrong. As such, those who accept the idiom will agree that it violates important values and beliefs.

Within the idiom of entitlement, I found that the new Bahamian sports-fishing law is being portrayed as denying equal access to all fishermen who would like to fish the Bahamian waters. Non-Bahamians (Americans) are being discriminated against and denied their right to fish, and this is considered to be morally wrong because it violates a protected right. While this is inline with Ibarra and Kitsuse's (1993, 2003) work on rhetorical idioms, my analysis also reveals that an idiom may include a collective response to the problem and thus offer a solution. The majority of motifs in the rhetorical idiom of entitlement called for sports-fishermen to respond to the unfair law by boycotting the Bahamas to sports-fish. Some motifs suggested an open boycott, others hinted at the need to locate new places to fish, and still others argued that boycotting the discriminatory fishing law would eventually back-fire, causing financial problems for the Bahamas.

Turning to the idiom of unreason, I found that this rhetorical idiom established an image of the local Bahamian sports-fishermen as well as the law. The image of the Bahamian fishermen was captured in the motif of passing the blame, which defined them as uneducated locals who falsely believed that American sports-fishermen were harming the environment. As such, local Bahamians were portrayed as uninformed and ignorant rather than adversaries who are bad or evil. Moreover, the new law is not viewed so much as discriminatory as it is seen as a vague law that is void of specific meaning, which makes it impossible to implement and enforce. Finally, the idiom of unreason locates the cause of the problem not in a discriminatory law but in a self-

seeking government that is manipulating local Bahamian fishermen into supporting a vague law to control non-Bahamian sports-fishermen. As a result, the Bahamian government is viewed as morally wrong rather than the law or the local Bahamians sports-fishermen.

Thus, I found that while each idiom operates to establish distinct images and morally imbued meanings with regards to the new law, together they provide a unified understanding for those who share their vernacular resources. In short, the idiom of unreason located the cause of the problem while the idiom of entitlement located the solution. Together, the idioms presented symbolic and moral components that created a collective understanding for the audience. In this understanding, both American and Bahamian sports-fishermen are victims of a vague law, which discriminates against non-Bahamian sports-fishermen, that was created by a self-seeking, manipulative government who was victimizing all sports-fishermen.

Claims-Making Counterrhetorics

While the focus of my research was on the claims-making of American sports-fishermen, my analysis of the sports-fishing forums also revealed a handful of responses by Bahamian fishermen. These responses constitute what Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) term counterrhetorical strategies that are made by counterclaimants. The majority of the forums contained both claims and counterclaims with regards to the new fishing regulations in the Bahamas. In response to the new fishing laws, American sports-fishermen are claiming that the fishing regulations are discriminatory and unreasonable. In an effort to defuse or neutralize these claims, Bahamians who posted used counterrhetorical strategies.

Claims are situated around being morally competent and symbolically coherent, and thus the counterclaimant has to either act sympathetic toward the claim and claimant or have a good reason for not doing so. Also, counterclaimants must possess a certain “artfulness” in how they use a particular vernacular resource. More precisely, counterarguments block either the call to action or the characterization of the condition-category, or both (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003).

The Bahamian sports-fishermen used unsympathetic counterargumental strategies toward the American sports-fishermen’s claims about the new fishing regulations. A group that is considered to be unsympathetic means that they disagree with the claim that the condition-category (i.e. new fishing laws) is a social problem and also then rejects the call for remedial actions. The Bahamians who posted on the online sports-fishing forums disagreed with American anglers when they claimed that the new fishing laws were unreasonable and discriminatory. As such, the local Bahamians did not feel that the law should be revised.

Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003) point out four strategies that counterclaimants use in their unsympathetic counterargument: *antipatterning*, *telling anecdote*, *insincerity*, and *hysteria*. The counterargumental strategy of *insincerity* was the only strategy used by Bahamian sports-fishermen on the online sports-fishing forums. When a counterclaimant uses the *counterargument of insincerity*, he/she is declaring or suggesting that the claimant and the claim are part of a “hidden agenda.” In other words, the claimant is acting in self-interest, as a means of securing status, wealth, or power (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003).

Many Bahamians argued that the American anglers' claims that the new fishing regulations are problematic are insincere. In other words, it is a decoy to hide the fact that they are greedy and self-interested sports-fishermen who want to catch whatever and how ever many fish possible. A common *counterrhetoric of insincerity* used by Bahamians was the counterclaim that Americans are only angry because they are being regulated more than the local Bahamians in the sport of fishing. For example, one local Bahamian stated, "OK well not to stir the pot, but since you cannot come over to fill the coolers or catch what you please then fisherman wont travel to the Bahamas?" (sic) (SFC Sport Fishing Forums 2006). The forum member continues on further to state that "[a]nd if boats were making the crossing for the large limits, well then I guess that changes allot, and personally they can stay in the US." Many counterrhetorical strategies were framed in the same manner as the one above. For instance, *Triggerfish*, a member of the SFC Sport Fishing Forums (2006) stated, "I say stay home if you only were coming over here to[o] for the large catch limits of old."

Many Bahamians questioned the American's intentions of coming to the Bahamas to sports-fish. They were especially critical of the American's claim of the law being discriminatory and unreasonable. The Bahamians demonstrated that they were unsympathetic toward the American's claim by using the strategy of *insincerity*. While it would seem logical for the Americans to respond with attacks on the Bahamian sports-fishermen's counterrhetoric, this was not always the case. More often than not, the response to the Bahamian's counterrhetoric was couched within the rhetorical idiom of unreason, and specifically the motifs of passing the blame and politics/gov't. Given the

symbolic and moral components of this idiom, it was difficult for the Americans to be angry at the Bahamian sports-fishermen.

Claims-Making Styles

A critical component of whether an audience will understand a claim as a claim depends on the style in which the claim is delivered. Claims-making styles, such as the comic style, civic style, legalistic style, and subculture style reflect features of the claimant's and counterclaimant's manner, tone, and demeanor (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003; Lynxwiler and DeCorte 1995). Because of the use of the internet in my study of claims-making activities, my data consisted of text of varying conversations, instead of the actual voices, tones, pictures, and so forth, to analyze the different styles of making a claim. However, I still attempt to locate the styles found from the online sports-fishing forums. The styles that were found throughout the discussions on the online sports-fishing forums are the comic style and subcultural style.

The comic style, which includes the use of hypocrisies and absurdities (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993, 2003), was evident in the claims-making of the American sports-fishermen toward the claim that they were to blame for the depletion of the marine resources in the Bahamas Islands. In fact, many of the claims made by Americans toward the new fishing regulations used the comic style by poking fun at the counterclaims made by local Bahamians toward the new fishing regulations (Lynxwiler and DeCorte 1995). For instance, one member from the SFC Sport Fishing Forums (2006) commented

“Do you think, even for 1 minute, that the American fisherman who comes over there 3 times a year are decimating your fish stock? Wouldn't logic dictate that

the thousands of Bahamians who fish every day and take whatever they want are more likely the culprit?" – *Bluefin Tuna*

This member is adapting the comic style of making a claim by pointing out the absurdity of the Bahamians pointing some of the blame at the Americans. Another example of using absurdities in Ibarra and Kitsuse's (1993, 2003) comic style of making claims was made by *Bluefin Tuna* once again. This forum member criticized the new fishing regulations by remarking:

"What cracks me up is these guys defending these ridiculous limits in the name of Sportsmanship. What sport is there in deep dropping with an electric reel or watching a 20+ pound Grouper float away with a mouth full of inflated gut" (SFC Sport Fishing Forums 2006).

Bluefin Tuna is stating how absurd, unrealistic, and unsportsmanlike the new fishing regulations are because many fish will be caught that exceed twenty pounds, but they have to be thrown back into the water even though they are already probably dead, resulting in the waste of fish in the Bahamas' waters. In these situations, the comic style is being used in claims made by Americans in regards to the new fishing laws in the Bahamas as being discriminatory and unreasonable.

Another tone that was evident throughout the postings that relates to the comic style is found in sarcastic tones. Sarcasm was undoubtedly evident in *Yellowfin Tuna's* statement "Hemingway will be rolling in his grave if he saw your islands now" (SFC Sport Fishing Forums 2006). This type of comic, vernacular usage refers to Ernest Hemingway and how he frequented and loved fishing in the Islands of the Bahamas. Also, another example of the use of the comic style in the claims-making strategies of the American anglers is found in the statement from a member of the Hatteras Owners Forum and Gallery (2006), *Red Snapper*. This member remarked, "[k]ind of like gun

control over here -- if they'd just adequately enforce/punish offenses here you wouldn't need another law, but that's another soapbox!"

Lastly, the use of the subcultural style of organizing a claim was apparent in the claims-making activities made in favor of the new Bahamian fishing regulations. Here, the counterclaims made by the Bahamians were developed through more of a subcultural style, whereas the comic style discussed above was used for the claims made by the American anglers. Using Ibarra and Kitsuse's (1993, 2003) concept, cultural differences, such as race, ethnicity, and/or geographical location play a significant role in organizing the Bahamians' claim. There are cultural differences between Americans and Bahamians and these differences change how the larger, social world is viewed, and thus, the subcultural style is incorporated in the process of building and making a claim. In fact, the vernacular resources used by both Bahamians and Americans are similar (i.e. shared) because the use of sport-fishing vocabularies is somewhat universal. This is similar to the vernacular speech patterns that Lynxwiler and DeCorte (1995) found in their analysis of hard core rappers authenticate and reinforce the claimant "as a knowing insider," is also apparent in the rhetoric between different cultures of sports-fishermen. However, one difference is how the Bahamians initially delivered their claim that sparked Americans into beginning their claims-making on the online sports-fishing forums – the passing of the new fishing law toward American anglers. The differences in the two cultures are frequently pointed out throughout the forums by many members' discussions about the influence of Bahamian's culture and their livelihood relying on commercial fishing.

The idea of “well if you don’t like it, then stay home” was a common rhetoric used by local Bahamians as a way of organizing and delivering their counterclaim/s. With that said, they stylized their claims using this motto, which in a sense is used to protect their culture. For instance, in response to many complaints in the fishing forums, *Swordfish* stated “[i]t comes to a simple conclusion. Either you come or you don’t” (SFC Sport Fishing Forums 2006). In trying to defend and protect their culture, many Bahamians are making these types of statements, which support their subcultural style of claims-making. Together, the styles used by both the Americans and Bahamians are used to help articulate the claim being made.

The use of motifs, rhetorical idioms, counterrhetorical strategies, and styles of the claims-making activities of claims made by American sports-fishermen and the counterclaims made by local Bahamian anglers in regards to the new Bahamian fishing regulations have been presented above. The use of these vernacular resources can be attributed to a fairly new arena for claims-makers, the Internet. With the ever increasing use of the Internet in modern society, it is likely that more claims will be generated through the use of the internet and online discussion forums or blogs. The Internet allows claimants and counterclaimants to make their claim in the same arena at the same time, which is unique compared to other claims-making arenas such as in newspapers or on television.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

My study identified how online sports-fishing forums are used as arenas for social problems discourse and claims-making activities. The vernacular discourse of the members on the forums was central to my examination of how American sports-fishermen attempted to define the new fishing regulations in the Bahamas as problematic. My analysis adopted Ibarra and Kitsuse's (1993, 2003) theoretical approach to focus on vernacular resources and the discourse of claims-making activities. I collected data from four online sports-fishing and boating websites that had a discussion forum on the topic of the new proposed fishing regulations in the Bahamas.

My analysis of the online sports-fishing forums identified seven motifs throughout the online fishing forums: boycotting/canceling trips, financial, discrimination, vague laws, politics/government, passing the blame, and reference to Cuba. Together, these motifs collectively established two rhetorical idioms. The rhetorical idioms used by American anglers in the online fishing forums were the rhetoric of entitlement and the rhetoric of unreason.

The rhetoric of entitlement was a common idiom used by many of the online sports-fishing members. The motifs that were found to be characteristics of this rhetorical idiom were boycotting/canceling trips to the Bahamas, the law being discriminatory toward Americans, financially hurting the Bahamian economy, and making reference to Cuba opening up to Americans and fishing those waters instead of in the Bahamas. The second rhetorical idiom that was found to be used in the claims-making activities of the American online sports-fishing members was the rhetoric of

unreason. The rhetoric of unreason was an idiom that the American sports-fishermen embraced to gain support for their claim. The motifs related to the rhetoric of unreason included references that claimed that the Bahamians were passing the blame onto the Americans for the depletion of the marine resources in the Bahamas; assertions that the government was acting as a self seeking group to pass a law during an election year; and, arguments that the Bahamian government made the new sports-fishing regulations vague and confusing.

When analyzing the rhetorical idioms found on the online sports-fishing forums, I found that the claims were both symbolically coherent and morally embedded. Also, because the idioms contained symbolic and moral components, the Americans and other forum members were able to “see” the new law as morally wrong. What’s more, I found that my analysis revealed a cause and solution relationship between the idioms. The rhetorical idiom of unreason pointed out the cause of the problem, while the rhetorical idiom of entitlement pointed out a solution. Not only was the relationship between the two idioms an interesting finding, but I also found that the two rhetorical idioms established that the Americans not only claimed themselves as victims, but they also viewed local Bahamian anglers as victims. Instead of blaming local Bahamian fishermen, Americans pointed the blame toward the Bahamian government who was viewed as being manipulative and self-seeking.

While the rhetorical idioms and claims-making activities of the American sports-fishermen were central to my study, a discussion of the counterrhetorical strategies was needed. Since the Americans’ claims attacked the law as being unreasonable and discriminatory, local Bahamian sports-fishermen who were members of the online

fishing forums engaged in counterrhetorical strategies in hopes of debunking or neutralizing the claim made by Americans. My analysis found that local Bahamian anglers used unsympathetic counterrhetoric strategies. In other words, Bahamians were denying the claim that the new sports-fishing law was discriminatory and unreasonable, as well as the call to action to do something about the new law. Bahamians adapted the counterrhetoric of *insincerity*, claiming that Americans had some kind of “hidden agenda” behind their claim, such as wanting to just fish and catch any amount of fish possible in the waters of the Bahamas.

Although locating the styles proved somewhat difficult since my data was collected from online written discussions, I still attempted to examine the claims-making styles found in the online sports-fishermen’s forum discussions. An examination of the styles in which the claims were articulated provided two different claims-making styles. In the Americans’ claims toward Bahamians, the comic style was most commonly used in expressing their thoughts and feelings toward the new fishing regulations in the Bahamas. Americans’ claims often consisted of pointing out the absurdities of the new fishing regulations in sarcastic tones. By contrast, the Bahamians adapted the subcultural style to articulate their claims to the members on the sport-fishing forums. The Bahamians often stylized their counterclaims in a way that basically said “this is our country, our laws, and our culture, and if you do not like it, then do not come.”

My analysis of the claims-making activities made by American sports-fishermen focused on the claims made after the new fishing regulations in the Bahamas were already passed. Future research could benefit from examining the processes in which the initial claims made by the local Bahamians were formed which in effect caused the

Bahamian government to pass the new fishing regulations. Also, I approached my data from a strict constructionist approach presented by Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993, 2003). Future research could move toward examining the context in which the claims were being made, or a contextual constructionist approach (Best 2003).

In conclusion, I examined the vernacular resources used by members of online sports-fishing forums who actively engaged in claims-making activities. Again, my research examined the motifs, rhetorical idioms, counterrhetorical strategies, and styles of those who participated in making claims online in regards to the new sports-fishing regulations in the Bahamas. With the growth of the Internet, the study of social constructionism has entered a whole new arena in the study of claims-making activities. Future research should explore not only the use of the Internet by claims-makers, but also how this popular form of communication may alter social constructionist theory.

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIAL TERMS

Claims-making activities are defined as “the activity of making claims, complaints, or demands for change.” Also, “[c]laims-making is always a form of interaction: a demand made by one party to another that something be done about some putative condition. A claim implies that the claimant has a right at least to be heard, if not to receive satisfaction” (Spector and Kitsuse, 1987). Claims-making activities are any collective attempt to (re)define a condition as problematic.

Condition-categories are defined as “typifications of socially circumscribed activities and processes – the ‘society’s’ classifications of its own contents – used in practical contexts to generate meaningful descriptions and evaluations of social reality” (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993:26). This definition is central to the claims-making process. Without a condition-category, the claim of a social problem does not exist. The condition-category is what members claim is the social problem in itself.

Counterrhetorics are the “discursive strategies for countering characterizations made by claimants” (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993:30). This definition refers to the act of counterclaimants neutralizing or defusing a claim made by the claimants by adapting certain rhetoric (in this case counterrhetoric).

Motifs are defined as “figures of speech operating as shorthand descriptions/evaluations of condition-categories” (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993:31). This definition indicates that motifs recurring themes found throughout the claims-making process. Motifs that claimants express are building blocks to which rhetorical idiom the claimants are adapting to help support their claim of the existence a social problem.

Rhetorical idioms are “definitional complexes, utilizing language that situates condition-categories in moral universes” (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993:30). Rhetorical idioms are used by claimants and counterclaimants to gain acceptance and support for their claim of the importance of the condition-category being a social problem.

Social problems are defined as “the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative condition” (Spector and Kitsuse, 1987:75). This definition forms the basis for the social constructionist approach by asserting that social problems are not simply inherently problematic but rather the result of a collective definition.

Styles are defined as “how various groupings of the claimant’s bearing, tenor, sensibility, and membership category can inform both a claim’s general appearance and specific content as well as instruct auditors on how the claim about be interpreted” (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993:45). Styles are used to demonstrate how claimants form their claim, as well as how claimants organize the claim in a fashion that people who share the same vernacular will hear and understand the claim as being problematic.

Vernacular resource is defined as “the conventional means through which members realize claims. Thus, they can refer to forms of talk, frames of interpretation, and contexts for articulation inasmuch as these effectively organize and circumscribe

members' social problems discourse" (Ibarra and Kitsuse, 1993:29). This definition highlights the importance of shared vernacular resources in the study of social problems discourse. If claimants do not share the same vernacular, the claim of a social problem will not be supported. If members do not share similar forms of talk, there will not be a mutual understanding of the claim that the condition-category is a social problem.

APPENDIX B: IRB EXEMPTION LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
 Office of Research & Commercialization
 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
 Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
 Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Notice of Exempt Review Status

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board
 FWA00000351, Exp. 5/07/10, IRB00001138**

To: **Sara Neuenschwander**

Date: **May 06, 2008**

IRB Number: **SBE-08-05643**

Study Title: **The Social Construction of Claimsmaking: Bahamian Anglers vs. Non-Resident Sports-Fishermen**

Dear Researcher:

Your research protocol was reviewed by the IRB Chair on 5/2/2008. Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.101, your study has been determined to be **minimal risk for human subjects and exempt** from 45 CFR 46 federal regulations and further IRB review or renewal unless you later wish to add the use of identifiers or change the protocol procedures in a way that might increase risk to participants. Before making any changes to your study, call the IRB office to discuss the changes. **A change which incorporates the use of identifiers may mean the study is no longer exempt, thus requiring the submission of a new application to change the classification to expedited if the risk is still minimal.** Please submit the Termination/Final Report form when the study has been completed. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <https://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

The category for which exempt status has been determined for this protocol is as follows:

- 4. Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. (“Existing” means already collected and/or stored before your study starts, not that collection will occur as part of routine care.)

All data, which may include signed consent form documents, must be retained in a locked file cabinet for a minimum of three years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained on a password-protected computer if electronic information is used. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

On behalf of Tracy Dietz, Ph.D., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Janice Turchin on 05/06/2008 03:39:02 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator

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