

**MEAT AND MEANINGS:  
ADULT-ONSET HUNTERS' CULTURAL DISCOURSES OF THE HUNT**

**A Thesis Presented**

**by**

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**Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
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My deep thanks go to the twenty-four men and women who participated in this study. As interviewees, they gave generously of their time and of their stories. I wasn't far into this study when I realized that my task was not only to produce a coherent document. I felt a greater obligation as well: to represent these people accurately and honestly, conveying their words to the reader as clearly as possible, illuminating the

meanings they expressed. If I have any regret, it is that I was not able—within the time and scope of this study—to convey and illuminate more. In future efforts, I hope to.

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ABSTRACT

MEAT AND MEANINGS:  
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This study is a description and interpretation of talk about hunting. The study is based on data gathered from in-depth interviews with twenty-four hunters in the United States who did not become hunters until adulthood. A single overarching research question guides the study: How do people create and use discourses of hunting? The study is situated within the ethnography of communication research program and, more specifically, within the framework of cultural discourse analysis. The study employs cultural discourse analysis methods and concepts to describe and develop interpretations of how participants render hunting symbolically meaningful, and of what beliefs and values underlie such meanings. The major descriptive findings include recurrent patterns of talk concerning: connecting with land and nature, spirit, other people, human ancestry, and human nature; taking responsibility in ecological, ethical, and health-related ways, both through hunting and through other practices such as gardening; being engaged, present, alert, excited, and challenged; killing for appropriate reasons, in appropriate ways, and with appropriate feeling; and living and acting in response to a modern world that diminishes human experience, brutalizes animals, and harms the natural world. The major interpretive findings include hunting being linked to other practices such as gardening,

and being spoken of as a deeply meaningful pursuit practiced for the feelings of connection, engagement, and right relationship that it fosters, and as a physically and spiritually healthful remedy for the negative effects of modern living and of industrial food systems. This research demonstrates that hunting and talk about hunting can be underpinned by common beliefs and values shared by hunters, non-hunters, and anti-hunters. This research also suggests that adult-onset hunters and their discursive practices may be of unique value to wildlife agencies and conservation organizations, to other adult onset-hunters, and to both scholarly and public understandings of—and dialogues about—the practice of hunting.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Context and Questions

A 30-year-old woman from Maine speaks of hunting as “a very environmentally friendly” way of procuring meat and a “humane” way of treating animals. A 40-year-old woman from Vermont talks about her nascent interest in hunting and says it is directly related to her interest in keeping bees and in gardening—in getting a better sense of how much effort it takes “to get that carrot that you put in your salad.” A 37-year-old woman from Maine speaks of how much she enjoys sitting in the woods during deer season with a rifle in hand: it is, she says, a time for reflection and meditation. A 57-year-old man from Vermont speaks of “the tragedy of this technological, high-paced world we live in” and of hunting as a practice that “balances” and “fixes all this stuff.”

To many hunters, these statements may sound perfectly sensible. To many non-hunters, they may sound odd. What does it mean to say that hunting is a “humane” way of treating animals? How much does hunting really have in common with gardening and salads? How can lying in wait for a deer with a rifle in hand be meditative? What does hunting have to do with remedying the “tragedy” of modern life?

In this study, I show that these and other ways of talking about hunting (1) constitute a complex and coherent discourse that is deeply meaningful to those who use it, and (2) are rooted in beliefs shared by hunters, non-hunters, and anti-hunters alike. I

accomplish this by describing and interpreting interviews with people who did not grow up hunting but came to the pursuit as adults.

In the United States, it has long been assumed that the vast majority of hunters start hunting in their teenage years, if not earlier, typically having been mentored in the practice by an older family member. And, indeed, an estimated two-third of U.S. hunters hunt for the first time by the age of 20, and half of those hunt for the first time by the age of 12. What has surprised some researchers is that one in three U.S. hunters starts hunting at 21 or older. One in five starts hunting after the age of 30 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2007).

On the one hand, then, U.S. hunters who take up the pursuit as adults are in the minority. On the other hand, they are a substantial minority. Whatever their family and cultural backgrounds, they are former non-hunters (and, in some cases, former anti-hunters) who have crossed what is, in U.S. American culture, a significant symbolic line. The line is significant because hunting remains a cultural flashpoint, epitomizing the clash between urban and rural views of how human beings should relate to the nonhuman world, wild animals included. This clash has deep roots in American history, going back to colonial views of hunting as the antithesis of civilized progress (Herman, 2001).

Having crossed this line myself, by taking up hunting at the age of 33, I have been curious to understand what other “adult-onset hunters” make of hunting. (I coined the phrase “adult-onset hunters” as a playful, shorthand way of referring to this population. In the wider literature, they are often referred to as “adult-initiation hunters.”)

My curiosity has been additionally piqued by Americans’ growing interest in food. Inspired—and, at times, disturbed—by bestselling books such as Michael Pollan’s

*The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) and Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (2007), many Americans are reconsidering the ecology, ethics, and safety of their food, especially in the context of industrial agribusiness: What means of food production are sustainable and ecologically responsible? What impacts do food systems have, on land, water, animals, and other humans? What are the health dangers of industrial food production? Where does our food come from? How can we get more of our food closer to home? What does food mean? These questions are part of what can be heard as a broad set of contemporary, morally infused U.S. American "discourses of food."

Within this broad set of discourses is a narrower set of "discourses of meat." On the one hand, vegetarianism is still strongly urged by some voices and texts, including the recent notable example of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals* (2009). On the other hand, Pollan, Kingsolver, and others—including Nicolette Hahn Niman (2009), who writes of her conversion from vegetarian to rancher and livestock-industry reformer—suggest that we rethink the simple meat/no-meat dichotomy and examine the ecological and ethical nuances of obtaining flesh foods in various ways.

Within these discourses of meat, a sample of recent *New York Times* stories sketches a picture of heightened interest and shifting perspectives among U.S. Americans. In the past two years, the *Times* has reported on the abundant live-animal meat markets in the New York metropolitan area, including Marlow & Daughters, a butcher shop in Williamsburg, Brooklyn (Barnard, 2009), on the "backyard chicken trend" sweeping the country (Neuman, 2009), on renewed interest in raising, killing, and butchering rabbits at home (Severson, 2010), and on Americans' growing interest in learning how to butcher their own meat (Williams, 2009). In a similar vein, the *Times*

reported on the surge of interest among urbanites in learning how to hunt and process wild game (Farrell, 2009) and published an essay by food writer Betty Fussell (2010), on learning to hunt at the age of 82.

U.S. American adults were, of course, taking up hunting long before the present surge of popular interest in food issues. Yet I wondered: Might the two be substantially linked? When adult-onset hunters speak about hunting, how do they render the pursuit meaningful? What various themes arise in such talk? Is talk about food prominent?

What discursive resources do adult-onset hunters employ in accounting for their interest in hunting, their participation in it, and the meanings they find in it? How are meanings—particularly about food and human relationships with animals and nature—taking shape among these contemporary hunters, perhaps shaping historically transmitted expressive systems in new ways? What implications might these discursive practices have for contemporary conceptions of hunting? Might these hunters speak about hunting in ways that resonate across conflicted divides?

These are the motivating questions behind this study. (They will be reiterated in Chapter II, in the context of discussing the methodological framework employed.) Together, they are encompassed by a single, broad research question: How do people create and use discourses of hunting? This question can, of course, be asked anywhere, among various groups of hunters, non-hunters, and anti-hunters. In this study, I attend to the speech of hunters who did not grow up hunting, treating their discursive practices as particular instances of “discourses of hunting.”

## Review of Related Literature

As noted above, this study is undertaken in the context of a recent surge of popular interest among U.S. Americans in food-related issues, and a surge in the publication of popular trade books on related topics. There has, not surprisingly, been a parallel surge of academic interest in food studies (e.g., Belasco, 2008).

This study is also set in the context of a broad range of academic and non-academic research and writing related to U.S. American hunting.

Herman's (2001) cultural history of U.S. American ideas about hunting, for example, illustrates early colonial associations of the hunt both with the "sport" of English aristocracy and with "images of man fallen to a state of nature, the condition of savagery....to the level of American Indians" (p. 4). Herman also shows how American discourses of hunting shifted dramatically between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, elevating figures such as Daniel Boone as paragons of self-reliance and natural virtue. Jacoby (2001) turns conventional U.S. environmental history on its head. Drawing attention to power and social difference, he examines how the wave of new conservation laws enacted around the turn of the twentieth century affected rural people's interactions with nature, including their hunting of wild animals for food. With a revisionist aim similar to Jacoby's, Warren (1997) documents how the U.S. conservation movement—championed primarily by urban middle and upper class "sport hunters"—succeeded in redefining wildlife as a national commons, and led to the sometimes brutal enforcement of wildlife laws. He shows, too, how such laws were resisted by lower class, rural, subsistence hunters, including Euro-Americans and American Indians.

Taking a journalistic approach to contemporary U.S. American hunting, Nelson (1997) covers many aspects of human-deer relationships in the U.S., depicts various hunting practices, and quotes hunters, wildlife biologists, and anti-hunters alike. Similarly, Kerasote (1993) reports on hunters' practices and words in various contexts, from Wyoming to Siberia.

Contemporary American hunting has also drawn attention from women's studies scholars. Stange (1997), for example, examines female participation in hunting and the broader relationships between hunting and gender, arguing for a rethinking of our cultural assumptions about women, men, and the human place in nature. In so doing, Stange contests the assertions made by Kheel (1995), who argues that hunting is a "quest to establish masculine identity in opposition to the natural world" (p. 110). (The discourses created and used by anti-hunters are an important part of the cultural context in which contemporary American hunting occurs. In concert with Kheel, for example, Cartmill (1993, 1995) contends that "butchery is not, in the final analysis, an appropriate recreation for a free people" (1995, p. 785).)

In recent decades, academic and professional researchers have conducted extensive research on (1) public attitudes toward wildlife and hunting, including hunters' own attitudes and motivations (e.g., Duda, Bissell & Young, 1998; Duda & Young, 1998; Heberlein & Willebrand, 1998; Kellert, 1978, 1980; Shaw & Gilbert, 1974), and (2) factors related to participation in hunting (e.g., Decker & Purdy, 1986; Duda, Bissell & Young, 1995; Enck, Decker & Brown, 2000; Heberlein & Thomson, 1991; Stedman & Heberlein, 2001).

In Decker, Provencher and Brown's (1984) study of antecedents to hunting participation, data from interviews with hunters were closely analyzed within a theoretical framework of social-psychological theory, with attention given both to external social influences and personal motivations. Bissell (1993) analyzed data from focus group interviews and individual interviews, documenting values held by hunting and non-hunting citizens and contrasting them with state wildlife agency positions. Bissell and Duda (1993) also analyzed focus group data, with a focus on understanding "the perceptions, motivations and factors influencing hunting recruitment, participation and desertion" (p. 1).

Dizard (1999) examined various meanings attributed to hunting in the context of a sociological analysis of the heated debate surrounding deer-hunting at the Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts. In a subsequent book, Dizard (2003) drew on interview data—as well as survey data and demographic statistics—in taking a close look at hunters, hunters' views of hunting, and the place of hunting in contemporary U.S. American society.

In anthropology, many ethnographic studies have examined American Indian hunting traditions. Relatively few, however, have examined the meanings of hunting among other Americans. I know of only two books focused on ethnographic treatments of U.S. American hunting. In the first, Marks (1991) examines the history and contemporary meanings of hunting in the rural American South. In the second, Boglioli (2009) does the same in rural Vermont, drawing attention to the lack of such research thus far:

Perhaps the greatest cost of the dearth of qualitative work on hunting is the effect (or lack thereof) on public discourse involving hunting. As the debate surrounding hunting becomes increasingly contentious, the need for ethnographic, meaning-centered studies becomes more pressing. (p. 13)

Additional relevant literature is reviewed below, in connection with the conceptual framework and analytic approach employed in this study.

## CHAPTER II

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

#### Cultural Discourse Analysis

This study is undertaken in the context of a set of theoretical and methodological literature. Generally, it is grounded in the *ethnography of communication* (Carbaugh, 1995, 2008; Hymes, 1962, 1972; Philipsen, 1989). In brief, anthropologist Dell Hymes called for a sociolinguistic approach to speaking. He proposed a form of research that would seek to understand human communication by giving primary attention to its use in cultural context. Hymes (1972) proposed units of observation and analysis including *speech community*, *speech situation* (a specific context of activity—such as a ceremony, hunt, party, or meal—which is “in some recognizable way bounded or integral”), *speech event* (such as a conversation at a party), and *speech act* (such as the telling of a joke within a conversation) (pp. 53-57). Hymes further proposed that the components of communication could be grouped into eight categories, using the mnemonic SPEAKING: setting (time and place) and scene (cultural and psychological context), participants, ends (outcomes and goals), act sequence (message form and content), key (the “tone, manner, or spirit” of speech), instrumentalities (medium and form of speech), norms (of interaction and interpretation), and genre (pp. 58-65). These units of observation and analysis provide ethnographers with a vocabulary and framework for investigating communication and for organizing theoretical thinking on multiple levels.

More specifically, this study is grounded in *cultural discourse analysis* (Carbaugh 1996a, 1996b, 2007, 2010; Carbaugh, Gibson & Milburn, 1997) which grew out of Hymesian ethnography, by way of cultural communication theory (Philipsen, 1987, 1992, 2002) and speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1997). Cultural discourse analysis proposes (1) that culture is an expressive system of communicative practices, performed by people in particular places, (2) that expressive practices (and the systems they constitute) are historically rooted, both evoking history and using it to create new practices, (3) that “communicative practices can be understood as a complex system of symbols, symbolic forms, and their meanings,” and (4) that communicative practices are meaningful to those engaged in them and are deeply rooted in often-unspoken premises about the world and proper action in the world (Carbaugh, 2010, pp. 104-107).

Cultural discourse analysis proposes that analysts can examine participants’ communicative practices for *cultural terms* (symbolic key terms), especially as they appear in clusters, and then seek to formulate *cultural propositions* (arrangements of cultural terms that, together, express a “taken-for-granted” view) and *cultural premises* (abstract statements about participants’ beliefs, statements that capture the essence of certain terms and propositions and “step back” to make them more readily visible to participants and analysts alike). Cultural premises can include both premises of existence (beliefs about what exists) and premises of value (beliefs about what is better or worse) (Carbaugh, 2007, pp. 177-178).

As a model for interpretation, cultural discourse analysis posits that

as people communicate with each other, they are saying things literally about the specific subject being discussed, but they are also saying things culturally, about who they are, how they are related, what they are doing together, how they feel about what is going on, and about the nature of things. (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 174)

Rephrased in the context of my inquiry, this becomes a set of questions: When people talk about hunting (and specific loci of meaning, such as food), what are they saying, not only about hunting, but also about

- who they are (e.g., as humans, as hunters)?
- how they are related (e.g., to other hunters, to non-hunters, to animals)?
- what they are doing (e.g., in hunting, in procuring food, in eating)?
- how they feel (e.g., about food, about hunting, about their relationships, about killing)?
- the nature of things (e.g., the human place in nature, the meaningfulness of the natural world)?

Grounded in these frameworks, this study (1) presumes that communicative practices are the primary means by which human beings render the world meaningful, and (2) seeks to illuminate meaningful discursive patterns by attending to actual communication practices in particular situations. It presumes that participants' communicative meanings are not constituted by words alone, but by words (and other communicative acts) in the context of particular situations and symbolic systems, in which communicative acts are understood in patterned ways. To establish that people have spoken the word "hunting" is one thing; to establish how the speakers interpret "hunting"—that is, what range of meanings "hunting" carries for them—is quite another, for meaning is not housed merely in words but in the particular ways in which words are used, in particular forms of expression, in particular contexts.

Within the ethnography of communication and cultural discourse analysis, a number of research efforts are thematically linked to this study's concerns, particularly in terms of human relationships with nature. For example, Morgan (2002, 2003) examined discourses of water, exploring how aspects of nature function in communicative terms. Milstein (2008, 2011) explored communication as a mediating force in human-nature relations in a wildlife tourism setting. And Carbaugh (1996a)—having suggested a framework for examining specific, situated, symbolic constructions of nature—implemented that framework in considering both ethnographic data regarding Finnish relationships with nature and a U.S. American text on wildness.

#### Research Question in Methodological Context

This inquiry pursues instance-specific answers to my overarching research question: “How do people create and use discourses of hunting?” The study asks: How is hunting discussed by participants? What links are discursively drawn between hunting and other activities, topics, and terms? How do these communicative practices render hunting symbolically meaningful? How do these discourses render the larger world culturally meaningful? What cultural logic is used in and created by these discourses? What historical roots-of-discourse are explicitly or implicitly referenced in this talk? What must be presumed—for instance, about being, relating, acting, feeling, or dwelling—for participants' communicative actions to be coherent?

In this study, I give primary attention to the content of participants' talk. I attend to what meanings are created and invoked when participants speak about hunting in certain ways and to how those meanings are interconnected: for example, what sense of

identity is getting created, what sense of the meaningfulness-of-hunting is being created, and what other ways of doing things are being contested. I attend to prominent themes and to how these themes are constructed through the use of terms and phrases that are “deeply felt, commonly intelligible, and widely accessible to participants” (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 170). I do not give as much attention to the shape of participants’ talk: its sequences and forms of expression. Such examination, which I may pursue in future studies, could also help deepen our understandings.

### Data Collection

As noted above, my inquiry is focused on talk, asking how actual communication practices render the world meaningful, especially with regard to hunting. In other words, the data of primary interest and relevance are instances of communication as they occur: things people actually say.

In the early stages of this research, I explored several avenues for data collection. First, I identified and sought access to sites and events where substantial talk about hunting might “naturally occur” among adult-onset hunters. Second, I began conducting one-on-one pilot interviews with such hunters (primarily in Vermont, with participants identified by word-of-mouth and “snowball sampling”). Third, I considered organizing a focus-group discussion among such interviewees. Fourth, I considered collecting contemporary written texts as a secondary communicative data source.

Of these avenues, the first yielded no relevant and readily accessible sites. The second yielded relevant and intriguing data, and—as I worked with participants to schedule one-on-one interviews—demonstrated that scheduling one or more focus groups

among interviewees (the third avenue) might prove impractical. The fourth avenue remained a viable source of secondary data, particularly considering the many active blogs about hunting (including my own) and the discussions that often occur in comments sections. Over time, as I conducted additional pilot interviews, I decided that these spoken conversations were yielding sufficiently rich data. For the purposes of this study, they did not need to be augmented by secondary (written) sources.

My data collection, therefore, consisted of conducting one-on-one interviews. As with my initial pilot interviews, participants were primarily identified by word-of-mouth and the classic ethnographic method of “snowball sampling.” Several participants were acquaintances I approached directly. Others were suggested by previous interviewees or by other people who had heard about my research. A few were hunters I had first encountered during online conversations about hunting.

Between September 2010 and February 2011, I interviewed twenty-four participants who began hunting as adults, all of whom signed informed consent forms. I did not set out with a specific number of participants in mind. Rather, I continued seeking new interviewees until it seemed that additional interviews were no longer suggesting substantially new and different discursive themes.

Sixteen participants resided in New England states (eleven in Vermont, four in Maine, one in Massachusetts), while eight lived elsewhere in the U.S. (one in New York, one in Pennsylvania, two in Wisconsin, two in California, two in Alaska). I considered restricting participants to a particular geographic area, such as my home state of Vermont or my home region of New England, but decided not to. Though the sample size would be small, it seemed that commonalities and contrasts among the discursive practices of

participants from one region and the discursive practices of participants from another region might raise helpful questions both for my analysis and for speculations concerning future research. I also considered limiting interviewees to people who grew up without any significant exposure to hunting; again, however, it seemed that commonalities and contrasts within the sample might raise useful questions.

Participants—nine of whom were female and fifteen of whom were male—ranged in age from 29 to 57, with an average age of 41. Ages at which participants reported that they started hunting ranged from 19 to 48, with an average starting age of 33. (Only one participant reported becoming a hunter before the age of 21. Another participant reported brief hunting experiences in his youth, but said he rejected hunting and did not “become a hunter” until his late 40s.) At one end of the spectrum, the two most experienced hunters reported that they had been hunting for 35 and 26 years; at the other end, three participants said they had not yet started hunting but intended to begin soon; on average, participants reported hunting for between 8 and 9 years. (One participant was not a hunter and did not intend to hunt in the future. I decided to include this interview in my sample because the participant reported (A) growing up with no connection to hunting and (B) becoming heavily involved in hunting and, over the course of nearly two decades, often accompanying others on hunts and helping with the field-dressing and butchering.)

Because my primary analytic focus was on discursive patterns, I did not collect demographic data other than gender, age, and duration of involvement in hunting. Other general information may, however, be of interest to the reader. Participants’ professions occasionally came up in conversation or were already known to me, and included, in no particular order, the following: veterinarian, nurse, graduate student, physician’s

assistant, college administrator, writer, building contractor, filmmaker, advertising copywriter, energy efficiency consultant, magazine editor, engineer, delivery truck driver, wildlife biologist, environmental advocate, and radio journalist. As far as I know, participants were all “white,” ethnically speaking, and were all United States citizens, except for one citizen of the United Kingdom who had been living in the U.S. for two years.

As part of the informed consent process, I committed to making every effort to prevent public identification of participants’ identities. Thus, all names referred to in this study are pseudonyms. (In the text, ages and states of residence are not always associated with pseudonyms, as I judged that such associations could, in some cases, jeopardize participant anonymity.) Because I ended up with twenty-four participants, I chose to spread pseudonyms across the alphabet, using all letters except Q and X. As the reader will see below, this simplified the format for denoting the interview from which each quote was taken.

Due to the constraints of geography and scheduling, eighteen interviews were conducted by phone. Six were conducted in person, in settings convenient for the participant and conducive to one-on-one conversation. Interviews ranged in duration from 51 to 92 minutes, with an average duration of 70 minutes, and were digitally audio-recorded with an Edirol R-09HR recorder.

The total data set, then, was comprised of just over 28 hours of digital audio recordings. All interviews were transcribed at the topic level. This involved listening to each interview in its entirety, pausing as necessary, and typing detailed descriptive outlines of each conversation, a process which resulted in a total of 79.6 pages (single-

spaced, 12-point font) of topic level transcriptions. Highly relevant segments were transcribed verbatim. This involved listening to segments in several-second blocks (using the software program Praat, which also enabled measurement of pauses between utterances) and typing word-for-word transcriptions; this process resulted in a total of 45.9 pages (single-spaced, 12-point font) of verbatim transcriptions.

Interviews were semi-structured, so that important topic areas would be addressed while allowing participants' own thoughts, ideas, and terms to emerge. Questions were not asked in exactly the same way each time. Rather, an interview guide (see Appendix A) was used as a general framework. Depending on how each conversation progressed, certain questions proved unnecessary or needed to be asked in a different way, sometimes with reference to earlier parts of the conversation.

### Data Analysis

Prior to interpretation, the initial task in any ethnographic or cultural discourse study is to describe the particular practices under investigation. If my data for this study had consisted of “naturally occurring” talk in a group social setting—or even of one or more focus-group interactions—my descriptive effort would have been strongly informed by the units and components proposed by Hymes (1972).

As it is, my data consisted solely of one-on-one interviews, so the setting, scene, and situation can be summarized briefly: In most cases, the talk I recorded was part of a phone conversation, during which I was sitting at my desk and the participant was somewhere else, usually at home. In six cases, the participant and I were face-to-face, sitting in a coffee shop, on a restaurant's back deck, or in a quiet meeting room at the

participant's place of employment. In all cases, the participant and I came to the interaction with the understanding that we were going to have a conversation in the "interview" genre, and the participant seemed comfortable with the level of privacy afforded by the interview circumstances. Throughout the forthcoming chapters, as I present excerpts from interview data, I provide descriptive detail where it seems helpful, especially in order to help the reader grasp a sense of who the participants were, what they said, and in what manner they said it.

I began my exploratory analysis by transcribing all audio-recorded interviews at the topic level, creating detailed descriptive outlines of each conversation, as noted above. I then reviewed these topic level transcriptions, and began mapping broad discursive themes using the software program Visual Understanding Environment (VUE), developed by Tufts University. From the topic level transcriptions and VUE map, I identified particular segments where participants' speech appeared to constellate around key themes. (Some readers will note that my approach bears a close resemblance to the constant comparative method (CCM) of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which has been widely applied in qualitative research and analysis. CCM has, for example, been utilized in conjunction with the ethnography of communication (e.g., Almeida, 2004; Heriberto, 2004; Uchida, 1997) and was employed by Tynon (1997) in examining what constituted "quality hunting experiences" among Idaho elk hunters. As Boeije (2002) notes, comparative analysis in the CCM tradition can be conducted among aspects of a single interview, among interviews within a group, and among interviews from different groups. In this study, I focus primarily on the second of these: comparison among interviews within a group.)

Within these segments, I then moved from a descriptive to an interpretive mode, examining the data for recurrent terms which played key roles in participants' speech and which could be examined as symbolically potent and expressively meaningful. Identification of these terms helped refine my tentative map of prominent discursive themes.

Having identified segments where such terms and themes were prominent, I returned to a descriptive mode, making verbatim transcriptions of the most relevant segments. (Throughout the chapters that follow, verbatim transcriptions are accompanied by line numbers. Line numbers are assigned sequentially, with each line representing 4 to 6 seconds, depending on the pace of the participant's speech. In the text, lines are referenced by the first letter of the participant's pseudonym. Thus, B1 would indicate the first words spoken in my interview with Bob, while H608 would indicate a line from the latter half of my interview with Helen. The speaker designation "TC" indicates the author. See Appendix B for a complete list of transcription conventions used.) Within these verbatim transcripts, I examined the data for clusters of terms and phrases occurring in connection with each cultural term.

Referring both to the detailed transcripts and to the VUE map, I then began to formulate a more detailed interpretive map, articulating the range of meanings apparently audible in the clusters of terms and phrases identified, and the relationships within and among these clusters. At this stage, I began to formulate cultural propositions using participants' own words.

Finally, I began to ask what must be presumed—for instance, about being, relating, acting, feeling, or dwelling—for participants' talk to be coherent. Here, my aim

was to formulate cultural premises, abstract statements that captured the essence of the terms and propositions identified.

Throughout the process of analysis, I regularly returned to the primary data—setting aside line-by-line transcriptions in favor of listening to key sections of the audio recordings—and also to the results of earlier phases of analysis (e.g., topic level transcriptions and the broad theme map). In revisiting the recordings, I considered whether my interpretive analyses and thematic maps required improvement in order to be faithful to the patterns of meaning apparent in participants’ actual words and in the interactional contexts in which those words were spoken.

Throughout, I also considered how various broad discourses (e.g., discourses of food, discourses of self-reliance) might or might not be reflected in my data. Here, I gave special attention to ways in which participants’ speech might invoke history, actively employing it in discourse, and to how participants’ talk might, as cultural discourse, be a “historically transmitted expressive system” (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 169).

My final task was to articulate the above for my readers—that is, to write, illustrating both the phenomena of concern and my tentative interpretations thereof.

#### Notes on Reading This Study

Though several interview participants commented that they had never had such a comprehensive conversation about their hunting and had never articulated so many thoughts about it all at once, most demonstrated ready access to a wide array of discursive resources relevant to their hunting. In other words, they may not have talked about it in this kind of interview before, but they were well-equipped with *ways* of talking

about it. Those ways of talking were, in the context of this investigation of cultural discourses, the focus of my attention.

As I listened to the audio recordings of the interviews, I was struck by the recurrence of certain patterns of talk, including the use of particular terms and phrases (e.g., “connection,” “responsibility,” “factory farming”). This suggested that at least some discursive patterns might be readily identified.

Simultaneously, I was struck by the great diversity in talk, not only between different participants but within individual interviews; one participant, for instance, spoke of how she refuses to eat “factory-farmed meat,” of how “exciting” and “challenging” hunting is for her, of how the pursuit feels “innate,” of how much she values hunting as part of her “rural heritage,” and of how she enjoys the “camaraderie” of hunting with others. This suggested that the picture was not a simple one—that it might be difficult to tease out the relationships among various discursive threads and to identify the patterns of meaning that underpinned them.

Working my way through the descriptive, interpretive, and analytic steps outlined above, I decided that one important step toward understanding the patterns I was hearing was to conceptualize these discursive practices as being clustered around central themes. I identified three themes (which, based on participants’ talk, I decided to call “connection,” “responsible living,” and “engagement”), plus an underlying pattern of talk about the “modern world.” Even as I identified these clusters, however, I was aware that they were interrelated and could not truly be separated from one another. Grasping the whole would require the recognition of interconnections.

I want to bring the reader's attention to the moves I made. The themes I identified and the names I gave them are my formulations; they are artifacts of analysis. Though I hope to demonstrate that my conceptualizations are useful, I intend to utilize them only to the degree that they help to deepen my understanding. I invite the reader to do the same—to take advantage of my formulations only to the degree that they are helpful as guideposts.

Within the time constraints of this study and the space constraints of this document, I have not been able to examine and discuss all aspects of these discursive phenomena. I hope, however, that I have succeeded in producing worthwhile descriptions and interpretations of the most prominent aspects. The remainder of this document is devoted to presenting those descriptions and interpretations and, in places, to indicating aspects which may warrant further attention.

## CHAPTER III

“I FEEL MUCH MORE CONNECTED TO THINGS”:

### DISCOURSES OF CONNECTION AND BELONGING

Many participants’ talk included references to feelings and experiences of connection, relationship, and belonging. Though I did not ask interview participants whether hunting provided them with a sense of connection, this talk is highly prominent in my data. This chapter is based on an analysis of (A) 68 instances of the term “connect” and of terms derived from it (e.g., “connected,” “reconnect,” “interconnection”) and 22 instances of the related term “relationship,” (B) 10 instances of the terms “belong” and “belonging” and 33 instances of the phrase “part of” used to express a sense of belonging (e.g., “part of nature,” “part of the food chain,” “part of something ancestral”), and (C) many other instances of related terms and phrases (e.g., “oneness,” “community”).

In this chapter, I examine the discursive theme created when terms such as “connection” and “belonging” occur. I present interview excerpts that illustrate several ways in which such references are made. I indicate terms and phrases that can be heard as highly active, and suggest interpretations of them and interconnections among them. My goals are to describe the shape of this discourse and the cultural logic of “connection” both presumed and created when this discourse is used.

## Connections with Land and Nature

I begin with several excerpts in which participants speak about feelings and experiences of connection with nature and land. The first are from an interview with a 29-year-old Vermont hunter:

146 Sharon: Climbing that tree and sitting there in the dark just listening (1.2) and just  
147 waiting and— (0.8) When everything comes alive (0.4) you're just— (0.5)  
148 To watch everything come alive (0.3) you're just another part of the  
149 woods. (0.5) It's like you're— You become that tree.  
...  
261 There's no place else I'd rather be. (1.5)  
262 TC: Than out in the woods. (0.7)  
263 Sharon: Than out in the woods (1.3) you know, being a part of nature. Because we  
264 are a part of nature.

The next few excerpts come from conversations with two other Vermont hunters, 44 and 57 years old, respectively:

79 TC: What was it like (1.0) for you (1.3) making that shift and becoming a  
80 hunter? (1.8)  
81 Frank: You know, it's interesting. I think, when the time came (0.8) it felt like  
82 just the right thing to me because it felt like (1.1) I was deepening my  
83 connection to this (0.6) place that we live, this land that we own.  
...  
256 TC: What is it (1.4) overall about (1.9) hunting that keeps you doing it? (2.2)  
257 Frank: I think for me it's the most intense connection (0.8) to the land and to  
258 nature that I feel in the entire year.  
...  
298 By being in the same spot year after year after year, it just develops this  
299 depth and complexity (1.2) of my relationship to that space, that spot.  
...  
388 TC: You mentioned that you (0.5) mostly hunt (0.8) your own (0.4) property  
389 (1.5) and you said it's fairly steep (1.0) a lot of it is. (3.6) What is it about  
390 hunting your own property, or that property (0.8) that is valuable or  
391 important?  
392 Bob: Mmm. Well, it's all part of knowing my land, which is really important to  
393 me. (0.6) I could be dropped down blindfolded at any point on my land  
394 and I would know instantly where I was. It's a great— (0.5) And it's nice  
395 also for me to (0.6) think that (0.7) our land is hospitable to (.) all sorts of  
396 wildlife (.) and that (0.9) it's a good place to find (0.6) to find deer.

Another excerpt comes from an interview with a 30-year-old hunter from Maine:

433 Carol: Being on the— Walking on the land...you just get to know (3.3) nature...  
434 how the leaves (0.4) blow in a certain area or starting to see the little  
435 tracks of animals or (3.3) ((audible breath)) starting— (0.6) seeing the  
436 little buds on the lea— just seeing how nature is working and moving and  
437 (1.0) developing (1.2) specifically in ((laughs)) November, but (0.9) just  
438 seeing all of that I think is (0.8) really neat. (0.9) It makes me feel more  
439 connected (0.7) connected with the land.  
440 And you do get to know the land, because you're (0.6) walking about on  
441 it, so (1.8) you get to (0.6) become more familiar with it.  
442 Because they've been hunting there so long (1.1) my dad and grandfather  
443 and uncle can (0.6) say so much about what's changed and what hasn't.  
444 (0.5) I mean down to the little— 'That rock wasn't there the last time we  
445 were here.' ((laughs)) Just like little things that they would know and  
446 become familiar with, and only (0.4) only through that sort of an  
447 experience, not necessarily hunting but really (1.0) interacting on the land,  
448 (0.4) do you get to know it in that way.

In the excerpts above, a diverse set of verbs are active. Specific actions in hunting are identified, including “sitting there,” “just listening,” “just waiting,” “watch everything come alive” (S146-7), “being in the same spot year after year” (F298), “walking on the land” (C433, 440), and “seeing” (C434-438). More general verbal phrases are prominent as well: “deepening my connection to this place” (F82), “knowing my land” (B392), “get to know nature,” “get to know the land” (C433, 440), and “interacting on the land” (C447). All of these contribute to the hunter feeling an “intense connection to the land” (F257), feeling “more connected to the land” (C438-9), and experiencing a sense of “being a part of nature” (S263) to the point that the hunter can “become that tree” (S149).

The above can be heard as *verbal depictions* (Carbaugh, 1996b, pp. 186-190) of interactions with nature. Participants reference certain kinds of interactions with nature, sometimes performed in specific places. In so doing, participants suggest that these particular kinds of interactions are worth engaging in and are meaningful. In some cases, these verbal depictions of interaction—encompassing action, observation, connection,

and feeling—can be heard to cultivate relationships with “land” and “nature” in a generalized and timeless sense (e.g., “we are a part of nature,” S263-4). In other cases, they can be heard to cultivate intimate relationships with particular places over time (e.g., “this place that we live,” F83; “being in the same spot year after year...develops this depth and complexity of...relationship,” F298-9; “blindfolded...I would know instantly where I was,” B393-4) and with particular details and phenomena (e.g., “how the leaves blow in a certain area or...the little tracks of animals,” C434-5; “that rock wasn’t there the last time we were here,” C444-5).

There is much more that can be said concerning these verbal depictions. There is also much more that can be examined in these excerpts, including the invocation of an ethic of responsible stewardship (“our land is hospitable to all sorts of wildlife,” B395-6) and the value placed on intergenerational knowledge and relationships to place (“my dad and grandfather and uncle can say so much about what’s changed and what hasn’t,” C442-3). These matters will be taken up later.

For the moment, I simply want to note (1) the depth of feeling voiced by these four hunters regarding their sense of connection and identification with nature, land, and place, and (2) the way in which connection and knowledge are described as emerging from direct and attentive interaction with the natural world. Though not all participants spoke in these terms, such talk is highly prominent in my interview data.

## Connection as Spiritual

For some participants, connection-with-nature talk included spiritual terms. A 41-year-old Maine hunter, for example, spoke of how his interest in hunting surfaced a few years earlier:

32       Evan:       It was about that same time where I started becoming aware that, first of  
33                   all, engineering wasn't something that necessarily provided a lot of value  
34                   other than monetary reward, you know paying the bills kind of stuff. It  
35                   didn't really seem to make much of a difference in the world. Yeah, I  
36                   could build machines, but at the end of the day what the heck does it do?  
37                   (2.5) So for me it was really an awakening (1.3) of my (1.9) my (0.7)  
38                   spirituality, I guess, for the lack of a better term. The awareness that I  
39                   needed to reconnect (0.7) to nature (0.6) somehow.  
                  ...  
49                   It was really about that connection. (3.7) You know, taking my place as a  
50                   part of nature.

Similarly, a 53-year-old California hunter spoke of how hunting has changed her:

278       Helen:       The spiritual (0.6) change, if you will— (3.3) I feel (1.7) much more  
279                   connected to things. (6.2) A lot of my growing up (1.6) I— (2.4) ((audible  
280                   breath)) I was very lonely because I didn't belong (0.8) to anything. And  
281                   in this (4.2) I belong to this, I belong to the cycle.

Sharon, the first Vermont hunter quoted above, described a conversation she once had with her mother and then, later in the interview, responded to my inquiry about what would be most important for her to tell someone, if she wanted them to understand her hunting:

91        Sharon:       She just completely (0.7) did not grasp the whole concept that going to  
92                   church for me (0.4) is going out in the wilderness (0.4) and (1.1) sitting  
93                   ((laughs)) (0.7) out there enjoying (0.6) the forest as my own church. (1.0)  
94                   Because it is a spiritual— It's a very spiritual experience, for myself. I  
95                   think it's the whole forest gods and (0.6) tree spirits and— (0.8) There's a  
96                   whole different level of respect there. (0.8) It does— The forest teaches  
97                   you things that you don't learn other places.  
                  ...  
249                   I think it has to come down to the whole (1.9) oneness with nature thing.  
250                   (1.6) You know, the whole spirituality part of it.

And a 57-year-old Vermont hunter spoke about what hunting means to him:

245 Ian: For me (2.0) it's where— (0.9) I'm going to use the word God. (1.0)  
...  
248 When I say God it means (1.1) Allah, it means (1.6) it means the whole  
249 shebang. (0.5) It encompasses every religious belief maybe on the planet.  
250 (0.7) It's where I (1.9) actually see— (.) When the wind blows through the  
251 trees, I call it God's breath. It's God (1.4) exhaling (0.9) and making the  
252 trees move. When a bird (1.2) lands on your boot. (1.6) It's— (2.0) It's the  
253 place where (3.0) life (0.7) makes the most sense.

Recalling that meaning is housed not just in words but also in contexts of use, it is important to consider what these participants mean by terms such as “spirituality” and “religious.” In the first two of these four excerpts—in which it is accompanied by caveats (“for the lack of a better term,” E38; “if you will,” H278)—the term “spirituality” is closely linked to connection. An “awakening of...spirituality” is linked to “awareness that I needed to reconnect to nature” (E37-9), “connection” (E49), and “taking my place as part of nature” (E49-50). A “spiritual change” is linked to feeling “much more connected to things” and to the sense that “I belong to the cycle” (H278-81). In the third, a cluster of terms—“church,” “spiritual experience,” “forest gods,” “tree spirits,” “spirituality” (S92-5, S250)—is linked to “wilderness” (S92), “respect” (S96), “teaches you things” (S96-7), and “oneness with nature” (S249). In the fourth, “God” and “religious” (I245-9) are linked to “the wind blows through the trees,” “a bird lands on your boot,” and “life makes the most sense” (I250-3).

Taken together, these excerpts discursively construct hunting as a vital way of cultivating particular kinds of spiritual (or religious) experience. Hunting—being in the woods, where one can “actually see” (I250) spiritual forces made manifest—is spoken of as an experience that involves both “respect” and learning “things that you don’t learn other places” (S97). Spirituality is, in turn, depicted as an experience of (or an awareness

of the need for) connection, belonging, and oneness with (or being part of) nature, in which life makes a kind of unified “sense.” Such experience is said to occur in nature, sometimes in relation to a particular phenomenon such as the wind, or a particular creature such as a bird.

### Connections with Other People

Participants also emphasized the importance of how hunting fosters connections with other people, often using the word “camaraderie.” Ian, for instance, had this to say:

209 Ian: You have incredible relationships and laughter and camaraderie and (1.1)  
210 respect for (1.0) the game, the tools, the landowner (0.4) and (0.4) nobody  
211 gets shot. (0.8) Nobody gets hurt.  
...  
214 These are people that you trust with your life (0.7) and where else, where  
215 else does that happen in this society at this point?

Nancy, a 50-year-old Vermont hunter talked about sharing the enjoyment of hunting and nature with her husband:

529 Nancy: I know as long as (1.4) [my husband] is on this earth, he’s going to hunt.  
530 And it is something we do enjoy together, love to fish, (0.8) and (1.3)  
531 we— The treasures in our lives are finding a feather or a bird’s nest or  
532 (0.4) an antler or something like that.

And Matt, a 34-year-old hunter, said that camaraderie was a significant factor in his enjoyment in the field:

116 TC: What is it about deer and turkey hunting that appeals to you (0.6) now?  
117 Matt: I would say (0.4) really it’s been a teamwork aspect (1.4) especially with  
118 turkey hunting. (0.3) Every time I’ve gone out (0.8) turkey hunting, I’ve  
119 gone with someone else.  
...  
248 I don’t get a lot of enjoyment out of doing things— (0.4) doing that by  
249 myself. (0.9) So a lot of it is the camaraderie of it.

In these three brief excerpts, a cluster of terms related to interpersonal connection—including “relationship,” “camaraderie,” (I209, M249), “together,” “our lives” (N530-1), and “teamwork” (M117)—draw our attention to the vital role that such connection plays in these participants’ experiences of the hunt. Additional terms, including “incredible,” “laughter,” “respect” (I209-10), “trust” (I214), “enjoy,” “love” (N530), and “enjoyment” (M248), underline the positive meanings active here. These connections are described in general terms of camaraderie and shared enjoyment, and also in relation to specific aspects of hunting, including safety (“nobody gets shot.... These are people that you trust with your life,” I210-4), appreciation of nature (“The treasures in our lives are finding a feather or a bird’s nest or an antler,” N530-1), and working together (“a teamwork aspect,” M117).

The importance of connections among people was also emphasized by a number of participants who, for various reasons, did not have many such connections, but wished to. Thomas, for instance, a 32-year-old Massachusetts man who had not yet hunted, had this to say:

505	TC:	Who do you imagine that you might (0.9) hunt with, or do you imagine hunting alone mostly?
506		
507	Thomas:	Yeah, this is definitely a challenge. It’s another part of it that (0.3) more than just wishing that I had been <u>brought up</u> into the culture, I think I wish
508		I <u>had</u> (1.1) people around me for whom this was part of their life, that I
509		could share this with. (0.7)
510		
511		As I read personal narratives and essays about this, there’s a huge
512		communal aspect of it that (0.6) I don’t have any ready-made community
513		for. And so at this point I don’t have that, but I would hope that over time
514		that would develop. I think that (0.8) while there are obviously necessarily
515		solitary parts of it, I think having a community that you share that with,
516		whether it’s the (0.5) <u>going out</u> and hunting, whether it’s the coming back
517		and processing, whether it’s the sharing of the, of the harvest, whatever, I
518		think (0.8) it’s done best in the company of others.

In this excerpt, “community” (T512, 515), “communal aspect” (T512), and “share” (T510, 515) are added to the cluster of terms and phrases related to interpersonal connection. These are linked to a range of possible activities (“whether it’s the going out and hunting, whether it’s the coming back and processing, whether it’s the sharing of the...harvest, whatever,” T516-7), and are explicitly evaluated as positive and preferred (“I wish I had people around me,” T508-9; “I think it’s done best in the company of others,” T517-8).

### Connections with Ancestry and Human Nature

Another term—“culture”—is also added in the excerpt above, in the context of longing: “wishing I had been brought up into the culture” (T508). Here, “culture” broadens the temporal scope: the connection wished for is not only with a “community” of people in the present with whom one can share hunting, but also with “the culture,” a lineage of practice over time. References to intergenerational connection were prominent in my interview data, whether indicating a particular family (e.g., Carol’s mention, several pages back, of “my dad and grandfather and uncle,” C442-3) or the larger human family. Yvonne, a 37-year-old Maine hunter, indicates both types in talking about hunting with a friend and his family:

504 Yvonne: Being with them, hearing their hunting stories, (1.0) learning from them,  
 505 (0.9) feeling tutored by them, (1.7) gently guided (0.4) by them, and (1.0)  
 506 like you were part of some (2.1) club, some (1.6) something, (1.5) some  
 507 tribe, (0.3) just feeling like you’re part of something (1.3) with a single  
 508 (0.7) kind of unifying (0.6) purpose that (0.4) is so (0.3) ancestral. (0.6)  
 509 And (1.6) I think that’s part of (1.0) why I came to it, too. It was just the—  
 510 (2.7) I just tend to look back at— (0.8) I always think about what we were  
 511 like as a species before all this civilization and technology. (1.2) And I do,  
 512 I think it’s (0.7) innate. And I know not everyone wants to do it, but I  
 513 think there’s a big part of it that’s innate.  
 ...  
 516 I guess that captures it for me, being with (0.8) with an old family, an old

517                    hunting family like that. And just being out (0.5) on the land and (1.7)  
 518                    being with somebody who knows that woods like the back of their hand  
 519                    and has been hunting it since they were a boy and (1.5) has numerous  
 520                    buck stories. And you just think, ‘You know, I hope to be like that  
 521                    someday.’ (1.2)  
 522                    And I would love to pass it down to my daughter.

Here, various interactions with a particular family (“Being with them, hearing their hunting stories, learning from them,” Y504) are described as evoking important feelings, both of “feeling tutored...gently guided” (Y505) and also of “feeling like you’re part of something” (Y507). A central locus of meaning here, as in the other excerpts above, is connection with others—the sense of being part of something that has a “unifying purpose” (Y508). This sense, though, goes beyond the immediate situation. The “something” of which one feels one is a part is spoken of in a widening scale and in a widening temporal scope: from “some club” (Y506) to “some tribe” (Y506-7) to “something...that is so ancestral” (Y507-8) to “what we were like as a species before all this civilization and technology” (Y510-1). Many examples of similar talk are present in my data, including Thomas’s mention of wishing he had been brought up in “the culture.”

Related to this sense of the “ancestral,” and of humans as a “species,” is Yvonne’s statement that she thinks hunting is “innate” (Y512, 513). In the following three excerpts, similar statements are made.

450        John:        I feel like (0.7) once you start hunting, you can’t help but realize that it’s  
 451                    built in. (0.6) There’s some aspect of it that’s built in, hard-wired into our  
 452                    genetic code, (0.7) so it just feels (0.5) like a natural thing to do.

518        Sharon:      I think all of us have this wild— (1.4) Like we all have this wild (0.7)  
 519                    instinct inside of us that— (0.4) In a lot of people it just sleeps. (0.4) But  
 520                    in (0.5) certain few people it wakes up. (3.6)  
 521                    And it just brings you back to (2.3) our roots.

224 Zach: I guess it is really (0.3) something primal. (0.8) I mean it's obviously—  
 225 (1.3) The desire to hunt and (0.7) obtain stuff (0.3) to eat that way is (1.4)  
 226 clearly something that's (1.7) in me and in a lot of people.  
 ...  
 251 Part of it is definitely a (1.8) connection to (3.8) to a world that we have  
 252 pretty much lost connection to. (1.1) I mean buying your food in a  
 253 supermarket is (0.4) really sterile (0.8) and (0.9) duck hunting is not  
 254 sterile.  
 ...  
 279 It makes you feel connected to something older, and to something that (.)  
 280 we don't get to feel connected to very often.

In these excerpts, a cluster of related terms and phrases can be heard as centrally active, including “innate” (Y512, 513), “built in” (J451), “hard-wired into our genetic code” (J451-2), “a natural thing to do” (J452), “wild instinct” (S518-9), “our roots” (S521), “primal” (Z224), “something that’s in me and in a lot of people” (Z226), and “something older” (Z279). Here, hunting for food—“the desire to hunt and obtain stuff to eat that way” (Z225)—is depicted as something that exists within modern human beings (“innate,” “built in,” “hard-wired,” “instinct,” “in me”), having been passed down to us from our ancestors (“primal,” “ancestral,” “something older,” “our roots”). Hunting is said to be “a natural thing to do” that “makes you feel connected,” both to human history and to nature (“a world that we have pretty much lost connection to,” Z251-2), and that feeling is clearly marked as rare and precious (“something that we don’t get to feel connected to very often,” Z279-80).

Elsewhere in the data, talk about the innateness of hunting is linked to talk about identity. For example, Yvonne—who was an anti-hunter in her teenage years—speaks of how hunting makes her feel more true to her “identity” as an outdoors-oriented person. And John—who also harbored anti-hunting sentiments in his younger years—speaks of how hunting helps him get “deeper” into his sense of self. In these specific instances and in the broader terms noted above, we can hear a fundamental conflict between

authenticity and inauthenticity, with the former valued over the latter. The natural, the ancient, and the instinctual are authentic, and thus valuable. Hunting is said to be a natural, ancient, instinctual—and thus valuable—“thing to do.”

### Connections Interwoven

The excerpts presented in this chapter—especially those from my interviews with Carol, Yvonne, and Zach—draw our attention to an important interweaving of themes. Carol speaks not only of “starting to see the little tracks of animals” and of feeling “more connected to the land,” but of doing so as part of an ongoing family tradition that reaches back through her “dad and grandfather and uncle” who have “been hunting there so long” that they can “say so much about what’s changed and what hasn’t” down to noticing that “That rock wasn’t there the last time we were here” (C442-5). Zach speaks not only of nature—“a connection to a world that we have pretty much lost connection to”—but of how the “primal” desire to hunt links him to others, in the present and the past: it’s “in me and in a lot of other people” and “makes you feel connected to something older” (Z224-80). Yvonne speaks not only of “being out on the land,” but of being out there “with...an old hunting family like that...being out on the land...with somebody who knows that woods like the back of their hand” (Y516-8).

In other words, the meaning of which these participants speak is not captured simply by talking about connecting with nature, connecting with people in the present, or connecting with human history. It is best captured when all of these elements (and others, as we shall see) are woven together. Human-nature connections and inter-human (interpersonal as well as cultural) connections are discursively linked. It is in feeling

connected to nature *in concert with* other humans and *in the context of* the past that hunting is said to take on its fullest and most nuanced form—a multi-layered and “unifying” sense of “belonging,” humans existing and acting, culturally and collectively, as part of nature. Relationship with land and animals is said (ideally, at least) to be a shared practice of knowing and dwelling. It is this shared knowing and dwelling that is described as most worthy of emulation (“I hope to be like that someday,” Y520-1) and of being passed down to the next generation (“to my daughter,” Y522). This interweaving will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

#### Summary of Descriptive Analysis: Discourses of Connection and Belonging

In this chapter, we have heard ways in which participants speak of (1) feelings of connection and identification with nature, land, and place, (2) the way in which connection and knowledge emerge from direct interaction with the natural world, (3) ways in which hunting can cultivate a spiritual experience of connection, (4) the importance of inter-human connection in the hunting experience, (5) the importance of connection to a sense of ancestral lineage, and (6) the innateness and naturalness of hunting. We have also heard how these discursive meanings are linked. When participants speak of feelings and experiences of connection, they often indicate that human-nature connections and inter-human connections are not separate. Rather, hunting is said to take on its greatest meaning when it is enacted in a way that evokes a sense of unity among humans (in the present moment and across time) *and* a sense of human unity with nature.

### Cultural Propositions and Premises: Connection and Belonging

Based on the excerpts presented above, what cultural propositions might we formulate? That is, how might we arrange prominent or recurrent terms and phrases in ways that express participants' taken-for-granted views? At this stage, I would like to propose these formulations regarding connection to nature:

- “Hunting” “makes you feel more connected” “to the land and to nature.”
- In “hunting,” “walking on the land,” and “interacting on the land,” “you get to know nature.”
- Feeling “more connected to things” can be a “spiritual experience.”

These, regarding connection to other humans, present and past, and to human nature:

- “Hunting” is “primal,” “innate,” “hard-wired,” and “feels like a natural thing to do.”
- “Camaraderie,” “relationships,” “community,” and “sharing” are “part of” the “unifying” experience of “hunting.”
- “Hunting” “makes you feel connected” to our “ancestral” “roots” as “a species.”

And these, regarding interweavings of the two:

- A significant sense of “belonging” and “connection” comes from “sharing” the experiences of “hunting” and getting to “know the land.”
- In “hunting,” you simultaneously “take [your] place” as “part of something” “ancestral” and as “part of nature.”

In short, feelings of connection and belonging can be heard as central and deeply meaningful in participants' talk.

Based on these observations and propositions, what cultural premises can be formulated? That is, what beliefs must be presumed for these participants' talk to be coherent and meaningful? Meaning must be construed in the context of the overall positive tone of these participants' talk about hunting. This implicit—and, at times, explicit—positive evaluation (at least of their own hunting, if not all hunting) suggests several premises of value, underlying the propositions above:

- It is good to feel connected to nature.
- It is good to do natural things and to be true to (one's) nature.
- It is good to feel connected to other humans.
- It is good to feel connected to (one's) ancient heritage.

Seeing these premises spelled out, we might be tempted to say, “Well, of course!” It seems obvious, for instance, that it is good to feel connected to nature and to other people. This obviousness highlights two relevant points. First, it shows how a given set of beliefs that are common throughout a culture can underpin very different propositions and actions. The belief that it is good to feel connected to nature, for example, underpins the words uttered by these hunters and the actions they take in hunting; that same belief also underpins the words and actions of many non-hunters and anti-hunters. Additional common beliefs will surface as we proceed.

Second, when we note the obviousness of these premises of value, our attention is drawn to their implicit inverses: it is *not* good to feel disconnected from nature, to do unnatural things, to feel disconnected from other humans, or to feel disconnected from

one's heritage. Above, references to such disconnection and unnaturalness—including “all this civilization and technology” (Y511), “engineering wasn't something that necessarily provided a lot of value other than monetary reward” (E33-4), “buying your food in a supermarket is really sterile” (Z252-3), “this society at this point” (I215), and “very lonely” (H280)—suggest the discursive depiction of hunting as a response to and remedy for the shortcomings of the modern world. Indeed, if disconnection was not a perceived problem, why would one talk about the need “to reconnect” (E39) or to feel “more connected” (H278)? Here, too, additional examples—of inverse premises and depictions of the modern world—will surface as we proceed.

## CHAPTER IV

“HOW DO I LIVE WELL WITHIN THIS WORLD?”:

### DISCOURSES OF RESPONSIBLE LIVING

Many participants spoke of hunting as part of a broader set of practices rooted in a sense of what it means to live responsibly, particularly in terms of ecology, ethics, and healthy food. I did not ask interview participants whether they conceived of hunting in terms of ecological, ethical, or nutritional responsibility, yet this talk is highly prominent in my data. This chapter is based on an analysis of 24 instances of the terms “responsible” and “responsibility,” and many instances of terms and phrases related to aspects of responsible and irresponsible action (e.g., “impact,” “environmental costs,” “awareness,” “cruelty,” “healthy”) and to specific types of actions (e.g., “provide your own food,” “gardening,” “get meat myself”).

In this chapter, I examine the discursive theme created when “responsibility” and related terms occur. I present interview excerpts that illustrate several ways in which such references are made. I indicate terms and phrases that can be heard as highly active, and suggest interpretations of them and interconnections among them. My goals are to describe the shape of this discourse and the cultural logic of “responsibility” both presumed and created when this discourse is used.

## A Sketch of Responsible Living

I begin by presenting the following interview excerpts, allowing two participants to sketch the broad outlines of the discussion to follow. The first excerpt is from the Massachusetts man quoted previously. He had not yet started hunting, and was raised by vegetarian, anti-hunting parents.

- 199 Thomas: Perhaps the (0.5) most broad shift is sort of (1.1) toward a willingness to  
200 (.) to take up space? (0.4)  
201 And I mean that in terms of— I think that a lot of (0.8) the climate that  
202 (0.3) I grew up in, which— I grew up actually about half an hour from  
203 here, so I think it's also the political and cultural climate of this area (0.6),  
204 is away from any kind of environmental impact, is away from population  
205 growth, is away from all these things, because people are necessarily (0.4)  
206 bad for the, bad for the world, and as apologetic as we can be about that  
207 the better, and just sort of slink off and not have too many children and—  
208 TC: You said 'slink off'?  
209 Thomas: Yes.  
210 TC: Yeah.  
211 Thomas: And that will be better for everybody...  
...  
220 To my mind presently, (0.5) the goal is not, as I was brought up to think,  
221 (0.6) 'How do I have as little impact as possible (0.5) and, if possible, end  
222 the suffering of everything else in the world,' which was my  
223 overemotional family's perspective on life and its goal. (0.6)  
224 But instead saying (2.2) actually 'How do I live well within this world?'  
225 And I think that (0.3) part of that is simplification as I said (0.5) and (0.5)  
226 consuming less, but at the same time (0.4) having what I think is a more  
227 balanced and natural relationship with the world around me. And that's  
228 saying that I am going to eat meat, I acknowledge that it causes suffering.  
...  
231 I would like to (0.3) be able to (1.0) engage those questions of suffering  
232 (0.4) in a way that is (0.5) personal, that is respectful, that is responsible.

The second is from a 49-year-old Vermont hunter who grew up in a suburban non-hunting family, and who was also quoted briefly in the previous chapter:

- 25 John: It's just more of a (0.5) a way to (0.4) be in the world, just being  
26 responsible for the things that you do (0.4) whether it be energy or (1.6)  
27 waste management or (.) or ((laughs)) where your food comes from.  
...  
54 It was a long, slow process of (0.5) of awareness and (0.8) and coming to  
55 terms with (0.6) being a human on the planet...  
...  
69 I feel (0.8) an innate responsibility to not pollute the world, to not make a  
70 mess, (0.5) you know, to clean up (0.5) ((laughs)) the pollution that I leave

71 behind me. (0.9)  
 72 And if that means (1.5) taking responsibility (0.4) responsibility for my  
 73 food, (0.3) if only for the one-time experience to understand what it's like  
 74 to process (0.5) food (0.5) whether it's a carrot, (0.9) it takes a lot of  
 75 energy (0.8) to grow (.) a carrot, (0.3) a lot of time, a lot of commitment,  
 76 (0.8) a little bit of land, (0.7) or if it's (0.3) processing meat. (.)  
 77 If you're going to take part in it, then you should know what it's like to  
 78 support (.) yourself in that need (1.0) whether it's (1.1) making your own  
 79 fuel to (0.9) drive your ((laughs)) car around or (1.1) dealing with your  
 80 own waste, (1.5) and not bringing it to the landfill, figure out what else to  
 81 do with it. I haven't (0.4) answered that one yet, but (1.8) getting better.

In the two excerpts above, hunting is set in the context of a search for a way to “live well within this world” (T224), “a way to be in the world” (J25). Such ways of living and being are most broadly depicted by the terms “responsible” (T232, J26) and “responsibility” (J69, J72).

Two aspects of such responsibility are spoken of as central, the first of which is depicted by a cluster of terms and phrases related to minimizing ecological impact: “simplification,” “consuming less” (T225-6), “energy,” “waste management” (J26-7), and “to not pollute the world” (J69). The second aspect of such responsibility is depicted by a cluster of terms and phrases related to recognition, hands-on participation, and self-reliance: “acknowledge” (T228), “engage...in a way that is personal” (T231-2), “awareness,” “coming to terms” (J54-5), “experience,” “understand what it's like to process food” (J73-4), “making your own” and “dealing with your own” (J78-80).

In these participants' talk, then, we can hear discursive constructions of ways of being in the world—ways of living *well*—that are “responsible” by virtue of both (1) their minimization of harm to nature and (2) their fostering of knowledge, awareness, and direct involvement in providing for one's own needs. In the first sense (minimizing harm), this kind of responsibility is depicted as bearing a certain resemblance to other efforts to avoid “any kind of environmental impact” (T204) and to “end the suffering of

everything else in the world” (T221-2). In the second sense (knowing and being involved), however, this kind of responsibility is marked as quite different from such efforts to avoid impact.

Both participants speak of this difference in terms of changes in perspective: a “broad shift” (T199) and “a long, slow process of awareness” (J54-5). In each case, the shift is from (A) concern for human impact on the natural world to (B) a desire for hands-on involvement informed by such concern. This shift can be heard as a morally infused process of recognizing, accepting, and embracing one’s own physical and ecological presence in the world, a process of “awareness and coming to terms with being a human on the planet” (J54-5) through which one develops “a willingness to take up space” (T199-200), a willingness to inhabit the world. This can be heard as a shift from a focus on the negation of action and existence—on what *not* to do or be (“people are necessarily bad...for the world,” T205-6)—toward a focus on the positive potential of action and existence—what *to* do or be (“live well,” “acknowledge,” “engage those questions,” “being responsible”).

Such active recognition, knowledge, hands-on involvement, and self-reliance are depicted by morally infused terms. Thomas, for example, speaks of “having what I think is a more balanced and natural relationship with the world” (T226-7) and John states that “you should know what it’s like to support yourself in that need” (J77-8). The discursive patterns evident in the excerpts above can be heard to verbally depict certain ways of living as more “natural,” “balanced,” and “responsible”—that is, they house an ethic for living.

These two excerpts and the brief discussion above provide a framework for this chapter as a whole, drawing our attention to prominent themes in my interview data. They also suggest a number of specifics that will be discussed below, including the moral significance of meat and animals (e.g., “those questions of suffering,” T231), and the linkage of hunting both to other food-related practices (e.g., “grow a carrot,” J75) and to non-food practices (e.g., “dealing with your own waste,” J79-80).

### Ecological Responsibility

The “responsibility” talk sketched above is, in part, focused on matters of ecology. To explore this aspect in more detail, I would like to introduce additional interview excerpts. Some participants spoke of ecological responsibility in terms specific to stewardship of habitat for wildlife, including both hunted and non-hunted species. Recall, for instance, the quote from Bob at the beginning of the preceding chapter: “it’s nice also for me to think that our land is hospitable to all sorts of wildlife and that it’s a good place to find...deer” (B394-6). Overall, however, ecological responsibility was framed in broader terms.

Frank, quoted in the previous chapter, had this to say in the latter part of our conversation:

365 Frank: In some ways I feel like I was a vegetarian for the same reasons I’m a  
366 hunter. (1.3) And (0.5) while that may seem odd (0.5) to an outside  
367 perspective, to me it feels like very much the same (0.9) the same impulse  
368 (1.0) of trying to have (0.8) a relationship with (0.7) food and the land  
369 that’s (1.3) ethical and (1.5) appropriate. (4.4)  
370 It’s just that I have different (0.8) different ideas now on how to achieve  
371 that but I think still the impulse is the same. (1.4)  
372 TC: And by ‘appropriate’ you mean? (3.0)  
373 Frank: Ah: (2.3) I was going to say non-exploitative. (4.5) Yeah, I do think that  
374 (0.9) when I think about the— (1.4) When I think about it from a protein  
375 perspective, we have a bunch of protein that’s raised on this farm and in  
376 some ways none of it (1.0) is more wonderful than (0.5) than the venison.

377 (1.2) None of it requires less effort, less fossil fuel expenditure, (1.0) less  
378 fencing, (.) less action. ((laughs))

When we spoke, Carol had been hunting ruffed grouse for four years, but had only recently taken up deer hunting. When I asked her what got her interested in hunting deer, she replied this way:

53 Carol: I never really thought that I wanted to deer hunt. I never thought that I  
54 could kill a deer, I think they're beautiful, I just didn't think I had it in me.  
...  
57 And then I remember listening to an NPR clip (0.4) and they were talking  
58 about the amount of, what is it? Methane? (0.5) Just talking about the  
59 costs of meat production, environmental costs to producing meat (0.8)  
60 from raising cattle to slaughtering to transporting and all of that sort of  
61 thing.  
...  
65 And it got me thinking about deer hunting in kind of a different way, of (.)  
66 this is really a very (1.8) environmentally friendly (0.5) humane sort of  
67 treatment of animals, in the sense that they're not all shoved into one little  
68 box. It's a very free animal (0.6) And so I felt like that would be— (0.3) If  
69 I could have a meat source like that, then that would (0.3) make me feel  
70 better. And so it kind of got me into, 'Well, I think maybe I could deer  
71 hunt,' if it's— (0.5) With that frame of reference, of (0.8) really thinking  
72 of it as more of a natural (.) a natural sort of thing, and a healthy thing for  
73 (0.7) human health as well as environmental.

In these excerpts, the depiction of hunting as an ecologically informed practice is further developed. Frank links his hunting to an impulse which, earlier in his life, led him to be a vegetarian: wanting to have “a relationship with food and the land that’s ethical and appropriate” (F368-9). When asked to elaborate on what he means by “appropriate,” he compares venison to the other meats that come from the farm where he lives and works, emphasizing that venison is “non-exploitative” (F373), requiring “less effort, less fossil fuel expenditure, less fencing” (F377-8). Similarly, Carol explains her interest in hunting deer by speaking of the “environmental costs” (C59) of industrial beef production, and by characterizing deer hunting as an “environmentally friendly” (C66), “healthy,” and “natural sort of thing” (C72). It is this within this “frame of reference”

(C71), she says, that she thought that perhaps she could hunt and kill an animal that she thinks is “beautiful” (C54).

Above, we have a cluster of terms and phrases which are vital to these participants’ accounts of why they hunt deer in particular. Hunting is discursively constructed as an “appropriate,” “non-exploitative,” “environmentally friendly” and “natural” way of relating to the land and procuring food.

Note, too, that hunting is depicted as an alternative to (and even in opposition to) other food ways—those that have significant “environmental costs” including greenhouse gases such as methane, those that are “exploitative” rather than “appropriate.” This alternative and oppositional construction is relatively subtle here, but will become more prominent as we progress.

#### Hunting in the Context of Other Responsible Living Practices

As I listened to participants speak, it became clear to me that they were not talking about hunting as an isolated activity. Rather, they linked it other practices which had roots in the question, “How do I live well within this world?” For example, when I asked a 33-year-old hunter what got him interested in hunting, he replied:

45	Vic:	I think the first (1.4) first thing that sort of opened my eyes to (0.8) to
46		hunting would be, I was in the Peace Corps (.) and I spent two and a half
47		years in Tanzania. (1.0) And (0.4) not hunting per se but being (0.9) more
48		connected to the land? (1.0) And living with farmers (.) and (1.0) people
49		who kept livestock and (0.6) who killed their own animals and (0.6) put
50		that (0.6) food on the table. (.) That’s really what (1.6) sort of opened my
51		eyes to (0.6) that sort of way of life.

A 40-year-old woman, who had just gotten interested in hunting in the past year, made these statements at various points during our interview:

12 Kara: My interest in hunting is closely tied with (0.7) my interest in providing  
13 more of my own food.  
...

62 TC: In terms of (.) providing your own food in ways other than hunting, (0.5)  
63 does that entail both raising animals and gardening, for you right now?  
64 (0.5)

65 Kara: Yes (.) we do some rather extensive gardening. (0.4) We currently have  
66 (0.5) laying hens. (0.5) We've had (0.5) two previous batches of laying  
67 hens which we've (0.3) slaughtered when they (0.5) were past (.) their  
68 highly productive stages. (0.9) And (0.3) just yesterday we (.) slaughtered  
69 our first (0.8) meat bird which was a turkey.  
...

160 I guess I regard it as just another skill. (.) I think the last five years (1.2)  
161 working (.) on (.) homesteading has been— (0.9) The (0.8) term that they  
162 use in transition (.) or in permaculture is 're-skilling.' (0.8) And that's  
163 definitely what the last five years have been like for me.  
...

526 I guess hunting is sort of— (1.2) It's on a continuum. (1.1) It wouldn't  
527 have been (0.8) the first place I started (.) and it wasn't the first place I  
528 started. I think (.) it's sort of— If you're going to be on this— (1.1) If  
529 you're going to be on the path that I'm on, (0.9) it's pretty natural to start  
530 with gardening. (1.3) And then see where it goes from there.

Similarly, I asked a 41-year-old man to elaborate on his family's involvement in food production:

301 TC: Do you and (0.6) [your wife] (0.7) produce a lot of your own food? (0.7)  
302 Evan: We do, as a matter of fact. (1.5) Probably not all of our food, (0.7) but I'd  
303 say we probably produce (.) a quarter of what eat, anyway. (.) And we've  
304 only got a quarter-acre lot, so we don't have a lot of space. (1.0) But (0.7)  
305 we raise all of our own broiler chickens in the spring.  
...

317 And we do a lot of lettuces (0.4) during the summer so that we've got  
318 plenty of salad. [My wife]'s been trying (0.6) potatoes on and off, with  
319 varying degrees of success. (0.8) And the real focus for me, (.) and I think  
320 for us, is (0.4) over the last year or so is really to start expanding our  
321 foraging (0.6) a little bit so we can get (0.5) that much more. And again,  
322 it's kind of like the hunting. It's really (0.6) trying to assume a place (0.7)  
323 in the natural cycle of things. (4.8)  
...

326 TC: From what you just said, it sounds as though (0.9) your (0.6) gardening  
327 (0.8) and your raising of (0.3) chickens and rabbits (2.5) and (1.0) the  
328 foraging (0.7) and the hunting (0.9) are (0.5) all linked. (0.4)

329 Evan: Yes. (0.7) It's funny because the rabbits— (0.4) We home-school our kids  
330 (1.0) and (0.8) early on the rabbits (0.6) and the garden (.) were about  
331 (0.4) teaching kids where food comes from, (1.2) because a lot of kids  
332 don't know.  
...

336 It started out as that and it's (.) really just kind of progressed from there to,  
337 'Hey, guys, you are part of (0.8) this world.' (0.6) And (0.4) we as a  
338 society in general (0.5) have kind of forgotten that. (0.5) You know, we're

339 out trying to make our money, so we can get our new cars and whatnot,  
340 and really— (0.5) I’m coming around to, and I know [my wife] has come  
341 around to, (1.5) ‘That’s not what it’s all about.’

And, when I asked a 40-year-old woman—who had not yet gone on her first hunt—what would be most important for her to tell someone if she wanted them to understand her interest in hunting, she began her reply this way:

425 Linda: I think what I would say is (0.5) that (0.4) I feel like (2.3) I don’t have a  
426 very close connection to (1.6) the la:nd, or haven’t had a very close  
427 connection to the land, and I’m trying to understand better (0.7) my  
428 relationship as a human (0.3) to: (0.7) to my landscape and to the land.  
429 And part of that is (1.5) thinking more closely about (0.6) the food we get.  
430 (1.0) So I’m thinking about—  
431 When we buy a house, then I’m going to have a garden. (0.9) So that I can  
432 grow my own food, and have a better sense of (.) how much effort that  
433 takes. (0.3) You know, how much effort does it actually take to get that  
434 carrot that you put in your salad? (1.4)  
435 We (.) sometimes tap my parents’ trees, so I get a better understanding of,  
436 ‘Okay, this is where maple syrup comes, this is how much time it takes,  
437 this is how much energy, to get that (0.5) sap from (0.6) the tree to (.) a  
438 little jar.’ (0.5)  
439 We apprenticed as beekeepers this year, to think about (0.4) keeping bees.  
440 And so I’m trying to explore a lot of different ways (0.6) to think about  
441 (0.5) my relationship to land and to animals (1.0) and (.) to food. (0.4)  
442 And hunting is part of that for me. This feels like more of a return to the  
443 way (1.0) we evolved, and to the way a lot of people (0.9) had to live and  
444 had to eat to survive. (1.3)  
445 And we’ve gotten so far away from that that I can just (1.2) go to Seven-  
446 Eleven (.) and buy a slushy. (1.1)  
447 And I would like to have more of an understanding of what it actually  
448 entails to (0.6) rely on (1.8) myself and rely on the land for my food.

In the excerpts above, we hear a number of broad terms and phrases related to the theme of responsible living. Participants speak, for example, of “being more connected to the land” (V47-8), experiencing a “way of life” (V51), putting “food on the table” (V50), “providing more of my own food” (K12-3), “homesteading” (K161), “transition,” “permaculture” (K162), “trying to assume a place in the natural cycle of things” (E322-3), and thinking about “my relationship to land and to animals and to food” (L441). In general, then, certain ways of living, thinking, and relating “to land and to animals and to

food” are discursively constructed as positive models. Such ways are depicted, for instance, as “more connected” (V47-8), more in keeping with “the natural cycle of things” (E323), and closer to “the way we evolved” (L422-3). Kara explicitly links them to “permaculture” and “transition,” terms which refer to efforts to establish sustainable human social and agricultural systems that operate within natural limits, both to prevent further ecological destruction and to prepare for a future in which oil is scarce and industrial systems have collapsed.

Here, I would like to note that terms such as “homesteading,” “self-reliance,” and “self-sufficiency” were prominent in my data. Heard literally and in the abstract, these terms have an individualistic “self”-oriented aspect. To be understood in use, however, they must be heard in their broader discursive contexts (e.g., “to rely on myself and to rely on the land,” L448; “produce a quarter of what we eat...really trying to assume a place in the natural cycle of things,” E303, E322-3; “having a community that you share that with,” T515). In these contexts, these terms seem to be primarily invoked to emphasize the value of being directly involved and developing certain “skills” (K160) which can play a present and future role in how one is connected to—how one *relates* to—food, nature, and human community.

Within these broad ways of living, participants identify a number of specific practices, including farming (V48), gardening (K65, K530, E317-9, L431), keeping livestock, broiler chickens, turkeys, laying hens, and rabbits (V49, K66-9, E305, E329), foraging (E321), maple sugaring (L435-8), and beekeeping (L439). Two participants mentioned producing their own solar electricity. Another mentioned cutting his own firewood and—like each of those quoted above—explicitly linked it to hunting.

In my interview data, gardening was the specific practice most commonly mentioned in this way. A few participants spoke of gardening not only as one way—and often, as Kara noted above, the first way—they got involved in procuring their own food, but also as central to their entry into hunting. John, for example, in a portion of the interview which I did not include in the excerpt at the beginning of this chapter, said this:

54       John:       It was a long, slow process of (0.5) of awareness and (0.8) and coming to  
55                   terms with (0.6) being a human on the planet, (0.3) needing to eat, (0.5)  
56                   wanting to eat good food, (0.6) being kind of disgusted with the current  
57                   (0.8) food system (0.7) and (0.5) being— living in a rural— (0.8) living a  
58                   rural lifestyle where I’m planting gardens and (0.8) putting a lot of (0.3)  
59                   time and energy into (0.9) producing my own food from a garden (.) or  
60                   from fruit trees (2.1) and having that stolen from me. (0.7) It all just sort  
61                   of congealed into (1.6) ‘This is— (0.9) hunting is a normal— (0.7) it’s just  
62                   the way that (0.6) nature works.’

Like some other interviewees, John saw the impact deer had on his garden and realized that he, his garden, and the deer were all part of a local food web in which hunting is “normal...just the way that nature works” (J61-2).

To explore how participants render these broad ways of living and specific practices meaningful, I would like to draw our attention back to the early pages of this chapter and to the cluster of terms and phrases identified there, in connection with recognition, hands-on participation, and self-reliance: “acknowledge” (T228), “engage...in a way that is personal” (T231-2), “awareness,” “coming to terms” (J54-5), “experience,” “understand what it’s like to process food” (J73-4), “making your own” and “dealing with your own” (J78-80). From the additional excerpts presented above, we can add “have a relationship with food and land” (F368), “teaching kids where food comes from, because a lot of kids don’t know” (E331), “have a better sense of how much effort that takes” (L432-3), and “have more of an understanding” (L447).

How do these ways of speaking house an ethic for living? That is, what do they tell us about what it means for these participants to “live well within this world,” to live in a way that is responsible? Value is clearly placed on awareness, acknowledgment, knowledge, and understanding (e.g., “you should know what it’s like,” J77). Such knowing and understanding, however, are not separate from hands-on involvement. In fact, it is only through hands-on, “personal” (T232) involvement that one can develop a relationship and connection with food and land, and get a literal, felt “sense” (L432) of what it takes to create electricity (J26), to grow carrots (J75, L434) and other vegetables (K65, E318, L431), to get eggs (K66-7), to make maple syrup (L436) and honey (L439), or to procure meat (T228, J76, V49, K67-9, E305, E329, L442).

In positively evaluating these ways of engaging with the provision one’s own material sustenance, these depictions can be heard to reach back into the past, celebrating traditions of self-reliance to which one can, in some ways at least, “return” (L442). They can also be heard to reach forward into the future, encouraging the development of responsible, renewable, ecologically viable practices by which humans can live well in this world (e.g., “permaculture”).

It is important to recognize, however, that these participants are speaking about more than responsibility. They are also speaking of deeply felt meaning. For Evan, teaching his kids about where food comes from “progressed from there to, ‘Hey, guys, you are part of this world,’ a lesson that “we as a society...have kind of forgotten,” and to a recognition that the cash economy is “not what it’s all about” (E337-41). (This commentary on modern life can be heard echoed in Linda’s words: “we’ve gotten so far away from that that I can just go to Seven-Eleven and buy a slushy” (L445-6). Such

commentary will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.) Here, the desire to live responsibly—aware of and engaged with the sources of one’s sustenance—is discursively linked to the yearning for connection and belonging.

The two, responsibility and connection, cannot be separated. These participants do not speak of wanting merely to be “good” in the world. Nor do they speak of wanting merely to have a “relationship” with the world. Rather, they speak of wanting both: wanting to have a “good relationship” with the world. And this aim, they seem to be saying, can be served by seeking hands-on intimacy with the sources of their own sustenance.

### Taking Responsibility for Animals and Meat

Though I did not inquire about meat or the ethics of meat, these were particularly prominent foci of participants’ talk about responsibility and about the importance of not distancing ourselves from the material realities of our sustenance. Here is a sampling of what interviewees had to say:

- 750 Nancy: I would rather eat wild game any day (1.0) than (.) factory meat, which  
751 (0.8) I think sometimes tastes like factory meat. (1.5) It tastes angry or—  
752 ((laughs)) I don’t know if that’s anger but...
- 86 Rachel: I thought about it (0.3) and thought, ‘Well, yeah, (.) if I’m going to eat  
87 meat, I’m going to go (1.0) get it myself.’  
...  
288 They’ve (0.7) lived (0.7) the lives they’re supposed to live and (1.2) and  
289 then it ends quickly. And I think that’s a (0.3) better way for (1.2) animals  
290 to be than (1.0) in a stockyard.  
...  
303 I want to know where my meat comes from and I would rather eat an  
304 animal that lived a (1.0) a natural life than (0.6) lived in a (0.6) a barn its  
305 whole life (.) or (0.5) in a feedlot.
- 95 Peter: It honored that determination that I had not to (0.5) support (0.5) the  
96 cruelty (0.8) and the (.) the whole (0.4) heinous world of factory farming

97 (1.2) of animals.  
 ...  
 926 ...that ancient tradition, (0.3) that ancient activity (0.6) that has been with  
 927 us for as long as we've been human, (0.4) of (1.6) of participating in the  
 928 lives of other animals, (0.6) of fellow animals (1.4) in this way. (2.7) That  
 929 can incorporate (2.3) death as well as awe and respect.

183 Ursula: It just makes you aware of everything around you. (0.6) It's just honest.  
 184 (1.6) I think that we (.) honestly as human beings have a footprint (0.9)  
 185 and we have to keep thinking about that. So that's like a basic thing,  
 186 where you're looking in the eyes of an animal and you're realizing (0.9)  
 187 that for you to live (0.8) something dies.

628 Owen: I'm a meat-eater. (0.9) And I feel as though if I'm prepared to eat it, I  
 629 should be prepared to (0.6) to kill it, rather than just (0.6) buying it at (0.3)  
 630 Costco, pre-packaged, pre-cut-up, (1.1) pre-prepared.  
 ...  
 648 I think (2.0) you become detached from it (0.7) when you buy it in the  
 649 supermarket. (3.6) So I think it, (1.6) it brought it back home to me,  
 650 having to clean it, (0.9) clean a deer.  
 ...  
 657 When you buy your burgers— (1.4) You just buy a burger these days and  
 658 don't think anything about it, but (2.4) that animal's been butchered  
 659 somewhere. (1.9) And I think (2.4) I think most people are (1.3) distanced  
 660 from that, they don't think about it.

96 Helen: I'd gone shopping in one of the local grocery stores (1.0) and they had a  
 97 (1.5) really nice display of the various packaged meats at the counter (.)  
 98 and I was looking at it, and there's tunas and steaks and all kinds of nice-  
 99 looking things there. (1.8)  
 100 And I'm standing there next to this (0.8) and all of a sudden I start  
 101 thinking (1.9) 'I don't have any connection to any of this. (1.4) If I buy  
 102 something and I take this home (1.2) and (0.9) I don't use it in time (1.3)  
 103 I've wasted money.' (0.7) Okay? (0.9)  
 104 That's (0.6) not (1.0) right. (0.7) I don't have any connection to this, so I  
 105 don't have any connection to the sacrifice. Because this was alive (1.3)  
 106 and (0.9) I need (.) to (1.1) have (0.5) that connection.  
 ...  
 672 There's all these beautiful packages and there's no connection. And there  
 673 needs to be a connection. We need to belong to this, because this is  
 674 something you're putting in your body to be part of your body, to be part  
 675 of you, and there's no sense of the great joy and sadness. (3.9) And the  
 676 great joy and sadness is everything. (2.6) That's the belonging.  
 ...  
 683 Like I say, we belong to this. It belongs to us. We're in the cycle. (1.6)  
 684 And whether you're working in the garden or hunting or whatever, that's  
 685 what you— (4.0) That's the elemental basic stuff.

In these excerpts, participants speak of animals and meat in potent ethical terms.

With regard to animals themselves, for instance, we hear phrases such as “factory meat”

(N750-1) and “factory farming” (P96) co-occurring with negative terms such as “angry” (N751), “cruelty” and “heinous world” (P96). In contrast, we hear talk about the “natural life” (R304) that an animal is “supposed to live” (R288), “a better way for animals to be than in a stockyard” (R289-90), “barn...or...feedlot” (R304-5). This echoes Carol’s words from earlier in this chapter, depicting a deer as “a very free animal” that is not “shoved into [a] little box,” and depicting hunting as a “humane sort of treatment of animals” (C66-8).

We hear, in other words, an explicit ethical coding of animal welfare, of how animals are “supposed to live,” and of what constitutes a good life for an animal: being “free” and “natural.” “Factory farming” and “factory meat” are key phrases in this discursive pattern, symbolizing all that is wrong and “heinous” about the human mistreatment of animals. Hunting, on the other hand, is discursively constructed as a way of allowing the animal to live a “natural life” and ending that life without cruelty (“it ends quickly,” R289).

With regard to human awareness of where meat comes from, a cluster of terms including “buying it at Costco,” “pre-packaged,” “pre-cut-up,” “pre-prepared,” (O630), “supermarket” (O649), “grocery stores” (H96), and “packaged meats” (H97) co-occurs with “detached” (O648), “don’t think anything about it” (O658), “distanced” (O659), “don’t have any connection” (H101-5). As Helen succinctly phrased it, that absence of connection—that reduction of relationship to mere “money”—is “not right” (H103-4). We might call this an ethical coding of thoughtlessness: in procuring meat pre-packaged from a supermarket, one is liable not to think about the fact that “that animal’s been butchered somewhere” (O658-9).

At one level, hunting is said to have moral value in terms of “responsibility” simply by virtue of bringing the “meat-eater” face to face with the animal he or she will consume: “if I’m prepared to eat it, I should be prepared to kill it” (O628-9), “if I’m going to eat meat, I’m going to go get it myself” (R86-7), “I want to know where my meat comes from” (R303).

At other levels, hunting’s moral value is said to be broader. Hunting is depicted, for instance, as a way of bringing us back into “participation” in the lives of “fellow animals,” and of imbuing those relationships with “awe and respect” (P926-9). It is said to foster a deeper awareness of “everything around you” and of your “footprint”—something that “we have to keep thinking about”—and is said to be “just honest,” reminding us that for us to live “something dies” (U183-7). In “looking in the eyes of an animal” (U186) that has just died, you reconnect to the “basic” (U185, H685) realities of life, to the “sacrifice” (H105) that sustains you, to “the great joy and sadness” of “the cycle” (H683), and to a sense of mutual “belonging” (H673-83). This connection to the living creatures that feed us is said to be necessary: “there needs to be a connection. We need to belong to this...the great joy and sadness is everything” (H672-6).

Above, we can hear an ethical imperative voiced: one should know where one’s meat comes from, should think about it, and should take some physical responsibility for it. For these participants, hunting is said to provide a responsible alternative to the “cruelty” of “factory farming.” It provides a path for someone like Thomas, who was quoted at the outset of this chapter: “I would like to be able to engage those questions of suffering in a way that is personal...respectful...responsible” (T231-2). More broadly,

hunting is said to provide a deeply meaningful antidote to thoughtlessness, distance, and disconnection.

Here, then, the previous chapter's discursive theme of connection is heard to have a deeply felt ethical dimension. In these participants' talk, connection is clearly about relationship and relationship encompasses moral responsibility. In this sense, the discursive themes of responsibility and connection can be heard as inextricably intertwined.

### "Industrial Food" versus "Good Food"

Many participants situated their talk about hunting and factory meat within larger commentaries on food and taking responsibility for one's food. Above, I quoted John speaking about "wanting to eat good food, being kind of disgusted with the current food system" (J56-7). At other points in our interview, he had more to say on the subject:

14        John:        Once I (1.4) realized the importance of food (0.4) in (0.3) my own health,  
15                    (1.3) it sort of fell together (0.6) that (1.0) responsibility for your own  
16                    food (1.7) is a big part of (0.3) of living. (0.4)  
17                    And (1.7) growing up in the suburbs where food was (0.5) a commodity,  
18                    (0.7) it came from (1.2) came from a box. ((laughs)) It came from a  
19                    cellophane wrapper.  
                         ...  
578                  People are becoming more alarmed about the (.) food system in this  
579                  country (0.7) and food is just not healthy. Every (.) month there's another  
580                  (2.6) food scare. (0.7) What was the latest, a hundred and sixty thousand  
581                  people sickened by eggs? (0.7) That's incredible.

Nancy and Sharon placed similar emphasis on the healthfulness of food and on taking responsibility for it:

758        Nancy:        In our little area of the world, southern Vermont, we have a very high  
759                    cancer rate. (0.7) Is it Vermont Yankee? Is it food choices? Is it (0.6)  
760                    things in the environment that mimic hormones? Who knows, but (1.5) I  
761                    sort of believe, and I'm not going to be (.) free of it, (0.4) that (1.0) with

762 (0.5) making (1.3) better food choices, getting those micronutrients from  
763 (.) wild meat, that (.) maybe I'll have a little more protection than  
764 somebody else who (0.9) just (0.8) glugs it down and doesn't think twice.

53 Sharon: I'm big in the (0.7) the whole farming thing and growing your own food  
54 and liking to know where my own food came from. (0.5) And that was a  
55 big thing that was more or less ingrained in me in college, (0.8) reading  
56 about (0.7) the whole food system and (1.0) Pollan's books there (0.4) he  
57 wrote. (0.4) They really changed my (0.5) my view on things.

...  
203 The pride comes in (1.5) when it's sitting on the dinner table (1.9) with  
204 everything. (1.1) It's just— (0.5) It's like, wow, that's (1.) that's so cool  
205 that (0.6) you can just (0.8) put everything on the table yourself (1.2) and  
206 not have to depend on (1.1) this (0.4) crazy (1.2) world that we live in of  
207 (.) pesticides and (1.6) corrupt (.) government (0.5) running farmers off  
208 the land and— ((laughs))

Other participants made related comments. For example:

- Vic, the 33-year-old hunter who spent time in the Peace Corps in Tanzania, spoke of “my want to break free of the industrial food chain.”
- Greg, a 31-year-old Vermont hunter, spoke of the “health, ecological, humanitarian considerations of industrial agriculture” and of his interest in “sustainable agriculture.”
- Walter, a 38-year-old hunter who has lived his entire life in the New York City metropolitan area, spoke of “mass-produced food.”
- Rachel, a 29-year-old hunter who lives in Alaska, spoke of what she values about gardening, berry-picking, and hunting, mentioning “some connection with what you put into your body” and saying that “you just want it to be good food.”

In these data, several food-related clusters can be heard. One such cluster revolves around human “health.” In the above excerpts—and elsewhere in my interview data—phrases such as “good food,” “quality of food,” “what you put into your body,” and “the

importance of food in my own health” (J14) are notably recurrent. Related phrases include “micronutrients from wild meat” (N762-3) and “a little more protection” (N763).

A second, related, cluster revolves around this chapter’s broader theme: responsibility. We hear above that “responsibility for your own food is a big part of living” (J15-6). We hear about the importance of “food choices” (N759, N762). We hear about the “pride” that comes from being able to “put everything on the table yourself” (S205). These participants are speaking of taking responsibility for their personal health. They are also speaking of the broader ethic of self-reliance and self-sufficiency noted earlier in this chapter.

A third cluster is comprised of “the food system” (J57, J578, S56), “the industrial food chain,” and “industrial agriculture,” which bring us “mass-produced food”—“a commodity...from a box...from a cellophane wrapper” (J17-18). Such talk speaks to the unnaturalness of food that is industrially removed from its origins in earth, water, and sun. Consumables “from a box,” we are given to understand, are not real or proper food. Here, one sub-cluster contrasts starkly with the “health” cluster above: “disgusted” (J56), “alarmed” (J578), “not healthy” (J579), “food scare” (J580), and “sickened” (J581). A second “food system” sub-cluster contrasts with the “responsibility” cluster above, suggesting a passive approach by which one might “depend on” (S206) the food system and by which one “just glugs it down and doesn’t think twice” (N764).

The discursive patterns above can be heard to say that (1) there is value for human health in taking responsibility for what one eats, and (2) the industrial food system poses a threat both to human health and to our capacity for responsibility. Given the omnipresence of “the industrial food chain,” it is all too easy to depend on the system, to

not “think twice” and instead “just glug down” the food that is most readily available to us—perhaps tainted eggs (J581) or a slushy from Seven-Eleven (L446).

The food system, however, is said to pose threats that go far beyond unhealthy food. There are also, Greg states, “ecological” and “humanitarian” considerations. The food system that we depend on employs “pesticides” (S207), which contributes to making the world “crazy” (S206). “Pollan’s books” (S56-7) refers to the works of Michael Pollan (especially *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*) which document an alarming range of economic, ecological, nutritional, and ethical problems with modern food production.

And the dangers of industrialization are said to go beyond the food system. “Vermont Yankee” (a nuclear power plant) and “things in the environment that mimic hormones” (perhaps estrogen-mimicking synthetics), for example, are mentioned as potentially contributing to “a very high cancer rate” (N758-60). Here we are reminded of talk about our “responsibility to not pollute the world” (J69).

In short, then, the above cultural commentary on human health, environmental health, the industrial food system, and the importance of taking responsibility can be heard to play a vital role in a larger agonistic discourse concerning how humans should and should not “be in the world” (J25)—that is, what it means to “live well within this world” (T224). These participants’ depictions of hunting are accomplished in this larger discursive context, in which human relationships with nature are said to be off-kilter. Through irresponsible use of technology and industry (including “the food system”), modern humans “pollute” the environment and make the world “crazy.” It is in this context that hunting—like gardening and homesteading—is rendered meaningful. It is in

this context that Carol speaks of deer hunting as “a natural sort of thing, and a healthy thing for human health as well as environmental” (C72-3).

### Summary of Descriptive Analysis: Discourses of Responsible Living

In the data presented above, a discourse of hunting is created and used in the context of broader talk about ways of living responsibly and ethically. This ethic urges (1) minimizing harm to nature, (2) understanding and thoughtfully considering one’s place in the world, (3) being directly involved in providing one’s own material needs, (4) cultivating positive connection and relationship, (5) treating animals humanely, (6) confronting animal death, especially if you eat meat, and (7) taking responsibility for your own physical health. The discursive construction of this ethic is not focused solely on hunting, but also encompasses gardening, cutting firewood, raising chickens, beekeeping, and so forth. This ethic is also constructed in contrast with other (exploitative, harmful, uninvolved, careless, irresponsible, and inhumane) modes of living and food production. Ethically speaking, the virtues of responsibility, awareness, knowledge, hands-on involvement, and self-reliance are said to be preferable to irresponsibility, ignorance, avoidance, and dependence. And the process of hands-on involvement with the material realities of life, nature, and food is spoken of as a source of deeply felt meaning.

This discourse extends beyond participants’ personal stories, to make broad cultural commentary about their sense of identity, their relationships, their actions, their feelings, and the nature of the world they inhabit. This commentary—and the morally infused interweaving of “connection” and “responsible living”—is nicely summarized by

Greg, who spoke of the importance of fostering connections between people and the “working landscape.” He was, he said, glad to have the opportunity to help preserve and promote “the parts of hunting culture that really are putting people in touch with their landscape”:

915 Greg: Any activity that really helps (1.4) support a culture of (0.3) relationship,  
916 positive, healthy relationship (.) with the land and with the landscape (.)  
917 and identifying ourselves as part of (1.0) as part of an ecological system,  
918 and not (0.3) control over, separate from, (0.5) I just think is (0.3) so:—  
919 It’s so critical.

Greg’s statement brings this cultural discourse into sharp focus: Hunting is one “activity” (among others) that can help in the “critical” task of supporting “a culture of relationship” in which humans “identify” themselves as “part of an ecological system.” In terms of the discourse I have roughly sketched above, this is central to what it means to “live well within this world.”

### Cultural Propositions and Premises: Responsible Living

Based on the excerpts presented above, what cultural propositions might we formulate? I propose these:

- “Hunting,” like “gardening” and “homesteading,” is a way to be “self-reliant,” to “take responsibility,” and to cultivate an “ethical” and “appropriate” “relationship” with “food” and “the land.”
- Through hands-on involvement, “engaging” in a “personal” way, you get a “sense” of “what it’s like” to produce “food” and to meet other material needs.

- “Hunting” is “honest.” It fosters “awareness,” “understanding,” and “connection,” “engages” you with “questions of suffering,” and reminds you that you have a “footprint” and are “part of this world.”
- “Hunting,” as a way of “participating” in the lives of “fellow animals,” fosters “awe,” “respect,” and a deep sense of “joy,” “sadness,” and “belonging.”
- “Hunting” is “humane” and allows animals to live “free” and “natural” lives.
- “Hunting” is “healthy” for “humans” and for the “environment.”

In contrast, I propose these as well:

- “Factory farming” is “cruel.”
- If you buy all your meat “pre-packaged” at the “supermarket,” you become “detached” and lack a “connection” to the animal.
- “Industrial food” is “not healthy,” harms the “environment,” and promotes “dependence.”

Based on these propositions and the data presented in this chapter, what cultural premises can be formulated? What beliefs and values must be presumed? I suggest the following:

- It is good to remember and understand your relationships with food, animals, and nature.
- It is good to be directly and actively involved in those relationships, with deep feeling.
- It is good to treat animals humanely and with respect.

- It is good to be healthy.
- It is good to keep the natural world healthy.

As in the previous chapter, these premises are apt to strike the reader as obvious. They help remind us that these hunters' words and actions are underpinned by beliefs held by many non-hunters and anti-hunters. Also as in the previous chapter, inverse premises play a crucial role. Here, they are more explicitly spelled out with regard to "industrial food," "factory farming," and the "supermarket": it is *not* good to be ignorant, detached, forgetful, disconnected, cruel, disrespectful, unhealthy, or ecologically harmful. Again, hunting is depicted as a deeply meaningful response to and remedy for the problems of the modern, industrialized, and unnatural world. It is spoken of as a way (1) to be fully present and inhabit the world (rather than "slinking off," as Thomas put it) and (2) to engage directly with how one's life impacts other lives (rather than becoming "detached" and not caring about the exploitation of animals and earth).

## CHAPTER V

### “THAT DEEP FOCUS WITH ALL YOUR SENSES”:

#### DISCOURSES OF ENGAGEMENT

Throughout these interviews, participants spoke of hunting as an intensely engaging activity that brings the hunter into meditative states and also into highly energized interactions with nature and animals. I did not ask interview participants whether hunting was meditative or exciting, yet this talk is highly prominent in my data. This chapter is based on an analysis of 13 instances of the terms “engaging” and “engaged,” 40 instances of the terms “exciting” and “excited,” 8 instances of the terms “focus” and “focused,” 5 instances of the terms “meditative” and “meditation,” and many instances of related terms and phrases (e.g., “so alive,” “intense,” “alertness,” “challenge,” “relaxed,” “reflecting”).

In this chapter, I examine the discursive theme created when “engaging,” “exciting,” “focused,” “meditative” and related terms occur. I present interview excerpts that illustrate several ways in which such references are made. I indicate terms and phrases that can be heard as highly active, and suggest interpretations of them and interconnections among them. My goals are to describe the shape of this discourse and the cultural logic of “engagement” both presumed and created when this discourse is used.

## Engagement with Natural Phenomena

I begin with examples of talk in which emphasis is placed on how the hunter is engaged with various natural phenomena:

197 Nancy: Spring turkey season is my absolute favorite time because (0.6) the woods  
198 are so alive, the bird language is so intense (1.0) and there's so much  
199 happening. I mean we came on a newborn moose. (0.8) It couldn't have  
200 been more than a day old.

167 Bob: For a while I hunted turkey and I'd like to get back to it. I loved hunting  
168 turkeys. (0.8) Having a conversation with a turkey (0.5) is (.) is just  
169 incredible. And it's— (0.4) You're out there before dawn and (.) and it's  
170 when the songbirds are just coming and (0.5) and the birdsong at that (0.9)  
171 hour of the day— I mean it's— You know, you're in Eden. It's just  
172 unbelievable. (0.6) And (0.5) and then to have a turkey respond. (.) to  
173 have a tom respond, (0.8) and (1.0) carry on a conversation is just (.) an  
174 amazing thing. (0.8) I loved it.

150 Zach: The opportunity with ducks to sort of see (0.6) life (0.7) is very (.) similar  
151 to some of the things that I used to love about blue-fishing or bonito-  
152 fishing, (0.9) which is you get in the middle— (0.8) This was especially  
153 true with bonito. You'd get in the middle of these schools (0.8) and would  
154 just (.) see fish (0.7) everywhere. They were basically jumping into the  
155 boat.  
156 And (0.9) this year— (1.0) I mean this always happens to some extent, but  
157 this year I really saw the most spectacular example of this. We were (0.8)  
158 down (1.4) hunting out of Brunswick.

...  
163 At one point somebody came by in a motor boat (0.4) along the far shore  
164 (0.6) the shore across the bay from where we were sitting and (0.6) it was  
165 like somebody had kicked a hornet's nest (.) or ten hornet's nests. (0.7)  
166 Just this huge number, thousands of ducks (0.5) came up off the bay and  
167 (0.4) circled and swarmed.

...  
169 Just to see this— It's sort of like— (0.5) you get a sense of what buffalo  
170 would be like, or gnu (1.0), you know, wildebeests. (1.0) This incredible  
171 migration.

In these excerpts, participants speak of experiencing various natural phenomena, including “the woods” (N197), “bird language” (N198), “birdsong” (B170), “a turkey” (B172), “a newborn moose” (N199), “life” (Z150), “fish” (Z154), and “ducks” (Z166). The quality of these experiences is depicted by a cluster of terms and phrases: “so alive,”

“so intense,” “so much happening” (N198-9), “incredible” (B169), “unbelievable” (B172), “amazing” (B174), “everywhere” (Z154), “thousands of ducks...circled and swarmed” (Z166-7), “incredible migration” (Z170-1).

Here, being outdoors as a hunter is depicted as an “intense” experience of “life,” in which the hunter is energized and awestruck by the “unbelievable” vibrancy of “bird language” or by a vast swarm of ducks that makes you think of migrating buffalo or wildebeests. Later in our interview, Zach described what you see when duck hunting as an “explosion of life,” and Matt—also a duck hunter—spoke of witnessing “a spectacle.” Here we might also recall Sharon’s talk about being in a tree before dawn, watching as “everything comes alive” (S147). In short, this aspect of hunting is depicted as an “amazing” and thoroughly engaging experience, one which a hunter could sum up by saying “you’re in Eden” (B171).

### Meditation and Focus

In other talk, a meditative quality is emphasized, as illustrated by these examples:

797     Walter:     Someone once said— (0.5) I told somebody about it (0.3) and they said,  
798                   ‘What do you do? Like do you walk around? Do you sit in a tree?’ And  
799                   I’m like, ‘I sit in a tree. (0.7) I sit in a tree for hours and hours and hours  
800                   and when it’s time to come down I (0.3) I don’t want to.’ (1.7) And they  
801                   were like, ‘Oh, it must be like meditation for you.’ And I thought, ‘That’s  
802                   (0.5) that’s a good (1.5) comparison.’ (1.5)  
803                   I’m so— I can literally sit in a tree for four hours without even blinking  
804                   and (2.2) and I’m just calm up there and relaxed and (1.9) and I don’t—  
805                   (0.4) You know, the worries that you have (.) just kind of melt away. (1.7)  
806                   It’s— It’s like meditation, (0.3) it really is. (0.7) I’m not a particularly  
807                   (0.9) spiritual guy, or religious in any way, but (1.3) being in the woods is  
808                   as close as I come, I think. It’s— (3.0) It’s, it’s very fulfilling.

205     Yvonne:     I’ve enjoyed deer hunting (.) just because of the time of year and ( )  
206                   (1.5) it’s a lot of sitting and (.) sort of reflecting and I’m kind of a  
207                   meditative person so I like that. (0.7)

138 Bob: Here's (1.0) an opportunity to really participate in the way the world (0.5)  
139 the natural world works. (0.9) It was just so engaging. (0.7) I found  
140 hunting to be just as engaging as fishing was. When you're doing it and  
141 you're doing it well, (0.5) you're (0.6) not thinking about work, you're not  
142 thinking of (0.7) how much (0.3) money you need to make and car  
143 payments and that crap. You're just (0.6) you're just out there (0.5) and  
144 looking and listening and participating.  
...  
146 It's not exactly a meditative experience, but it's a (0.9) an experience in  
147 which you're so focused that everything else goes away, (0.5) when  
148 you're doing it well. And I love that experience.

261 Frank: It feels like it's a time apart (0.7) in the year. (2.1) November was already  
262 one of my favorite months of the year (0.7) just how the leaves are down,  
263 it's open, you can see. (.) there's a clarity, there's a simplicity. (1.1) And I  
264 think the same thing about hunting, too. In some ways it's a very simple—  
265 (2.4) or (0.3) maybe not simple. It's not complicated ((laughs)).  
266 You're out there for one thing and (0.4) I feel like when I'm out hunting  
267 (0.7) I'm fully in that experience. (0.8) So it's not— There's no multi-  
268 tasking, there's no checking things off the list. (0.3) It's just (0.5) you're  
269 out there. (1.0) And because of that, I feel (1.3) that's what feels so special  
270 about it.

Here, one aspect of the hunting experience is depicted by a cluster of terms including “meditation” (W801, 806), “calm,” “relaxed” (W804), “reflecting” (Y206), and “meditative” (Y207). As another participant, Ian, put it, “Your mind gets quiet.” Related to this “calm” and “meditative” cluster is another, where the emphasis is slightly different: “not exactly a meditative experience” (B146), “so focused” (B147), “so engaging” (B139), “fully in that experience” (F267). We can hear, then, two depictions of a quieting of the “mind,” one emphasizing a “relaxed” and “reflective” quality, the other emphasizing a “focused” and “engaging” quality of being fully present. (The two are closely tied, above and elsewhere in my data. Carol, for instance, spoke of how “you’re relaxed, you’re focused on the woods.”)

The value of such meditative, focused experience is, in part, described in terms of its contrast with other aspects of life. Hunting, like the bare November woods, has “a clarity...a simplicity” (F263) and is “not complicated” (F265). In that quieting of the

mind, “you’re not thinking about work...money...car payments and that crap” (B141-3) and “everything else goes away” (B147). Your “worries...melt away” (W805). “There’s no multi-tasking...no checking things off the list” (F267-8). This talk—of quieting the mind and escaping from the complications and worries of daily life—plays an important role in these participants’ articulations of what makes hunting “fulfilling” and, for some, an activity that brings them as close as they come to the “spiritual” (W807-8).

### Hunting Contrasted with Other Outdoor Activities

At times, participants speak of how the quality of attention and engagement cultivated in hunting differs from that cultivated in other outdoor activities:

- 151 Owen: Just going for a hike or anything like that, which is great, but (0.5) you  
 152 don’t sit down and actually (0.4) pay attention to (0.7) to the nature around  
 153 you when you’re (0.3) just hiking through, (0.5) whereas I think if you’re  
 154 fishing or you’re hunting you (0.5) pay far more attention to (0.8) to the  
 155 signs, I guess. (0.4)  
 156 I’m still a novice, I’m still learning, but (1.2) I’ve got someone that’s  
 157 showing me (.) the ropes, as it were. (0.8) But, yeah, you miss an awful lot  
 158 if you’re just walking through. (0.4) Like the tracks on the floor::r, (0.8) the  
 159 rubs on the tree::. (1.4) There’s loads of stuff I would never have (0.5)  
 160 noticed before.
- 75 Bob: Up until then my outdoor life was really (0.6) just a lot of hiking and we  
 76 would climb mountains in the Adirondacks every year. (0.6) And— (0.6)  
 77 But that was (.) that was my engagement with the woods, was just going  
 78 on a hike. There’s a destination, at the destination you’ve got a nice view,  
 79 you hang out at the top of the mountain, look around, and (0.4) then you  
 80 back down. (0.6)  
 81 So (0.4) I didn’t know anything about (0.4) the plants that I was seeing (.)  
 82 on top or on the way up. I knew my trees reasonably well. (0.6) But (0.5)  
 83 you know (0.3) it was just (0.6) a walk (0.3) basically.
- ...
- 87 It was really just (.) for (0.4) the peace and (.) and (0.3) quiet of (0.3) of  
 88 being out there. (0.4) And (0.5) and (0.6) ultimately that became sort of  
 89 (1.5) not all that engaging. (0.7)  
 90 And (0.4) so (1.2) fly-fishing was (0.5) truly a revelation to me, that (0.5)  
 91 you could be so incredibly focused (.) on an activity (0.4) outdoors (.) that  
 92 (0.5) that (0.3) that you would just (0.7) be (0.3) working (0.5) a stream  
 93 (0.6) for (.) hours (.) and just totally engaged (0.5) in a (0.5) in a way that  
 94 I’d never (0.4) been (0.4) engaged with the outdoors.

In these two excerpts, the comparison is to hiking. Hiking experiences are depicted in positive terms: “great” (O151), “nice view” (B78), “the peace and quiet of being out there” (B87-8). But “hunting” and “fishing” (O154, B90) are heard to add a vital dimension to one’s experience. It is in these activities that you become “incredibly focused” (B91) and “totally engaged” (B93), and “actually pay attention to the nature around you” (O152-3), taking notice of “signs” (O155), “tracks” (O158), and “rubs” (O159).

In my interview data, participants frequently highlight the engaged quality of the experience of learning. Above, for instance, Owen speaks of being a “novice” who is “learning” (O156) and says, “There’s loads of stuff I would never have noticed before” (O159-60). Bob similarly notes that, before he started fly-fishing and hunting, he “didn’t know anything about the plants” (B81) he was seeing outdoors. Likewise, in my interview with Walter, he spoke of his early years of hunting as “such an unbelievable learning experience.”

In resonance with this theme, we can also return to Carol’s depiction of how her father, uncle, and grandfather know the land where they hunt: “only through that sort of an experience, not necessarily hunting but really interacting on the land, do you get to know it in that way” (C446-8). Though her statement allows that other kinds of activities might also lead to such learning and knowledge, the central point is the same as that made by Bob and Owen: it is through a certain “sort of experience” of “interacting” that one learns best and gets to know the land most deeply.

“Interacting” can be heard as crucial here. If you are out there to “really participate” (B138)—perhaps as a hunter or angler—then you pay attention and learn. If you are out there “just walking through” (O158), out for “just a walk” (B83), then you “miss an awful lot” (O157) and may find that the experience is “not all that engaging” (B89).

The potential quality of such interaction and participation is vividly depicted by two deer hunters I interviewed, both speaking of the experience of sensory engagement, in being alert to prey:

- |     |        |   |
|-----|--------|---|
| 393 | Peter: | The act of hunting <u>itself</u> , (0.6) of the (.) of the opening of the senses, (0.6) |
| 394 |        | of being (0.8) in this semi-altered state of (.) very (.) intense alertness,            |
| 395 |        | (0.9) of opening up the senses of sight and hearing and even smell, (0.3)               |
| 396 |        | that’s a lot of the reward for the activity itself.                                     |
|     |        |   |
| 210 | Bob:   | Deer hunting (0.7) requires just that (0.4) really, really (0.6) <u>deep focus</u> (.)  |
| 211 |        | with <u>all</u> your senses, just trying to (0.6) make sure (.) that you see a deer     |
| 212 |        | before the deer sees <u>you</u> . (0.6) And (0.8) I <u>like</u> the experience.         |

These brief excerpts foreground an experience of a “semi-altered state” of “very intense alertness” (P394) and “really deep focus” (B210). Specifically, this aspect of hunting is depicted in terms of human senses. That semi-altered state is one of “opening up the senses of sight and hearing and even smell” (P395). That deep focus is a “deep focus with all your senses” (B210-1), testing the hunter’s senses against the senses of the prey: “trying to make sure that you see a deer before the deer sees you” (B211-2). The hunter is most definitely not out for “just a walk” (B83).

These depictions of “opening up the senses” and focusing with “all your senses” echo the depictions examined two chapters earlier, of hunting as “innate,” “primal,” and “hard-wired.” The fully engaged experience of hunting is depicted as crucial to

awakening to one's inner nature and connecting to one's ancient heritage ("this wild instinct...wakes up...it just brings you back to our roots," S518-21).

### Challenge

The need to be focused and engaged during the hunt is discursively linked to participants' depictions of hunting as exciting and challenging. Here, for example, are three depictions of hunting as a challenge:

- 111 Yvonne: It felt like a skill that was (.) challenging and exciting to learn.  
...  
115 And just as a wildlife biologist, it was just (.) great because— (0.7) I still  
116 feel that— (1.0) With the act of (.) of live-trapping an animal, which is  
117 also (1.0) very exciting in terms of trying to get inside the animal's mind  
118 and think about (0.4) their patterns and their behaviors, hunting to me is  
119 like— (1.0) I don't really get in that zone as I deeply as I have when I'm  
120 hunt— (0.6) any other time than when I'm hunting.
- 193 Owen: I thought my very first day (.) it would be like (0.3) shooting fish in a  
194 barrel. I thought, 'Turkeys are dumb.' (0.5) But they made us look really  
195 dumb. (1.3) We just couldn't get near enough to them. (1.3) They're—  
196 they're really wily, (1.3) really wily.  
...  
321 It got me wanting to go back to (.) try and catch them.
- 77 Matt: I think a lot of it was (1.4) what I had read about turkey hunting (1.4) kind  
78 of the challenge and the (.) the sneak. (1.1) The full camouflage aspect of  
79 it (.) appealed to me in that (0.5) you were truly trying to (.) to (0.6) fool  
80 something. (1.4) I think the challenge of it is what (0.5) what prompted me  
81 to want to do it.

In the first excerpt above, Yvonne describes hunting as "a skill that was challenging and exciting to learn" (Y111). She goes on to compare hunting to her experiences as a wildlife biologist, live-trapping animals. In both, she says, it is "very exciting" to attempt the challenging task of "trying to get inside the animal's mind and think about their patterns and their behaviors" (Y117-8). Hunting, she has found, gets her

into “that zone” more “deeply” (Y119). Hunting, in other words, is especially effective at providing entry into “that zone” of perception and imagination.

In the second, Owen describes his first season of turkey hunting. He says he began with the assumption that “turkeys are dumb” (O194) and soon realized that the turkeys were “really wily” (O196). The challenge of it—the fact that it was not easy—is noted as one of the factors that got him “wanting to go back to try and catch them” (O321).

In the third, Matt says he knew that turkey hunting was a “challenge” (M78, M80). That, he says, is what prompted his interest in trying it: “the sneak,” the need for “full camouflage,” and the fact that “you were truly trying to fool something” (M78-80).

Though a variety of specific terms are employed, these excerpts depict a similar attraction to “challenge.” In each, the hunter speaks of the excitement and appeal of engaging their own capacities—whether of thinking and strategizing (e.g., “trying to get inside the animal’s mind and think about their patterns and their behaviors,” trying to catch the “wily” turkey, “trying to fool something”) or of physical movement (e.g., “the sneak”)—with the capacities of the hunted animal.

The value of challenge is also highlighted by various participants’ talk about how hunting is, or would be, different without it. For instance, Frank—who farms, growing vegetables and raising livestock—told me that if hunting was a predictable matter of going out on opening day of rifle season and shooting a deer, then “that would feel like farming.” It is the very fact, he said, that the outcome of the hunt “doesn’t feel in any way in my control” that makes hunting a unique and valuable “time apart in the year” (F261). Similarly, Zach spoke of the appeal of “intermittent reward.” He speculated that if he was

“perfect at duck hunting...it might lose its interest.” And Matt drew an explicit contrast between two hunting experiences:

172      Matt:      I remember being really, really excited the first time I took a turkey. (1.2)  
173                    Becau— ((laughs)) Because there was a lot of (.) failure ((laughing)) that  
174                    went into it before I (.) I succeeded in it. (1.1) With my deer hunts they’ve  
175                    all been— (1.2) I think that most people would consider my deer hunts  
176                    pretty (0.8) slam-dunk (0.3) kind of things. (0.8) I don’t feel like I’ve  
177                    worked all that hard for them.

Frank speaks of hunting deer in Vermont as a constant challenge in which the outcome is always unknown, always out of his “control.” Zach speaks of hunting ducks in Maine in a similar fashion, indicating that he is not “perfect at duck hunting.” Both hunters speak of imagining what it would be like to succeed predictably and with little effort, and both describe an aversion to the notion. Matt speaks of experiencing both kinds of success: the kind that was preceded by “a lot of failure” (M173) and made him feel “really, really excited,” and the kind that came too easily (“slam-dunk”) and felt lackluster. (For those few participants who spoke of occasionally experiencing easy success in the hunt, depictions of such success sometimes included references to a lack of “fairness” to the hunted animal.)

#### Summary of Descriptive Analysis: Discourses of Engagement

In the data above, hunting is depicted as a highly engaging activity. In talking about hunting, participants speak of how it provides an opportunity for (1) intense experiences of the vibrancy of life and nature, (2) focused and meditative experiences during which one’s worries melt away, (3) far greater focus, attention, and learning than one experiences during less interactive, less participatory outdoor activities such as hiking, (4) the intense experience of one’s own senses opening and coming to full

alertness, and (5) the exciting and challenging experience of engaging one's own physical and mental capacities with the capacities of the hunted animal.

The experience of full engagement, full aliveness, and sharpened awareness is depicted as an important aspect of the hunt, which is said to be a spirited, highly focused, uncomplicated, attentive, energizing, exciting practice. This discursive theme is not separate from the previously examined theme of connection and belonging. Rather, it is a vital element in participants' cultivation of connection to nature, to animals, to one's own nature, and to one's ancient heritage—an element that encompasses a sense of mystery, as well as expressions of respect and awe for animals' superior senses and knowledge of the land. If you go out and shoot a deer without really trying (e.g., “slam-dunk”), then no engagement is required, no mystery or uncertainty is involved, and something important is lost. As Frank put it, “that would feel like farming.”

#### Cultural Propositions and Premises: Engagement

Based on the excerpts presented above, what cultural propositions might we formulate? I propose these:

- “Hunting” is an “intense” experience of “life” and “nature.”
- When you hunt, you can be “relaxed” and “meditative,” or highly “focused.” Either way, your “worries” “go away.”
- “Hunting” is a “totally engaged” way of “interacting” in which you “learn” and “pay attention” to far more than when you are “just walking through.”

- Being in a state of “intense alertness” and “deep focus with all your senses” is “a lot of the reward” in hunting.
- To experience “excitement,” the hunter must face a “challenge,” matching senses and wits with the prey. The outcome of the hunt must be outside the hunter’s “control.”

Based on these propositions and the data presented in this chapter, what cultural premises can be formulated? What beliefs and values must be presumed? I suggest the following:

- It is good to experience intensity, in nature and in oneself.
- It is good to feel relaxed, focused, and fully present.
- It is good to learn about, and pay close attention to, nature and animals.
- It is good to be challenged.
- It is good to do things where the outcome cannot be controlled.

Are not these premises commonly held by many non-hunters and anti-hunters? And are not commonly held inverse premises also implicit here? From the foregoing propositions and premises, and from the data presented in this chapter as a whole, we can surmise that, for these participants, it is *not* good to always experience dullness, to feel tense and distracted, to be oblivious to and ignorant of nature and animals, to accomplish everything easily, or only to do things where the outcome is certain and controlled.

Once again, hunting is depicted as a meaningful response to and remedy for common problems of the modern world, in which our inherent capacities for “deep focus” and “intense alertness” are not required and in which life is often full of

distractions and repetitive, dulling routines. All too often, we are disengaged from the natural world around us, caught up in worries, complications, multi-tasking, and the everyday grind of “how much money you need to make and car payments and that crap” (B142-3).

Participants did not all speak of hunting as a consistently effective antidote to such troubles. Some, in fact, spoke of the struggle to stay focused in the woods when their “productive mind” was wandering to the “chores” they knew they should be doing. This talk, however, gives voice to the same basic premises. The focused, engaged experience of the hunt is valued, if not always achieved.

## CHAPTER VI

“IT NEEDS TO BE DONE WITH RESPECT”:

### DISCOURSES OF THE KILL

In talking with participants, I asked various versions of the question “What is it like for you to take an animal?” (Or, for those who had not killed an animal as hunters, “What do you imagine it will be like to take an animal?” I used the term “take,” rather than introducing the term “kill” or the term “harvest.”) I did not specifically ask about ethics, nor did I ask about emotions. Yet themes of ethic and emotion were both highly prominent in participants’ talk, both in response to my question about taking an animal and at other points in the interviews. This chapter is based on an analysis of 118 instances of the terms “kill,” “killed,” and “killing,” as well as 35 instances of the terms “respect” and “respectful”, 12 instances of the terms “sad” and “sadness,” 8 instances of the terms “powerful,” 13 instances of the terms “thank” and “thankful,” and many instances of related terms and phrases (e.g., “take,” “reverence,” “awe,” “deep,” “gratitude,” “shed a tear,” “suffer,” “use/utilize”), as used in talking about killing animals.

In this chapter, I examine the discursive theme created when the terms “kill” and “killing” and related terms and phrases occur. I present interview excerpts that illustrate several ways in which such references are made. I indicate terms and phrases that can be heard as highly active, and suggest interpretations of them and interconnections among them. My goals are to describe the shape of this discourse and the cultural logic of “the kill” both presumed and created when this discourse is used.

### Seeing the Animal

A number of participants described what it was like to see the animal they were hunting, in those minutes or moments before they knew whether they would get a shot.

Yvonne in Maine, for example, and Walter in New York, spoke in these ways:

- 208 Yvonne: I would say that (0.3) the turkey hunting to me was the most exciting I've  
209 ever experienced and (1.2) I absolutely loved it.  
...  
212 It was just so interactive, that was the thing about it, with the calling and  
213 the full camo.  
...  
224 They started flying down out of the trees, (.) all these hens and there was a  
225 couple toms coming in there and, (0.6) we can see them, and, oh my God,  
226 I was so excited, I couldn't even do my diaphragm call because I was (.)  
227 too excited. (1.0) ((laughs))
- 131 Walter: There's nothing as exciting as (0.3) seeing deer. I— I don't know why.  
...  
493 When you see an animal and like (.) and right before the shot, (0.5) I think  
494 it's (0.4) it's all (0.8) it's all instinct.  
...  
499 It's such a pure moment, I guess. Like it's all that you're— (0.7) Every  
500 fiber of your being is involved in taking that animal.  
...  
503 You just come alive.

These excerpts can be heard as an extension of the “engagement talk” described in the previous chapter: for instance, how “amazing” it is to “carry on a conversation” with a turkey (B173-4), and how “alive” and “intense” the woods and birdsong are in spring (N198). Here, though, the engagement is not with natural phenomena in general or with an animal heard at a distance. It is with the hunted animal, with which the hunter is now in visual contact (“can see them,” Y225; “seeing deer,” W131).

In Yvonne and Walter's talk above, “excitement” terms are prominent: “the most exciting” (Y208), “so excited” (Y226), “too excited” (Y226-7), “nothing as exciting” (W131). This excitement is articulated in terms of full, intense, absolute engagement: “It

was just so interactive, that was the thing about it” (Y212), “it’s all instinct” (W494), “it’s such a pure moment...every fiber of your being is involved” (W499-500), “you just come alive” (W503). It is the visual sensory encounter and the “exciting,” “interactive” experience of “instinct” that leads up to “taking that animal” (W500).

### The Clean Kill

When I asked participants what it was like to take an animal, one recurrent thread was talk related to making a “clean kill,” a phrase commonly used by hunters to refer to a swift kill that minimizes animal suffering.

- |  |        |  |
|--|--------|--|
| 145<br>146                             | Matt:  | I just (.) couldn’t stomach (1.9) wounding something and not being able to retrieve it.  |
|  |        | ...  |
| 159<br>160                             |        | For <u>me</u> — (0.3) It’s more important for me to get a clean kill than it is for anything else.   |
|  |        |  |
| 478<br>479<br>480<br>481<br>482<br>483 | Nancy: | I try to only have to take <u>one</u> shot. (0.3) I’ve never had to shoot twice. (0.7) And I just find myself sitting there saying, ‘ <u>Please</u> , you know, let this be a good shot. (0.3) I only want to do this once.’ And I’ve been lucky enough to have that be true and (0.5) and <u>that’s what we teach</u> , and we really (0.3) emphasize, (1.0) ‘You’ve got to practice, practice, practice so that you don’t ever wound an animal.’ |
|  |        |  |
| 802<br>803<br>804<br>805               | Owen:  | That’s (1.2) one of my nightmares, really, (1.5) is shooting an animal, (0.3) it bolting, (1.3) having been shot, (0.4) and not being able to find it, or <u>not</u> bringing it down or— (2.2) The <u>guilt</u> — (1.2) I (0.3) I don’t know how I’d deal with that.  |

In these excerpts, the “clean kill” (M159)—in which the hunter only takes “one shot...a good shot” (N478-80)—is contrasted with its opposite: “wounding something and not being able to retrieve it” (M145-6), “wound an animal” (N483), “it bolting, having been shot, and not being able to find it or not bringing it down” (O803-4). The latter scenario of wounding an animal is depicted in strongly emotional terms, including

“couldn’t stomach” (M145), “one of my nightmares” (O802), “guilt” (O804), and “don’t know how I’d deal with that” (O805).

It is in this discursive context of emotion that the actions of the hunter are ethically coded. Achieving a clean kill is said to be “more important...than...anything else” (M159-60). Nancy, a hunter-education instructor, specifically speaks of the importance of teaching this ethic to new hunters: “that’s what we teach, and we really emphasize, ‘You’ve got to practice, practice, practice so you don’t ever wound an animal’” (N481-3). The “practice” that leads to the “one shot” kill is stated as an ethical imperative (“You’ve got to”), just as wounding an animal is stated as an ethical violation (e.g., “don’t ever,” “guilt”). This emphasis on the importance of minimizing animal suffering in hunting echoes the emphasis, noted earlier, on rejecting the cruelties of “factory meat.”

### A Mixture of Feelings

Even when the kill is “clean,” many participants spoke of a wide-ranging mix of emotions. Here are a few examples:

- 474 Nancy: I always feel sad. (1.2) I feel glad. (0.8) I feel very excited, but I always  
475 feel sad, usually cry.  
...  
484 I always feel sad. I think they’re incredibly beautiful. (1.0) Whether it’s  
485 turkey or deer or partridge, I just, ah, I can’t believe how beau— how  
486 astounding nature is. It’s just— (1.0) just blows your mind, and— (1.8)  
487 And it’s a mixture of awe, sadness. (1.6). It’s a bunch of things. (1.3) But I  
488 feel (.) thrilled, too. (0.8) And proud.
- 292 Art: It still is a big deal to me and (0.6) it (0.6) is (.) not something to do  
293 lightly. I (0.9) don’t (0.4) feel (1.0) remorse or guilt. (0.4) But I don’t  
294 jump up and down (0.4) with delight either.  
...  
304 It’s— It’s a mixture of feelings. Sadness (0.3) sometimes but, like I said,  
305 not guilt or feeling (0.3) bad, because it’s natural. (1.3) And (0.7) and also

189 Frank: I'm not exactly sure what the right word— Because every word I think of  
 190 (.) seems (0.7) a little bit coarse. (0.3) ((laughs)) (0.8) Because (0.3) in  
 191 some ways it's exciting? (1.0) in some ways it's satisfying (0.8) at sort of  
 192 a, at a deep level? (2.4) Humbling isn't quite the right word, but there's  
 193 that piece of it also, (0.9) of gratitude. (3.7) So (0.4) when I say that it's  
 194 exciting and satisfying, that sort of feels like (1.4) the 'great white hunter'  
 195 (.) triumphing (0.4) ((laughing)) triumphing over the poor game animal  
 196 (0.6) and (0.9) it is exciting and satisfying, but it also— Actually it's  
 197 magical, too.

Several clusters of terms stand out above. One is comprised of “sad” (N474, N475, N484), “sadness” (N487, A304), and “cry” (N475). A second is comprised of “excited” (N474), “exciting” (F191, F194, F196), and “thrilled” (N488). A third—perhaps less sharply constellated—is comprised of “glad” (N474), “proud” (N488), “satisfaction” (A306), “satisfying” (F191, F194, F196). A fourth is comprised of “awe” (N487), “magical” (F197), and perhaps also “humbling...that piece of it, of gratitude” (F192-3). What can be made of this “mixture of feelings” (A304)?

To begin, it is helpful to note that these clusters are not contradictory depictions of the same thing. That is, each cluster suggested above is oriented in a different direction, referring to a different aspect of what has occurred. The hunter may simultaneously feel “sad” that the animal has died, “excited” by the intensity of the encounter, and “proud” and “satisfied” that the hunt was successful and that they now have meat. He or she may also be struck by a feeling of “awe” and “magic,” perhaps at how “incredibly beautiful” (N484) the animal is, at “how astounding nature is” (N486), or—as Frank went on to explain to me—at the fact that he succeeded in the hunt despite the deer’s almost preternatural ability to appear and disappear. This last element—of the

hunter's success being dependent on factors outside his or her control—adds coherence to the idea of the kill being “humbling” and evoking “gratitude.”

Peter described his mixed feelings in particularly incisive terms:

467 Peter: The killing itself is still (1.9) pretty traumatic for me.  
...  
478 In that moment, when I'm close and the shot (.) looks (.) like it's going to  
479 be good and everything and I'm contemplating pulling the trigger, (0.7)  
480 there's already this feeling of remorse. (3.8)  
...  
487 I would say that's the largest struggle that I have, (1.3) of just being able  
488 to (0.3) fight the resistance (1.3) in that moment. During the hunt there's  
489 no resistance at all. (0.6) I am a hunter. (1.0) To the best of my ability, I  
490 am hunting, I am stalking, I am (.) seeking (0.6) and loving it, I'm loving  
491 every minute of it. (1.6) But at that moment of actually (0.9) hurling a  
492 projectile into the body (.) of that animal (1.4) there's a tremendous  
493 amount of resistance. (4.1)  
494 And then afterward there's always a feeling of, of remorse and gratitude  
495 (0.5) mixed together. (3.0) The remorse doesn't last. The remorse is just  
496 almost like a shock to the nervous system and a recognition of the (0.3)  
497 profundity of what I've done. (0.7) And (1.4) often there's (0.7) there's a  
498 tear or two. (1.0) But then there's just a feeling of (0.7) 'Thank you so  
499 much.' (0.3) Thank you to the spirit of the animal, thank you to (0.6)  
500 Creation, (1.0) thank you to (.) the whole mystery of life.

Peter distinguishes (1) the feeling of “loving” the “hunting...stalking...seeking” (P490) from (2) the “tremendous amount of resistance” (P492-3) and “remorse” (P480, P494-5) he feels with regard to the “traumatic” (P467) experience of the kill itself, and also from (3) the “gratitude” (P494) he feels “to the spirit of the animal...to Creation...to the whole mystery of life” (P499-500). Note that Peter's talk of “resistance” to killing can be heard as an amplification of Nancy's words about making a clean kill—“I only want to do this once” (N480)—where she seems to express both a desire to prevent animal suffering and a desire not to have to commit the killing act twice.

The clear distinctions made by Peter demonstrate that understanding participants' talk about mixed feelings requires attention to each feeling's specific orientation. That is, these hunters speak of (1) loving the excited, thrilling engagement of the hunt, (2) feeling

sadness and even remorse at the animal’s death, (3) feeling proud and satisfied by the hunt’s success and the procurement of food, (4) feeling gratitude to the animal, and (5) feeling awe for the mysteries of nature.

### Depth and Discursive Limitations

It is also helpful to note the overall tone—or, as Hymes (1972, p. 62) proposed, the “key”—of these utterances. Whether participants are speaking of excitement, sadness, satisfaction, or gratitude, their talk is marked by an emphasis on depth. They speak of “awe” (N487). They speak of killing as “a big deal...not something to do lightly” (A292-3). They speak of how feelings occur “at a deep level” (F192). They speak of the “shock” (P496) and “profundity” (P497) of the experience. This depiction of the kill as something momentous is further illustrated in the following excerpts.

John spoke of the experience of taking his first deer:

295	John:	When I (0.6) came across the body of the deer that I—the <u>first</u> deer that I
296		had shot, I was <u>stunned</u> . (1.0) You think, <u>wow</u> . (0.5) I was— (1.9) It
297		was— It was <u>shocking</u> .
		...
301		So there was (0.5) somewhat of a feeling of (.) remorse (.) in (0.4) causing
302		(1.0) some <u>pain</u> , (0.6) and (0.7) a feeling of (1.1) <u>connection</u> to the food
303		chain?, a feeling of connection to the hunter-gatherers that we all came
304		from?, (1.9) and (1.1) a feeling that I was— I’m just another part of it.
305		((laughs)) (0.7) So it’s a very humbling, (0.5) very <u>powerful</u> experience.

Don told me how deeply ambivalent he felt about killing an animal for the first time (one of the domestic rabbits raised for food at the small, outdoor-oriented college he attended). He then told me about eating that rabbit and later drew a parallel with the experience of hunting:

348	Don:	I remember (0.5) <u>eating</u> the rabbit and just— It was the first time that—
349		(0.3) I understood ‘Grace’ for the first time, that (0.8) ‘ <u>Thank</u> you for this

350 food.' It just was a very strong feeling of 'This is why we say it.'  
 ...  
 771 There's a reverence (0.5) of appreciating what you're eating (.) that you  
 772 don't (0.6) when you're just— If it's just store-bought (0.4) you don't  
 773 know where it comes from.

And Bob talked about what it's like to kill a deer:

300 TC: When you do (1.3) take a deer, (1.2) what's that (1.8) experience (.) like?  
 301 (4.9)  
 302 Bob: It's— (0.7) It's a big (0.5) big (0.3) powerful experience. It's a— (0.5) It's  
 303 a mammal. It's a large mammal. It's a (0.5) mammal who (0.3) weighs  
 304 (0.8) somewhere (1.0) close to what you weigh and— It's— (0.6) That  
 305 just— (0.4) It's— (5.3)  
 306 It's a really (4.0) primal experience to (.) to take the life of an animal like  
 307 that. (0.6) And (0.8) to (1.3) follow (0.7) follow a blood trail, and come to  
 308 it, and see it (0.9) see it (.) there with its eyes open, (0.4) still, (0.3) on the  
 309 ground. (0.4)  
 310 It's— (0.8) You really— (0.6) It makes you understand that (0.5) you're  
 311 really in this for keeps, and this is (0.5) this is not just (1.4) playing  
 312 around. This is (.) really deeply serious stuff. (0.5) And (0.8) it just (1.0)  
 313 makes (1.5) makes you (1.3) have— (0.8) I think (2.1) it makes you have  
 314 maybe more of a (0.5) an appreciation for life, (1.0) to (.) see (.) this  
 315 animal (.) who's lost its life. (1.5)  
 316 I don't know. It's just— It's— It's a— (1.8) I wish I had better words. It's  
 317 just not a trivial experience.

Our cluster of terms and phrases related to “depth” now includes “a big deal” (A292), “at a deep level” (F192), “shock” (P496), “shocking” (J297), “powerful experience” (J305, B302), “primal experience” (B306), “deeply serious” (B312), “very strong feeling” (D350), “reverence” (D771), and “profundity” (P497).

This tone of profundity is linked to specific feelings and shifts in understanding. For instance, the word “satisfying” is clarified by the phrase “at sort of a deep level” (F191-2). “Remorse” is described as being “like a shock...and a recognition of the profundity of what I've done” (P496-7). The “shocking” and “powerful” experience of seeing the body of a deer is linked to “a feeling of connection to the food chain...to the hunter-gatherers we all came from” (J302-3). The uncomfortable experience of killing an

animal for the first time is described as leading to a “very strong feeling” and an “understanding” of “Grace” (D349-50). Killing an animal one’s own size “makes you understand” how “deeply serious” life and death are, and “makes you have...more of an appreciation for life” (B310-4).

Here, we find echoes of excerpts quoted in the earlier discussions of responsible living and connection. In those sections, we heard hunting depicted as a way of bringing us back into “participation” in the lives of “fellow animals,” and of imbuing those relationships with “awe and respect” (P926-9). We heard how “looking in the eyes of an animal” (U186) that has just died reconnects you to the “basic” (U185, H685) realities of life, to the “sacrifice” (H105) that sustains you, to “the great joy and sadness” of “the cycle” (H683), and to a sense of mutual “belonging” (H673-83). In those sections, as here (e.g., “to...see it there with its eyes open...makes you have...more of an appreciation for life,” B307-14), the kill is depicted as a deep experience that fosters connection, responsibility, and insight. We can hear that participants’ talk about hunting, and especially about killing, is consistently infused with this tone of depth—depth of emotion, of connection, of responsibility, of engagement, and of understanding.

One striking feature of this talk about deep emotion in relation to the kill is the way in which some participants seem to struggle to find the right words. At the close of the excerpt above, for instance, Bob says, “I don’t know. It’s just— It’s— It’s a— I wish I had better words. It’s just not a trivial experience” (B316-7). Likewise, in an excerpt presented earlier, Frank stated that he was “not exactly sure what the right word” (F189) was; no matter what word he thought of, it didn’t quite convey what he wished to say. He was aware that his words might sound “a little bit coarse” (F190) or might suggest “the

‘great white hunter’ triumphing over the poor game animal” (F194-5), which is not at all what he meant to convey.

Like other participants I interviewed, Bob and Frank, in their attempts at clarification, sometimes resorted to saying what the experience is *not* (e.g., “not a trivial experience”) or to naming a feeling that approximates what they mean, and then suggesting or explicitly stating that it is *not* quite the right word. Frank speaks in a questioning tone: “in some ways it’s exciting? in some ways it’s satisfying at sort of a, at a deep level?” (F190-2). And he states outright that “humbling isn’t quite the right word, but there’s that piece of it also” (F192-3).

These verbal demonstrations of a struggle for language (and the explicit depictions of that struggle, as in “I wish I had better words” and “not exactly sure”) suggest a limitation in discursive resources. That is, they suggest that these participants do not have ready access to a satisfactory way of speaking about these experiences, one that accurately conveys the depth and nuance of feeling they wish to articulate.

### Ethical Codings of Emotion

To the degree that such feelings can be articulated, participants’ talk about the kill frequently depicted emotion as having an ethical dimension. Ian, for example, described the kinds of things he says when he teaches hunter education, including how he tells young hunters to act if a deer is in their sights and an uncle is telling them to shoot:

582 Ian: We speak right up in our class and say, ‘You should be really happy if  
583 you’ve done a good job. (0.7) You’ve practiced all summer with this tool,  
584 you’ve gotten permission from the landowner, you’ve made a clean kill.  
585 (1.4) You should be really pleased and happy.’ (0.5)  
586 I then throw in, (0.5) ‘If you didn’t have some remorse, if you didn’t shed  
587 a tear, (0.6) I’d be a little worried about you.’  
...

596                    If Uncle Bob is whispering to you (0.4) and you just can't do it, then (0.7)  
 597                    don't do it. (0.6) It's powerful. You've taken an animal's life. It needs to  
 598                    be done with respect.

In this excerpt, killing is depicted as a “powerful” act that “needs to be done with respect” and should only be done if it feels right: “if...you just can't do it, then don't do it” (I596-8). Violating one's own conscience can be heard as an act of disrespect—for one's self, for the animal whose life is taken, and for the power of the action itself. Similarly, in Art's statement quoted above, killing is depicted as “not something to do lightly” (A292-3). Killing with the wrong attitude (e.g., doing it “lightly,” or doing it because someone else urged you to) can be heard to constitute an ethical violation: “don't do it,” “not something to do.”

Once the kill has been made, additional dimensions come into play. On the one hand, the hunter should be proud, “pleased,” and “happy” to have “done a good job” and to have “made a clean kill” (I582-5). (Recall, from above, participants' depictions of feeling “glad,” “proud,” and “satisfied.”) On the other hand, if the hunter doesn't “have some remorse” and doesn't “shed a tear,” then the teacher would be “worried” (I586-7).

Nancy makes a similar point:

496            Nancy:        I really believe that if you don't feel sad, (1.2) if you don't shed a tear,  
 497                    there's something wrong, (0.5) that you need to feel (0.6) sadness, some  
 498                    remorse. You've taken the only thing this animal has, (1.1) its life. (0.5)  
 499                    And (0.9) you (0.7) you're responsible for that.

The ethical dimension is explicit here: there is “something wrong” if you don't “feel sad” or “shed a tear” (N496-7). Not only should one kill “with respect” (I598) (i.e., not “lightly”), one should also feel certain kinds of feelings after the kill. “Sadness,” for example, or “remorse” (I586, N498) are coded as necessary ways (“you need to feel,”

N497) of acknowledging that one is “responsible” (N499) for taking an animal’s life (I597, N498). To kill lightly, or to kill and feel no sadness, would be improper and unhealthy. Yet to kill without feeling “pleased” and “proud” would also be improper. One should, in short, experience the “mixture of feelings” participants reported.

The force of such an ethical coding is confirmed by one participant’s report of what he did *not* feel after killing his first deer:

387	TC:	What was it like (.) for you (0.3) just (0.7) the experience of taking that
388		animal? (2.8)
389	Owen:	I think— I don’t know, I wasn’t— (2.4) It was nothing special to be
390		honest. I didn’t feel (0.9) any (0.8) <u>joy</u> , I didn’t feel any (0.5) <u>sorrow</u> , I
391		didn’t (0.9) feel much of— (0.7) And I thought I would. I didn’t feel (0.5)
392		either of those sensations, to be honest.
		...
958		I don’t <u>why</u> I didn’t get that. (0.5) I think every— <u>most</u> people get it, I
959		would have thought.

Here, the lack of the proper mixture of feelings—“didn’t feel any joy...didn’t feel any sorrow” (O390)—is marked as strange, for the hunter had an expectation of what he “would” (O391), and perhaps should, feel. In emphasizing his lack of emotional experience, his inability to explain that lack, and his sense that most people do feel the things he did not, Owen clearly sketches the outlines of an ethic of emotion.

Alongside this ethical coding of a “mixture of feelings” is an ethical coding of how such feelings should be demonstrated. Ian and Nancy, for example, spoke of the need to “shed a tear” (I586-7, N496). Art spoke about displays of emotion he has seen on television:

300	Art:	It kind of creeps me out. I’m not so into these (0.4) TV hunting shows
301		either, and we don’t have cable, but a few times I’ve seen, you know,
302		where the guys will be <u>high-fiving</u> and jumping up and down and (1.3) it
303		doesn’t feel like that (.) for me.

And John spoke of how he feels about killing:

262 John: The act of (1.2) killing (.) an animal (0.3) for me was— (0.5) is (0.9)  
263 very— very personal, very— (3.5) It doesn't seem like you should be  
264 having a party around it.

“High-fiving” (A302), “jumping up and down” (A302), and “having a party” (J264) describe demonstrations of emotion that are alien to the speakers (“I don’t jump up and down with delight,” A293-4; “it doesn’t feel like that for me,” A302-3; “killing an animal for me...is...very personal,” J262-3) and that also evoke a feeling of moral discomfort (“creeps me out,” A300; “doesn’t seem like you should,” J263).

Several participants illustrated their awareness of this ethical coding of different kinds of emotional displays, yet refrained from committing themselves to its values.

Peter, for instance, spoke of how he saw hunting as a boy and how he sees it now:

115 Peter: I remember seeing (0.5) deer (0.5) splayed on the (0.4) on the hoods (1.0)  
116 or the roofs of cars occasionally. And it (.) kind of seemed (0.7) bizarre. It  
117 seemed like the people who did that were a very separate culture (0.8)  
118 from what I had (0.5) than what I had experienced.  
119 Now being a Boy Scout, (0.5) where Indian lore (0.7) was a good part of  
120 that, (0.9) there was (0.7) a recognition that there was a (.) other kind of  
121 relationship that was available. (0.3) But it didn't seem— But I didn't  
122 have any direct contact with that. (1.1)  
123 So I would say that my early impressions about hunting (0.7) were that it  
124 was certainly very violent, because the evidence that I did see of it were,  
125 you know, bloody carcasses strewn over the hoods of cars. (0.8) And (1.0)  
126 I remember there being people who were (0.8) mmm (0.4) didn't seem  
127 very humble about it, the few people that I came into contact with who  
128 had (.) killed a deer. (1.0)  
129 I could look it at now and say, ‘Well, it was— There’s definitely a  
130 celebratory aspect to it if you’ve (0.4) been hunting really hard, and here  
131 you’ve got your deer.’ (0.6) Mixed with some (0.3) machismo and (.) and  
132 that sort of thing (0.7) is what I was seeing.

Thomas talked about the kinds of people he might want to hunt with:

524 Thomas: I don't even necessarily think that (0.4) they have to (0.7) even share my  
525 approach to the activity either (0.4), that I've read (0.4) plenty in the last  
526 several months by (0.4) people who are very sort of (.) cautious and

527 thoughtful people and dislike the sort of (0.6) quote ‘redneck displays’ of  
528 (0.3) deer on bumpers and (.) and high-fiving and all this sort of thing.  
529 (0.6)  
530 On the other hand, I think (0.6) I don’t necessarily (0.4) have a problem  
531 with that. I mean I think—I mean it’s just a different culture and a  
532 different approach to the sport and to the animal world, and (1.0) I don’t  
533 (0.5) I don’t necessarily judge it.

And Matt described how he acts after making a kill:

179 Matt: It’s celebratory, but I’m not a whoop-and-holler kind of guy.

Here, participants indicate they do not or would not engage in certain demonstrations of emotions of being “pleased” and “proud” (e.g., “high-fiving,” T528; “whoop-and-holler,” M179; “people who...didn’t seem very humble,” P126-7); these demonstrations are heard to go hand in hand with certain ways of displaying the dead animal (e.g., “deer splayed on the hoods or roofs of cars,” P115-6; “bloody carcasses strewn over the hoods of cars,” P125; “deer on bumpers,” T528). Rather than committing to a negative ethical evaluation of these demonstrations and displays, however, these participants depict them as different ways of expressing the “celebratory” (P130, M179) emotions of the successful hunt. These ways are depicted as “a different culture and a different approach” (T531-2)—one that might include “machismo” (P131) and might not match “my approach” (T524-5), but that I “don’t necessarily judge” (T533).

### An Ethic of Utilization

Another prominent aspect of participants’ talk about the kill—one that also encompassed ethical dimensions—focused on how hunters made use of animals’ bodies. For example:

- 109 Ian: You are always (0.5) powerfully impacted by (0.6) taking an animal's life.  
110 (0.7) I only do it (.) because (0.5) I want it in the freezer.
- 286 Carol: I wouldn't take something's life that I'm not going to (.) to eat (0.7) or use  
287 in that— in some way.
- 500 Nancy: It bothers me when I hear stories about people letting (.) meat go to waste,  
501 (1.3) wanting only (.) to get the mount and not caring about the meat or  
502 something like that. Because so many people would want it or— (0.5) It's  
503 just wrong to do that.

In the first two excerpts, participants speak of taking life *only* if they intend to make use of the animal, primarily as food (I109-10, C286-7). In the third, commentary is made on stories about other hunters' actions ("letting meat go to waste," N500) and the ethical impropriety of such actions is stated explicitly ("It's just wrong to do that," N502-3).

Additional features of this ethic of utilization are illustrated in these excerpts:

- 465 Helen: Once you've made the shot, (0.4) you've— you've created an obligation.  
466 (6.6) And (2.3) that's (1.3) where you want to do (1.0) the best job that  
467 you can (3.1) so that you can do a good job of using the animal that  
468 you've— (0.8) that you've killed, for your life.
- 528 Walter: I want to think about what I did and I want to (1.0) respect the animal and  
529 (0.3) and (0.7) eat every part of it that I can.

Similar features are also illustrated when Kara talks about the kind of person she would like to hunt with, and then about meat and animals (both those she has raised and those she intends to hunt):

- 345 Kara: Someone who:: (1.9) respects the environment that they're hunting in,  
346 respects the animals that they're hunting, (0.8) someone who (0.6) fully  
347 utilizes? (1.2) what they hunt? (0.4) which, (0.3) again, I think— I see that  
348 as a form of respect, (0.5) that you don't— (1.6) Killing an animal just to  
349 put (1.0) a hide on the floor or some (.) trophy on the wall is— I just— I  
350 don't— (1.2) That to me is somewhat repugnant.  
...
- 481 Animals die (0.8) because we eat meat. (2.5) And (0.9) I just— (0.4) I  
482 prefer to (.) to:: (0.7) to face that (1.5) sort of baldly rather than (0.6) skirt  
483 around it and be coy about it. (1.5)

484 I think it makes me: (0.4) more (0.4) respectful? (1.1) I'm more interested  
485 in (0.9) off-cuts and offal and (0.4) utilizing the whole animal than (.) I  
486 was previously?

As before, ethical commentary is again made on letting meat go to waste (“Killing an animal just to put a hide on the floor or some trophy on the wall is...repugnant,” K348-50). Here, though, the ethical “obligation” that is “created” by killing (H465) involves more than simply eating the animal. Walter speaks of wanting to “eat every part of it that I can” (W529), Helen speaks of doing “the best job that you can...a good job of using the animal” (H466-7), and Kara speaks of “fully” utilizing (K346-7) animals and of how raising animals has made her “more interested in off-cuts and offal and utilizing the whole animal” (K484-5). In these participants’ utterances, the ethic of utilization is specifically constructed as an ethic of *full* utilization. (Several participants spoke of using, or intending to use, more than just the meat. Evan, for example, spoke of tanning deer hides, and Greg spoke of his interest in using a hide to make a drum.)

Utilization can also be heard as a matter of “respect.” In this particular context, the term “respect” can be heard to carry a particular set of meanings. Walter states, “I want to respect the animal and eat every part of it that I can” (W528-9), linking “respect” with full utilization. Kara says that she would like to hunt with someone who “respects the environment...respects the animals...[and] fully utilizes what they hunt” (K345-7) and explicitly states her view of full utilization: “I see that as a form of respect” (K347-8). She says, too, that facing animal death “baldly” (K482) makes her “more respectful” (K484), meaning “more interested...in utilizing the whole animal” (K484-5).

In short, killing—an act by which one takes “responsibility” for animal death—is said to create an obligation to “eat” and “use” the animal as “fully” as possible, and such

utilization is said to constitute a form of “respect.” Especially in terms of food, then, “killing” and “eating” are depicted as ways of cultivating “respect.”

It should be noted that one participant did mention having hunted coyotes, which she did not eat or intend to eat. And another participant said that he would consider hunting coyotes, albeit reluctantly, if they became so numerous that they seriously threatened local populations of deer and other wildlife. Overwhelmingly, however, participants spoke of hunting animals they intended to eat, and of the ethical importance of using what one kills.

### Different Animals, Different Depictions

It should also be noted that most of the interview excerpts presented in this chapter refer to the hunting and killing of large mammals, primarily deer. Depictions of the kill were substantially different when participants spoke of hunting smaller animals, especially birds such as grouse and ducks, and explicit comparisons were frequently made between killing small animals and killing large animals.

These hunters, for instance, had both hunted birds before hunting deer:

55        Art:        He invited me grouse hunting first. We did that some and (0.6) that was  
56                    (0.9) something that (0.5) that didn't— (0.3) It was (.) fun to do, a nice (.)  
57                    hike and (0.9) we'd sometimes see some birds and sometimes not. And (.)  
58                    when we did, I'd usually miss them. ((laughs)) (0.9) Not a good way for  
59                    me to live off the land at least. (0.6)  
60                    And so (0.5) that was fun, though, and then (.) he invited me (0.4) deer  
61                    hunting. (1.2) That was a (0.4) a (0.4) bigger step for me. (0.7) I guess (.)  
62                    partly because it's (0.8) killing something bigger that's (.) that's a  
63                    mammal about the same size as a human, and that (0.8) felt kind of weird.  
64                    I (0.3) thought about it before, (1.0) did a lot of thinking about it as (.) I  
65                    was getting ready.

694        Matt:        When I shot that deer last year, (0.6) it was (0.6) the first time that (0.3)  
695                    that I'd ever (2.3) seen anyone shoot a deer before.  
                  ...

700 I shot it and (0.4) like I said, it just— (0.6) It fell right there. (1.0) And I  
 701 just stood there. (1.4) And I (0.8) I'd been hunting ducks for (0.3) for ten  
 702 years and (1.2) I'd probably killed (1.5) two hundred different things, I  
 703 would guess, at least.

Two participants from Maine—neither of whom had yet taken a deer—made related remarks. Recall that Carol spoke of getting interested in deer hunting after hearing an NPR story about the environmental costs of meat production. She said: “I never thought that I could kill a deer, I think they're beautiful, I just didn't think I had it in me” (C53-4). At other points in our interview, she spoke about what it was like for her to kill a grouse, and then speculated about what it might be like to kill a deer:

269 Carol: I think there's always a part of me that (1.9) recognizes that (0.7) I'm  
 270 killing something.  
 ...  
 272 It's consequential. (.) You're taking something's life and (0.6) that's—  
 272 (0.4) I appreciate that. (1.0) So there have been those moments of feeling  
 274 (1.2) some— (0.7) I don't— (0.7) It's not necessarily regret, it's just some  
 275 sort of an emotional feeling of (0.9), 'Wow, I've just killed this thing,' or  
 276 'Gosh, I hope it's not suffering or (0.8) any of that.'  
 ...  
 279 But most of the time it's excitement, (1.2) maybe some level of pride in  
 280 actually getting the bird. (1.0) But mostly excitement with the feeling of  
 281 (0.6) gladness that it's there and (0.5) thanking it in some way.  
 ...  
 293 TC: How (0.5) do you imagine that (1.7) getting a deer might be different (.)  
 294 from (0.4) getting a partridge? (2.0)  
 295 Carol: I— (3.2)  
 296 TC: If you imagine it would be different.  
 297 Carol: Yeah, yeah. (0.5) I think (0.8) the thing that would be different is that I  
 298 have more of an attachment to a deer in the sense of (0.5) I've watched  
 299 them, they're pretty.  
 ...  
 302 Maybe I just have a little bit more attachment to a deer as a beautiful thing  
 303 (0.5) versus (0.4) a partridge I don't (0.6) look at and say, 'Oh, what a  
 304 beautiful animal ((laughing)).' You know, I just haven't had that sort of  
 305 (0.3) connection. It's always been a (0.6) a bird (0.9) that is (0.7)  
 306 hopefully a dinner.  
 307 And for deer (1.9) I haven't necessarily thought of them as meat (0.4) in  
 308 that way (1.8) until recently. So I think I'll have more of a (2.2) maybe a  
 309 (0.4) greater appreciation? Or not a greater appreciation (.) but it'll (7.6)  
 310 have a (0.5) a bigger feeling of taking something's life?

Yvonne spoke of anticipating a similar difference:

291 Yvonne: I think it would probably be different when I take something big? (0.4)  
292 Like a mammal. (2.3) I don't really— It doesn't bother me at all to take a  
293 bird (0.8) or a rabbit, which is all I've had so far is bird and rabbit. So  
294 small game has been— (1.0) I've been respectful and felt (0.4) that this  
295 animal— (0.5) and want to be sure that I use the animal and eat it and all  
296 that kind of stuff. (1.3)  
297 But I— I'm sure it will be different when I do take something (0.8) larger.  
298 (0.5) And (1.3) I could never bear hunt, for example, I just— (1.4) I just  
299 could— I mean I just couldn't— It would ((laughing)) be like shooting  
300 family or something, I don't know, it's just— I have a long history with  
301 bears and (0.7) worked as a bear biologist for a number of years, so—  
302 (0.7) And it's also an intelligence thing? And (1.0) and I don't know if  
303 that's right or not? but (1.0) maybe it's because there's more of a kinship  
304 (0.9) with (0.7) animals (.) that have higher intelligence, (0.6) bigger  
305 brains, (.) eyes in the front of their head, (.) other predators?

In these excerpts, the experience (and imagined experience) of killing a deer is contrasted with the experience of killing smaller animals such as grouse (also known as partridges), ducks, and rabbits. Though killing a grouse or a duck, for example, might be depicted as “consequential” (C272), participants who hunted birds conveyed that it did not bother them much if at all (e.g., “doesn't bother me at all,” Y292). Killing a deer, on the other hand, is depicted as “a bigger step” (A61), “kind of weird” (A63), “different” (Y291, Y297), and likely to evoke “a bigger feeling” (C310), even stunning a hunter who has killed at least two hundred ducks (M702-3). These terms echo Bob's depiction of killing a deer as a “big powerful experience” (B302), which he, too, contrasted with killing grouse.

These different depictions invoke several differences between the animals mentioned. One difference is constructed in aesthetic terms. Carol, for example, says that deer are “pretty” and “beautiful” compared to partridges (C299-303). Similarly, Helen told me she felt less comfortable shooting deer (which have “pretty eyes”) than she did shooting wild pigs (which are smart and deserve respect, but are not “pretty”). And

Linda, in her desire to take ethical responsibility for eating meat, spoke of her intent to confront the experience of looking the dead animal “in the eyes”—a kind of experience she felt would be more meaningful with deer than with turkeys, which are “less cuddly” and look “less like a pet.”

A second difference is depicted in terms of size. Part of what makes killing a deer “a bigger step” and makes it feel “powerful” and “kind of weird” is that the animal is “big” (Y291), “about the same size as a human” (A63), weighing “somewhere close to what you weigh” (B304).

A third difference is depicted in terms of kinship. This encompasses the descriptions above, of a deer’s size and weight being similar to a human’s. It also encompasses the fact that deer is, like you and me, a “mammal” (B303, A63, Y292). Yvonne takes this theme one step further. Though she is a wildlife biologist who understands the wildlife management benefits of hunting bears, she states that she “could never bear hunt” because it would be “like shooting family” (Y298-300). Bears’ “intelligence” and status as fellow “predators,” she says, give them “more of a kinship” (Y302-5) with humans.

In these various ways, then, hunting deer is heard to be a more significant, more powerful, and potentially more troubling experience than hunting birds and smaller mammals. Yet a number of participants also stated that hunting deer seemed more worthwhile, given the amount of food a single animal can yield. Art, Carol, and Thomas, for instance, all compared the amount of meat a hunter can get from a deer with the amount one can get from a grouse or woodcock. Hunting grouse might be “fun to do, a

nice hike” (A56-7), but hunting deer is “deeply serious stuff” (B312) and potentially “a good way...to live off the land” (A58-9).

### Summary of Descriptive Analysis: Discourses of the Kill

In the data presented in this chapter, the discursive themes of connection, responsible living, and engagement intersect sharply. Encountering the hunted animal is depicted as an experience of intense engagement. An ethical imperative is clearly outlined: to make a quick, clean kill. And the act of killing an animal is discursively linked to a variety of emotional experiences: (1) excitement from the engagement of the hunt and the final encounter, (2) sadness or remorse at the animal’s death, (3) pride and satisfaction at having succeeded in the hunt and at having procured food, (4) gratitude for one’s success and for the food gained, and (5) awe at the beauty of animals and nature, and perhaps at the mysteries of nature and even of one’s own success. Though participants struggle to find the right words, these experiences are depicted as deep, shocking, and profound—leading to feelings of reverence and a greater sense of responsibility and understanding.

The kill is also ethically coded in terms of attitude and emotion. The hunter should kill in a certain manner: not lightly, but with an attitude of respect. After the kill, the hunter should feel proud of his or her success, and should also feel sad at the animal’s death. The hunter should, in short, experience the mixed feelings reported by most participants. Participants also spoke of demonstrations of sadness and joy in ethical terms: some spoke of the need to shed a tear, some spoke of the need not to jump up and

down in delight, and some spoke of understanding emotional displays (especially celebratory displays) in which they themselves did not participate.

Killing is also ethically coded in terms of utilization. Participants speak of hunting only for animals they intend to eat, and deplore letting meat go to waste. Further, utilization is depicted as a form of respect, and full utilization is depicted as an ideal.

Finally, the experience of killing large animals, especially deer, is depicted as quite different from the experience of killing smaller animals, especially birds. This discursive construction—of killing deer as more emotionally significant—is accomplished in terms of aesthetic differences, size differences, and different degrees of kinship with the human hunter.

In short, the kill is discursively constructed as an intense, complex, emotionally charged, and ethically bounded act that (1) should be committed for certain reasons and not others, (2) should be committed in certain ways and not others, and (3) should be followed by respectful utilization of the animal's body as food.

### Cultural Propositions and Premises: The Kill

Based on the excerpts presented above, what cultural propositions might we formulate? I propose these:

- Making a “clean kill” is very “important.”
- When you kill, you feel a “mixture of feelings”: “excitement” from the hunt, “sadness” at the animal's death, “pride” and “satisfaction” at having succeeded, “gratitude” for the food, and “awe” at the mysteries of nature.

- You should feel both “proud” or “satisfied” at your success and “sad” for the animal’s death.
- Killing is a “deep” and “powerful” experience, for which it is hard to find “the right words.”
- The “experience” of the kill depends, in part, on how “beautiful” the animal is, how “big” it is, and how much “kinship” it has with the hunter.
- To be “respectful,” the hunter must “eat” or otherwise “use” the animal.

Based on these propositions and the data presented in this chapter, what cultural premises can be formulated? What beliefs and values must be presumed? I suggest the following:

- It is good to minimize animal suffering.
- It is good to feel sad when an animal dies.
- One should only kill when one has a good reason.
- Getting food is a good reason to kill.

With the exception of the last (which would likely be contested by most anti-hunting vegetarians), these beliefs are commonly held by non-hunters and anti-hunters. And inverse premises are spelled out explicitly by participants above: it is *not* good to make animals suffer, to feel nothing or to feel happiness when an animal dies, or to kill without good reason.

## CHAPTER VII

### “OUR TOO-MODERN WORLD”:

#### DISCOURSES OF HUNTING AS COUNTER-PRACTICE

In several of the preceding chapters, I have briefly noted ways in which participants discursively construct hunting in contrast with various aspects of modern life. In this chapter, I bring these prominent counter-discourses into sharper focus, highlighting examples of how the modern world is depicted and of how hunting is depicted in contrast. This chapter is based on an analysis of 18 instances of the terms “modern,” “industry/industrial,” and “technology/technological,” 16 instances of negatively inflected uses of the terms “society,” “world,” and “system,” and many instances of related terms and phrases (e.g., “insanity,” “crazy,” “everyday grind,” “factory,” “money,” “car payments,” “crap,” “high-paced”).

I examine the discursive theme created when participants speak of the modern world and modern living. I present interview excerpts that illustrate several ways in which such references are made. I indicate terms and phrases that can be heard as highly active, and suggest interpretations of them and interconnections among them. My goals are to describe the shape of this discourse and the cultural logic both presumed and created concerning hunting in the context of the modern world.

## Disconnection and the Diminishment of Experience

To examine these depictions more closely, let us recall several excerpts from the preceding chapters:

- “I always think about what we were like as a species before all this civilization and technology.” (Y510-1)
- “I started becoming aware that...engineering wasn’t something that necessarily provided a lot of value other than monetary reward, you know paying the bills kind of stuff. It didn’t really seem to make much of a difference in the world. Yeah, I could build machines, but at the end of the day what the heck does it do? So for me it was really an awakening of my...spirituality, I guess, for the lack of a better term. The awareness that I needed to reconnect to nature somehow.” (E32-9)
- “‘Hey, guys, you are part of this world.’ And we as a society in general have kind of forgotten that. You know, we’re out trying to make our money, so we can get our new cars and whatnot, and really...‘That’s not what it’s all about.’” (E337-41)
- “A lot of my growing up, I was very lonely because I didn’t belong to anything. And in this, I belong...to the cycle.” (H279-81)
- “When you’re doing it and you’re doing it well, you’re not thinking about work, you’re not thinking of how much money you need to make and car payments and that crap. You’re just you’re just out there and looking and listening and participating.” (B140-4)

To these, let us add other excerpts that have not yet been presented:

- 65 Sharon: To go back to your (0.7) primitive instincts, back— Just (0.4) forget about  
66 all this (0.3) crap of the world that’s going on now and just (0.7) kind of  
67 (0.3) go back to being one with nature, (0.8) more or less the way it should  
68 be.  
...  
265 The whole industrial world of—(1.3) The whole everyday (0.4) grind—  
...  
271 I’d just rather not be a part of this world, I just want to be a part of the  
272 natural world.  
...  
526 We just for some reason (1.3) seem to have disconnected ourselves from  
527 everything.
- 218 Ian: Unfortunately I think those same people never (0.4) sit on the ground (1.1)  
219 because their pants will get dirty. (0.7) They spend no time in the woods.  
220 (0.6) They have no quiet time, they have no (0.9) time to heal (0.9) the  
221 tragedy (.) of (1.2) this (.) technological, high-paced world we live in now  
222 that I think is (0.9) not (0.4) particularly healthy.  
...  
225 Sitting in the woods (1.5) fixes all this stuff. (0.7) It— It (0.4) balances. It  
226 brings us back to (1.8) what we did...all of us did.

In the excerpts above, the modern world is referred to as “all this civilization and technology” (Y511), “the whole industrial world” (S265), and “this technological, high-paced world we live in” (I221). As a whole, it is negatively depicted by some participants as “all this crap” (S66), a “tragedy” (I221), and “not particularly healthy” (I222). More specifically, depictions focus on the cash economy (e.g., “monetary reward...paying the bills,” E34; “we’re out trying to make our money, so we can get our new cars and whatnot,” E338-9; “thinking of how much money you need to make and car payments and that crap,” B142-3; “the whole everyday grind,” S265) and on technology (e.g., “engineering,” E33; “machines,” E36; “cars,” E339, B143; “industrial,” S265; “technology,” Y511; “technological,” I221).

This world, as participants describe it, has serious problems. Its primary activities lack meaning (“didn’t really seem to make much of a difference,” E35), and it fosters

both disconnection (“you are part of this world...we...have kind of forgotten that,” E337-8; “we...seem to have disconnected ourselves from everything,” S526-7) and isolation (“I was very lonely because I didn’t belong to anything,” H280). In multi-tasking and otherwise meeting the numbing demands of the “everyday grind,” we are distracted and prevented from “looking and listening and participating” (B144). In other words, the modern world is depicted as psychologically and spiritually unhealthy, out of touch with “what it’s all about” (E341). It is said to diminish the meaningfulness of people’s experience by stripping them of a sense of belonging, making them feel disconnected from the natural world. It is a world that one might “just rather not be a part of” (S271).

### The Food System

Recall, too, that earlier—in the chapter on discourses of responsible living—we heard how “the food system” (J57, J578, S56), “industrial food,” and “factory farming” (P96) are depicted as harmful to (1) human health (e.g., “not healthy,” J579; “food scare,” J580), (2) ecological health (e.g., “pesticides,” S207; “environmental costs,” C59), (3) animal welfare (e.g., “cruelty,” “heinous world,” P96), (4) responsibility (e.g., “depend on,” S206; “doesn’t think twice,” N764), and (5) connection (e.g., “detached,” O648; “don’t have any connection,” H101-5). This kind of talk about the food system was prominent in my interview data and can be heard as an important discursive strand in the broader weave of negative depictions of the modern world and modern life.

### Natural World, Natural Human

Participants' depictions of hunting, then, are accomplished in the larger discursive context of a modern, high-paced, technological, industrial world, with its cash economy, its food system, and all its deleterious effects. Such an unnatural and unhealthy existence, in such an unnatural and unhealthy world, calls for a remedy.

The participants quoted above depict hunting as a practice that contributes to such a remedy, linking it to "spirituality" (E38), "time to heal" (I221), "participating" (B144), "belong...to the cycle" (H281), "reconnect to nature" (E39), "fixes all this stuff" (I225), and "balances" (I225). How, though, is hunting said to "heal" and "fix" these modern ills? To what is "participating" in this way said to "reconnect" us?

Returning to the excerpts above, we find a cluster of terms and phrases that help constitute a theme discussed several chapters earlier: connection to ancestry and human nature. This cluster includes "what we were like as a species before all this civilization and technology" (Y510-1), "to go back to your primitive instincts...back to being one with nature, more or less the way it should be" (S65-8), "back to what...all of us did" (I226). Here, let us recall a few more excerpts presented earlier:

- "I think all of us have this wild...instinct inside of us...In a lot of people it just sleeps. But in certain few people it wakes up. And it just brings you back to our roots." (S518-21)
- "I guess it is really something primal...The desire to hunt and obtain stuff to eat that way is clearly something that's in me and in a lot of people." (Z224-6)

- “It makes you feel connected to something older, and to something that we don’t get to feel connected to very often.” (Z279-80)

Note that the “wild instinct” is said to be in “inside” “all of us”; mostly it “sleeps,” but in some people in “wakes up” and “brings you back to our roots” (S518-21). Similarly, note that the “primal” “desire to hunt and obtain stuff to eat that way” is said to be “in a lot of people”; if that desire to hunt is heeded, “it makes you feel connected to something older...to something that we don’t get to feel connected to very often” (Z279-80). The desire to participate directly in nature, especially by hunting, is said to be “in” and “inside” humans—or, as other participants put it, “built-in,” “hard-wired,” and “innate” (from the Latin *innatus*, meaning “inborn”).

In this discourse, then, the tragedy of the modern world—the wounding and imbalance that create the need for healing and re-balancing—is that we have become disconnected from both (1) the natural human within us and (2) the natural world around us. Reconnection to the former is said to be best cultivated by participation in the latter. Hunting—along with other ways of engaging with nature, including just “sitting in the woods” and having “quiet time”—is said to reconnect us inwardly and outwardly, making us whole, imbuing our lives with meaning, healing the psychological and spiritual imbalances wrought upon us by the modern world, reminding us that we are part of nature and belong in and to it.

Similarly, in the chapter on discourses of responsible living, we heard how hunting—along with gardening and other practices—is depicted as a meaningful remedy and response to the ills of the food system. Where mass-produced food is heard to be unhealthy, food you grow or hunt is heard to be good food. Where industrial agriculture

is heard to harm the earth, hunting and gardening are heard to be environmentally friendly. Where factory farming is heard to be cruel, hunting is heard to be humane. Where the food system is heard to foster dependence, hunting and gardening are heard to foster self-reliance. Where the food system is heard to foster disconnection, ignorance, and forgetfulness, hands-on involvement with food—whether in growing a carrot or shooting and butchering a deer—is heard to foster connection, honesty, participatory awareness, and a deeply felt connection to the sources of your sustenance.

In the context of these contrasts, we can hear a range of potential meanings active in statements such as this one, made when I asked Art what kept him hunting:

435 Art: There's something (0.8) satisfying about (.) knowing that you've (0.4)  
436 you've gone out (.) and grown or, or:: (0.5) in some other way procured  
437 your own (.) food. (0.8) And (0.9) that's— That's part of (0.6) what makes  
438 (.) hunting (0.9) maybe especially:: satisfying in our (.) too-modern (.)  
439 world.

The circumstances of “our too-modern world” are, he says, what make growing, hunting, or otherwise procuring your own food “especially satisfying” (A438-9).

It is in this context that Greg's utterance, quoted earlier, can be more fully understood: “Any activity that...helps support a culture of...positive, healthy relationship with the land and with the landscape...identifying ourselves as part of...an ecological system...not control over, separate from...is...so critical” (G915-9). Hunting, like sustainable agriculture, is one such “activity,” undertaken in the context of a modern world in which humans see themselves as “separate from”—and wielding “control over”—nature. The purpose of the activity is not only individual (e.g., personal meaning and satisfaction), but also collective, helping “support a culture of...positive, healthy

relationship with the land,” a culture in which humans identify themselves as “part of an ecological system.” Such a relationship is “so critical.”

And it is in this context that the following excerpt is imbued with meaning:

495 Ursula: Is it more meaningful to go to the mall? (.) and (.) shop at outlets? or to be  
496 out in the woods (1.0) tromping around saying you’re hunting. Maybe you  
497 won’t get something, (0.7) but seeing like (0.6) incredible (.) rainbows or  
498 (.) some moss you’ve never seen before.  
...  
531 By hunting, you really have to think about (0.3) how the animal lives (0.4)  
532 and what their habitat’s like. (1.4) So that’s a whole element of (0.5)  
533 thinking (.) about the place you live and the environment. (3.5)  
534 And you have to worry about— that the environment’s taken care of. (1.3)  
535 If we’re dumping toxics, if there’s a lot of persistent organic pollutants  
536 floating around, (0.8) if we’re letting things get developed or clear-cutting.  
537 (3.1) It’s all interconnected and I think a lot about it is (1.0) not just about  
538 what you’re sticking in your mouth but thinking about the interconnection  
539 and the bigger environment. (1.0)  
540 TC: “The interconnection”? (0.3)  
541 Ursula: Yeah, the way we’re interconnected (0.3) and the bigger environment.  
542 And if you’re someone who always shops for everything and sees it in  
543 plastic, (0.6) I think it gets hard to see that.  
...  
547 In a consumer-y, electronic-y, (.) buy-this-buy-that culture, it’s just— It  
548 (1.0) helps you balance that a little bit. (1.3) You have those days when  
549 you’re not on the computer.

Here, hunting is explicitly depicted as a “more meaningful” alternative to the cash-economy activity of shopping at “the mall” (U495-6). As a practice, hunting is said to help “balance” the effects of the modern “consumer-y, electronic-y, buy-this-buy-that culture,” getting you away from technology (“the computer”) (U547-9).

The meanings and values of hunting are said to include not only the procurement of food (“what you’re sticking in your mouth,” U538), but also experiences of beauty and nature (“incredible rainbows or some moss you’ve never seen before,” U497-8), concern that the natural world is “taken care of” and not poisoned by “toxics” or “developed,” and “a whole element of thinking” about “animals,” “habitat,” “environment,” and especially “interconnection” (U531-8). “The way we’re interconnected” “gets hard to see” when

your relationship with the sources of your sustenance is defined entirely by the modern food system: “if you’re someone who always shops for everything and sees it in plastic” (U541-3). This excerpt, along with others presented above, highlights how hunting is depicted as a way of cultivating a certain kind of consciousness: a natural human experience in, and relationship with, a natural world.

### Summary of Descriptive Analysis: Discourses of a Counter-Practice

In the data presented above and in the preceding chapters, the modern world is depicted as morally, physically, and ecologically unhealthy. Modern living is depicted as a model of how *not* to live, just as the modern food system is depicted as a model of how *not* to produce or procure food. Hunting—like other activities, including gardening—is depicted as a meaningful remedy and response.

The modern world is said to foster unnaturalness, disconnection, isolation, meaninglessness, ignorance, detachment, dependence, irresponsibility, forgetfulness, cruelty, frenzy, dullness of feeling, and a lack of spirituality. Hunting, in contrast, is said to foster naturalness, connection, belonging, relationship, meaning, knowledge, awareness, involvement, participation, self-reliance, responsibility, compassion, calm, intensity of feeling, and a fullness of spirituality. Where the modern world is said to foster perceptions of everything, including animals, as cash commodities, hunting is said to foster perceptions imbued with reverence, awe, and respect. It is in this context—where humans have forgotten their “roots,” feel “disconnected” from nature, and produce food with “pesticides” and then eat it “from a box”—that hunting takes on such potent symbolic significance.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

In the preceding five chapters, I have illustrated prominent ways in which interview participants talked about hunting. In the first three findings chapters, I highlighted three primary discursive themes: connection, responsible living, and engagement. In the fourth chapter, I showed how these themes were expressed in talk about the kill. In the fifth chapter, I indicated ways in which all three themes contributed to a counter-discourse that depicted hunting as a meaningful response to, and remedy for, various shortcomings of the modern world and modern living.

In this final chapter, I begin by reiterating key points about the nature of this study and its claims. Next, I draw together central findings from the preceding chapters and discuss discursive diversity within my interview data. I then note ways in which participants suggested the historical origins of their own discursive practices, and speculate on other potential sources and on how these historical strands are being woven together today. Finally, I suggest avenues for future research.

#### The Nature of the Study and the Scope of Its Claims

This is a study of discursive practices, of how people talk. It is important to remember that this study does not claim that all U.S. American hunters speak in the ways outlined above, nor that all adult-onset hunters speak in these ways. Nor is it even claimed that all of the 24 participants in this study spoke in all of these ways. (Diversity

among participants is further discussed below.) Other people (including some lifelong hunters) may speak about hunting in similar ways, in varying degrees, at various times. That, however, is an investigation that goes beyond the scope of this study.

What this study claims is that certain ways of talking about hunting—together forming a “cultural discourse of hunting”—are created and used by certain hunters. This discourse, as described and interpreted in this study, is rooted in a particular set of key cultural terms and term clusters, and is defined by particular contours and norms. Further, this study claims that this discourse is deeply significant to the hunters who create and use it.

This study also demonstrates one way of using the theory and methodology of the ethnography of communication and cultural discourse analysis. It shows how attending closely to what people say and describing and interpreting their speech can assist us in (1) identifying patterns of discourse and ranges of meaning, (2) formulating understandings of the sometimes-unspoken beliefs and values that underlie people’s utterances, and (3) linking these patterns, ranges, beliefs and values to broader cultural patterns, historically and in the present.

### Summary of Prominent Findings

To briefly recap, the overarching questions guiding this study consist of the following: How do people create and use discourses of hunting? How do these communicative practices render hunting meaningful? How do they render the larger world meaningful? What ways of living are cultivated as natural? What models are suggested for personhood, relationship, action, feeling and dwelling? In other words,

when these hunters and would-be hunters talk about hunting, what are they saying not only about hunting, but also about who they are (and should be), how they are related (and should relate), what they are doing (and should do), how they feel (and should feel), and what the larger world—and the human place in it—is (and should be)?

In the preceding chapters, especially prominent *cultural terms* included connection/connected, relationship, nature/natural, land, responsibility/responsible, understanding/awareness, participate/interact, respect/respectful, health/healthy, focused/engaged/alert, excitement/exciting, intensity/intense, challenge/challenging, powerful/deep, wound/suffering, clean-kill/humane, sadness/sad, pride/satisfaction, gratitude/thankful, and eat/food.

Briefly summarized, participants created and used discourses which rendered hunting and the larger world meaningful in the following terms:

- As part of nature, people are natural beings.
- Predation is a natural activity.
- People can and should experience meaningful feelings of connection with nature and land, with each other, and with their ancestral roots.
- People can and should experience engagement with life and nature, being fully present, deeply focused, and intensely alive.
- People can and should understand—and take responsibility for—their relationships with food, animals, and nature. Taking responsibility involves treating food, nature, and animals with respect and care. Taking responsibility also involves a moral and emotional confrontation with killing.

- Killing is a powerful experience that needs to be done respectfully and humanely, minimizing suffering. Killing should only be done for good reason. Respecting the hunted animal requires utilization of its body, primarily for food. Killing does and should evoke a mixture of feelings, including sadness, awe, gratitude, and satisfaction.
- Direct interactions with nature—especially those that involve procuring food, such as gardening and hunting—are powerful, participatory practices that foster responsibility and self-reliance, feelings of connection, experiences of engagement, and understandings of relationships.
- The modern, industrial world is unnatural. It makes people feel disconnected from nature and from their own ancestral nature. High-paced and money-oriented as it is, modern living distracts people from what matters, providing little opportunity for experiences of full engagement with life and nature.
- The industrial food system produces unhealthy food, and also harms and disrespects animals and the land. It disrupts our relationships, making people forgetful of the sources of their sustenance. In particular, factory farming of animals is cruel and makes people morally detached and irresponsible, ignorant of the costs and impacts of their eating.

- Hunting is a deeply meaningful response to and remedy for the negative impacts of the modern world: on nature, on animals, and on people's physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual health.

In short, hunting is discursively constructed as a deeply meaningful way of (1) being fully engaged with the natural world, (2) experiencing connection and belonging, and (3) cultivating responsible relationships with animals and nature, especially in terms of food. Notably, this discourse of responsible relationship includes both moral and ecological dimensions which, together, comprise an ethical framework for engagement with animals and nature. The meaningfulness of hunting is particularly constructed in the context of the modern world: as a response to modern life, as a physical and spiritual remedy for the disengagement, disconnection, irresponsibility, and unhealthiness of industrial society and industrial food systems. Hunting, in other words, is spoken of as a meaningful part of a natural way of living—a way of living that repairs and maintains relationships, cultivating a certain kind of natural person who is aware and respectful, who acts responsibly, who feels appropriately, who knows the land and animals, and who understands his or her interconnections with the larger natural world.

As indicated in earlier chapters, many of the premises underlying participants' talk about hunting—the beliefs, for instance, that people are natural beings, that it is good to feel connected to nature and other people, that people should take ethical and ecological responsibility for their relationships, that animals should be treated humanely and respectfully, that animals should not be killed without good reason, that modern life alienates us from nature and from ourselves, and that industrial food systems are harmful to nature, animals, and human health—are shared by many non-hunters and anti-hunters.

### Discursive Diversity

With varying emphasis, virtually all participants in this study depicted hunting in terms of (1) the theme of connection and belonging, (2) the theme of responsible living, or (3) both. Virtually all participants also depicted hunting in terms of the theme of engagement. (Let us not forget that these three themes do not “exist” in the data but are, instead, analytical formulations intended to aid in the process of interpretation. Let us also not forget that all three are interconnected.) Particular differences, however, occurred among participants. Despite the small sample size, these differences raise interesting questions. These differences also remind us that culture and cultural discourses are not “objects” that are “out there” somewhere; rather, as Carbaugh has noted (Berry, 2009, p. 231), they are living practices which are historically transmitted and used, re-created, and re-shaped by individual people in the present, in various ways and in various social contexts, acting and speaking into the future.

Of the 24 participants, 18 (Group A) reported growing up with no significant family or cultural connection to hunting or hunters. Some of these 18 said hunting was simply not something they thought or talked about. Others said it carried negative meanings, as their families were opposed to hunting, firearm ownership, or both. Three more participants (Group B) reported growing up with some significant family or cultural connection to hunting, but one that was diluted—that is, the connection was not particularly strong, was only on one side of the family, or was associated with some degree of negativity. The last three participants (Group C) reported growing up in active hunting families where the meanings of hunting were strongly positive. (Note: After

conducting my analysis and completing a first draft of this thesis, I sent all participants a document containing draft summaries of my thematic findings and a draft of this section on discursive diversity, and invited them to let me know how much of it did, or did not, ring true. In the weeks between sending that document and finalizing this thesis, I heard back from several participants. Portions of responses are quoted below, with participants' permission.)

I asked all participants what prompted them to start hunting. Among the 18 in Group A, who reported growing up with no significant family or cultural connection to hunting, most reported being prompted by factors which, in my interpretive model, fall under the thematic categories of connection and responsible living. Others reported being introduced to hunting by a friend or spouse and then having their interest cemented by factors of connection, responsible living, and engagement. Two reported always having an interest in hunting, but having no opportunity to learn about and participate in it as youngsters; they, too, reported that when they got the opportunity as adults, their interest was cemented by factors of connection, responsible living, and engagement.

Among the three participants in Group B, who reported growing up with some significant-but-diluted connection to hunting, one (Art) reported being an "easy convert" to hunting whose interest was prompted by wanting to procure his own food, especially venison. The second (Yvonne) reported having been an anti-hunter as a teenager, being re-exposed to hunting during in her late teens and twenties, and having her interest prompted by her concerns about food and by the opportunity to be more connected to the sources of her sustenance. The third (Linda), who had not yet started hunting, emphasized

that her interest was prompted by the desire to feel more connected to land and food, and—as a meat-eater—to take responsibility for animal death.

In short, for the 21 participants who reported having either no lifelong connection to hunting (18 participants) or a diluted connection (3 participants), the themes of connection and responsible living were discursively prominent in depictions of what prompted or cemented their interest. In almost all cases, the theme of engagement played a role as well.

Notably, the three participants who had not yet started hunting (Kara, Linda, Thomas) talked very little about engagement. They expressed curiosity about whether hunting would, for example, be engaging or exciting or emotionally upsetting, but they did not report being prompted by these possibilities. Rather, they reported their interest being primarily prompted by factors which, in my interpretive model, fall under the thematic category of responsible living. (After reviewing the summary document I sent, Kara emailed me, reporting that “a lot of that rang true.” She wrote that she primarily felt resonance with the theme of “responsible” living, including the “humane” treatment of animals, and also with the potential “meaningfulness” of hunting. She wrote that the spiritual aspects of connection—“mystical oneness”—did not ring as true, “though I sort of wish that were so.”)

Among the three participants in Group C, who reported growing up in active hunting families where the meanings of hunting were strongly positive, one (Sharon) said, “It’s really hard for me to say why I started hunting. And I think it’s because it’s so ingrained in my DNA through my family that it’s just something that maybe I was destined to do.” She had, she explained, “always been surrounded by hunting and the

hunting tradition,” but simply hadn’t been interested in hunting when she was a kid. She speculated that her interest in starting to hunt at the age of 19 may have been a matter of “boredom”; about the same time, she said, she bought a small boat to enhance her lifelong enjoyment of fishing. Yet, as we heard in the preceding chapters, Sharon also spoke of hunting in terms of connection (e.g., being one with nature, returning to our roots, spirituality), responsible living (e.g., providing her own food, knowing where her food comes from), and engagement (e.g., excitement, instincts waking up).

Similarly, Carol reported growing up in a family where hunting played a significant and positive role. She said she was “always interested,” but that she didn’t start hunting until she was 26, when she met her boyfriend, who was also interested, and they took hunter education together. Carol, like Sharon, spoke of hunting in terms of connection (e.g., feeling connected to the land, feeling connected to family), responsible living (e.g., hunting deer as an alternative to the ecological harm and cruelty of factory farming) and engagement (e.g., excitement, being alert).

Sharon and Carol offered no detailed account of anything in particular prompting them to begin hunting, or of being introduced to the experience by one person in particular. They reported that the interest simply surfaced, or had been there all along and finally crystallized into action. Yet, having been hunting for 10 and 4 years respectively, Sharon and Carol did provide a detailed account of what made hunting meaningful for them—an account that included the themes of connection, responsible living, and engagement. In this way, Sharon and Carol’s accounts of hunting and their journey into it resembled those given by the two participants from Group A who—despite having no significant lifelong connection to hunting—reported always having an interest. These

four participants all reported that hunting—as an interest or possibility—was a given; they also all gave accounts of its meaningfulness that included the themes of connection, responsible living, and engagement.

That leaves one participant in Group C still to discuss. (As we are now down to a sample size of one, we cannot identify patterns or draw even tentative conclusions. Yet a single notable exception can, at times, get us to listen more closely and think more incisively, perhaps raising useful questions.) Matt reported growing up in an active hunting family where the meanings of hunting were strongly positive. He reported, too, how he had been about to hunt for the first time as a teenager when the plans were scuttled due to the sudden death of his grandfather, who was at the center of the family's hunting traditions. That, Matt said, put an end to his hunting opportunities as a teen. It was eight years later, in his early twenties, that he started hunting. We could say that he is an “accidental” adult-onset hunter. But for his grandfather's untimely passing, he would have started hunting well before reaching adulthood.

Recall that, near the beginning of our interview, when I asked Matt what prompted him to start hunting he said, “I think the challenge of it is what prompted me to want to do it” (M80-1). A few minutes later, when I asked him what appealed to him about hunting deer and turkey, he spoke of camaraderie and teamwork. Toward the middle of the interview, when I asked him what it is about hunting that keeps him doing it, he spoke again of “challenge” and “camaraderie.” When I asked him if he could think of a particular hunting experience that captured what hunting meant to him, he described a duck hunt during which getting onto the lake was particularly challenging (due to ice that had formed overnight), “a ton of different birds” were seen, and the hunters' success

rate was high. The next day, he said, they hunted at a different lake using a “diver spread” of decoys, and saw ducks flying in a pattern he had never seen before (“a spectacle”). All in all, he said the hunt offered variety, challenge, and excitement, plus, of course, the camaraderie of his fellow hunters.

Matt’s talk about getting interested in hunting, continuing to hunt, and what hunting means to him, then, all centered on (1) particular aspects of the theme of engagement (e.g., challenge, excitement, variety) and (2) one specific kind of connection: camaraderie with fellow hunters. Matt was the only participant who did not account for his hunting by emphasizing either connection in a broader sense (e.g., to the natural world, to ancestral tradition) or the theme of responsible living (e.g., procuring his own food). One possible interpretation is that Matt did not speak of hunting in terms of broader connections or responsible living because these themes are not relevant to his hunting.

Consider, though: Early in our interview, when I asked what his impressions of hunting were as he grew up, Matt told me there was no “negative connotation” because he and his family were “people of the land” who farmed and butchered their own chickens and cows. “The killing of animals for sustenance,” he told me, “wasn’t really something that was removed from us.” Hunting, he said, was “probably just looked at as another way to put food on the table.”

Consider, too: Late in our interview, Matt described a duck hunt on the same lake where the ice had formed overnight. He and his hunting companions went out a couple hours early to see a meteor shower that had been forecasted. “We sat out in the middle of this marsh,” he said, “with just no light pollution around us and watched this meteor

shower. So that lake kind of holds a special spot in my heart.” From meteor showers, Matt and I went on to talk about Northern Lights, and he said:

You just kind of wonder at the thousands of years that people have been looking at that stuff, kind of what the reaction would have been hundreds of years ago. We’ve lost some of the mysticism of our world...that really was there not too long ago.

When Matt speaks matter-of-factly of being “people of the land,” of farming and the “killing of animals for sustenance” not being “removed from us,” and of hunting as “just another way to put food on the table,” he can be heard as giving voice to *cultural propositions* and *cultural premises* which most of this study’s participants came to later in life but with which they did not grow up. “People,” he says, are “of the land.” “Killing” is not and should not be “removed from us.” “Hunting” is “another way to put food on the table.” In other words, people are part of nature. People can and should take responsibility for their food, including the killing of animals. Hunting is one way to do that.

Similarly, when Matt speaks of watching the meteor shower “with just no light pollution around us,” of the “special spot” that lake holds in his heart, and of how we have “lost some of the mysticism of our world...that really was there not too long ago,” he can be heard as giving voice to beliefs that underpin many other participants’ utterances: Connections with nature can and should be deeply felt. They can and should have spiritual dimensions. We can and should look to our ancestral roots to regain a sense of those connections.

In these ways, Matt did give voice to the themes of broader connection and responsible living. He simply did not emphasize them in his account of why he started hunting, why he continues hunting, and what hunting means to him. Why? In my

analysis, I could only speculate. Perhaps, growing up in rural Wisconsin and coming from what Matt called “people of the land,” a sense of connection with nature and with food sources was taken for granted. Perhaps, coming from that cultural context and viewpoint, there was no need to reconnect or to reclaim responsibility. Perhaps hunting was so obviously a way of being connected and responsible that there was no need to say so.

These tentative interpretations appear to have merit. After reviewing the summary document I sent, which included a draft of this section, Matt sent me an email. “At first glance,” he wrote, “I would say you hit it on the head. I have never really thought about myself in those terms... so I guess you *were* right on.” Two weeks later, after he had read the summary document in more detail, Matt and I had another email exchange. He reiterated the importance, to him, of the challenge of the hunt (“a challenge against the elements, the game, and myself”) and also reiterated that he “had never thought about” his hunting in these other ways. I then asked him: “Are you saying that ‘connection’ and getting your own meat are part of what makes your hunting meaningful, too—alongside the central factor of ‘engagement/challenge’—but that those things usually remain unspoken (and not directly thought about)?” He replied:

Your assumption is correct. I enjoy the connection but it’s not something that is conscious. It is assumed. One of my favorite parts of the hunt is the predawn hours. Whether it’s walking through the woods using just the stars as light or setting decoys under a moonlit sky, 4 AM is a magic hour for me. In fact, I usually go out a half hour earlier than necessary just to enjoy more of it.

Perhaps, coming from his family and cultural background, Matt simply had no need to develop a different account of his hunting. In the context of a certain set of unspoken beliefs and understandings, it makes sense that an attraction to the “challenge”

of hunting and an enjoyment of “camaraderie” among fellow hunters would constitute a sufficient and acceptable account of why you hunt and what hunting means to you. In the context of other sets of unspoken beliefs and understandings, however, a different kind of account is needed.

In much of mainstream U.S. society, especially in suburban and urban areas, hunting (unlike bird-watching, say, or playing the guitar) is not something that many people just take up on a whim. Hunting, after all, involves killing and—in some places—invokes culturally and historically loaded beliefs about hunting and hunters. In many areas of the U.S., for instance, common beliefs include these: hunting is motivated by a penchant for violence, and hunting is practiced by uneducated rural people. Not surprisingly, participants in this study expressed keen awareness of such beliefs, of related stereotypes, and of anti-hunting discourses. (Bob, for example, spoke of people’s surprise when they learn that he hunts; according to their stereotype, he said, hunters are characterized by “bloodlust” and a lack of ethics. Nancy also spoke of people’s surprise at her hunting; she reported that people often say “You don’t look like someone who would hunt,” leading her to suspect that they have a particular image in mind, perhaps of “some Billy Bob stereotype with no teeth and a porkpie hat.” And Thomas mentioned that if he tried to explain his interest in hunting to a stranger he would try to “sound sane” and would try not to sound like a “bloodthirsty redneck.”) In such a cultural context, people who take up hunting may have a greater need to account for it, to themselves and to others. This is especially true for those hunters (e.g., Yvonne, John, Don, Nancy, Thomas, and Vic) who reported harboring some degree of anti-hunting sentiment earlier

in their lives, and for those (e.g., Walter) who reported still harboring doubts about the moral defensibility of the hunt.

After reviewing the summary document I sent, Art replied in some detail. Generally, he noted that “much of it rang very true” and that he found it “interesting to read about others who experienced similar thoughts and emotions as they went through that transition from non-hunters to hunters.” More specifically, he reflected on what that transition was like for him, and what it might have been like for others. For him, he wrote, “it seemed like a really big deal to start hunting,” despite the fact that he was a member of Group B who, in our interview, called himself an “easy convert”—he already enjoyed shooting firearms, he had uncles who hunted and a father who had hunted earlier in life, and he grew up on what he called “a hobby farm” where the family butchered ducks and chickens. “If it was a big decision for me,” Art observed, “it might have felt like an even bigger decision for members of Group A.”

In the moral and cultural logic of many adult-onset hunters from Groups A and B—and in the moral and cultural logic of the people around them—it may be insufficient to say, as Matt did, that they were simply attracted by the “challenge,” or, as Sharon did, that they don’t really know why they started. To generate a different kind of account for themselves and for others, they may have to think (and talk) differently and perhaps more carefully about their reasons for hunting and about the meanings hunting holds for them.

#### Potential Implications of Discursive Diversity

As a result of their cultural backgrounds and discourses, adult-onset hunters may be of unique value in several ways. First, they may be of value to other adult-onset

hunters. At least two participants in this study mentioned how much they appreciate talking with other people who came to hunting later in life. Nancy, for instance, observed that such hunters are more able “to separate themselves” from hunting and thus have a different “perspective” on it. Similarly, Don critiqued a particular outdoor newspaper columnist for being “all pure positive” about hunting and never questioning it; in contrast, people who start hunting later in life, Don said, “have questions.” These comments and the diversity indicated above suggest that experienced adult-onset hunters—and their ways of talking about hunting—might be a vital resource for new adult-onset hunters who need to “talk through” their “perspective” on hunting and their “questions” about it.

Adult-onset hunters may also be of unique value to state wildlife agencies, conservation organizations, and others. If agencies and organizations want to reach out to existing adult-onset hunters or recruit new ones, what approaches might be most effective? This might be better understood if additional attention is given to such hunters’ ways of talking about hunting and to underlying meanings and beliefs.

Adult-onset hunters—especially those who were, at one time, uncomfortable with or opposed to hunting—might also be of unique value in public dialogues about hunting. Because many adult-onset hunters understand multiple viewpoints and are fluent in multiple discourses, they may be an important resource in helping hunters relate to non-hunters and even anti-hunters. Many of them can talk and listen across the hunting/non-hunting divide. They might prove to be crucial “ambassadors,” as one participant referred to himself, especially if—as Dizard (2001) predicted—hunting continues to “edge nearer and nearer the center of our ‘culture wars’” (p. 23; also quoted in Boglioli, 2009, p. 8).

### Historical Origins and New Patterns

One of the assumptions of cultural discourse analysis, as I noted in the introductory chapters, is that expressive practices are historically rooted. In the findings chapters above, I did not devote attention to this dimension, as it did not appear to be of central importance to participants. For scholars and other interested readers, however, and perhaps even for participants themselves, there is value in taking first steps toward exploring this aspect, as it can help us to “develop insights about what is being evoked from the past, and what is being created in the present” (Carbaugh, 2010, p. 115).

Many participants spoke about “industrial food” or “the food system.” Though these terms carry potent symbolic meaning, they appear—historically speaking—to be relevantly recent; we would not, for instance, expect to hear them in archival data from a century ago. Yet the roots of such U.S. American discourses of sustainable, healthy, local, ecological food can be traced back at least half a century, to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* and widespread concern over pesticides. Indeed, much of participants’ talk about food and agriculture—encompassing the theme of responsible living and the ills of the modern world—is suggested by lines from the opening pages of the book:

There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings....deer silently crossed the fields, half hidden in the mists of the fall mornings....Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. (Carson, 1962, pp. 1-2)

Discourses of sustainable, healthy, local, ecological food can, in turn, be heard as part of broader U.S. American discourses—also emergent over the past half-century, also marked by books such as *Silent Spring*—of ecological degradation and environmental awareness.

Some participants explicitly referred to very recent books (e.g., Pollan, 2006) and films (e.g., *Food, Inc.*) that had influenced their ways of thinking—and perhaps their ways of talking—about food and its production. For some, these ways of thinking were central to their initial interest in hunting. For others, they cemented an existing interest. A month after interviewing Carol, for example, I received an email from her, in which she reported that she and her boyfriend were “even more adamant about hunting and gardening after watching Food Inc. last weekend.”

Many participants also spoke of the value of relating to nature in good ways: connecting to nature, participating in nature, being one with nature, taking one’s place in nature. This talk—like Carson’s phrase “all life seemed to live in harmony”—can be heard as evoking an entire lineage of American nature writers, including John Burroughs and John Muir. These writers’ thoughts and words were influenced by the mid-nineteenth century writings of Transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau, and related discursive threads can be found in Europe a century and more earlier, in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (and others) on the natural human in “the state of nature.”

Several participants also referred specifically to sources of discourse with cultural origins on this side of the Atlantic. Peter, for instance, spoke of having been a Boy Scout and learning about “Indian lore.” In talking about his desire to re-establish himself as “part of nature” in a “symbiotic” fashion, Evan spoke of having a “Native American bent” and of being part Native American himself. Nancy spoke of things she had learned from a friend of hers who is “Sioux.” And Don speculated about the ways in which “Indians” related to the animals they hunted. In these instances, participants’ talk

depicted American Indian cultures as sources of valuable insight into what constitutes proper relationships with nature in general and with animals in particular.

In speaking about relationships with animals, participants referred to other sources of discourse as well. Peter, for instance, said that his spiritual path had long been rooted in Buddhism, the first precept of which is not to harm other sentient beings. Since every animal eaten by humans—including Buddhists—is killed by somebody, he contended that it was “a cop-out” for Buddhists to think they could avoid bad “karma” by not killing with their own hands.

Several participants mentioned that reading played an important role in their processes of learning about hunting and learning how to hunt. Popular hunting and fishing magazines were specifically mentioned by Art, Bob, and Walter. Two participants mentioned online readings. And Thomas, as we saw earlier, mentioned reading “plenty in the last several months by people who are very...cautious and thoughtful” (T525-7). Taken together, these references suggest that participants’ own discourses of hunting were likely shaped, in part, by various texts on U.S. American hunting, including the popular “sporting” press, online articles and forums, and a wider hunting and conservation literature including Aldo Leopold’s seminal *A Sand County Almanac* (1966). These texts, in turn, are shaped in part by a tradition of American hunting literature that reaches back to the early- and mid-1800s, when stories about Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and the fictional Natty Bumppo became popular, and when new magazines—including the *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine* and the *Cabinet of Natural History and American Rural Sport*—began offering readers hunting stories as well as lessons in natural history (Herman, 2001).

Participants also referred to anti-hunting sentiments expressed by other people and, in some cases, anti-hunting sentiments that they themselves had expressed or held in the past. Indirectly, such references evoke a discursive lineage that includes present-day animal rights philosophers including Peter Singer and Tom Regan and that also reaches back to words penned in Britain over the past two centuries, by social reformer Henry Salt, humanitarian Howard Williams, and philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Participants in this study expressed deep concerns about animal welfare, especially suffering (both in factory farms and when wounded by a careless hunter). Though they did not speak at length about anti-hunting or animal rights, their talk about hunting was produced in the context of larger cultural discourses. Boglioli (2009) argues that mainstream American culture is increasingly dominated by a particular way of seeing (and talking about) nature and animals: “Killing beautiful wild animals simply does not fit into the mainstream urban worldview” (p. 3). From references made during these interviews, it was clear that participants were well aware of these larger discourses and the role that anti-hunting talk plays within them.

Participants expressed particularly keen awareness of local beliefs and values concerning hunting. At one extreme, participants living in Massachusetts and along the central California coast, for example, spoke of how hunting was not accepted in the local cultural context. At another extreme, participants in Wisconsin and Alaska spoke of how hunting was both accepted and encouraged. In the middle of this range of cultural values, participants in Vermont and Maine spoke both of local traditional hunting culture and local opposition to hunting. These references are suggestive of specific regional histories, each imbued with a range of discursive meanings.

In all cases except Alaska, participants also made frequent references to differences between urban/suburban and rural cultures, with the former tending toward non-hunting and anti-hunting values and the latter tending toward pro-hunting values. This divide can be heard as echoing a long history of urban/rural cultural clashes over the meanings of nature and animals and human relationships with each. “Ever since Marsh’s *Man and Nature*,” argues Jacoby (2001), “a key component of conservation’s degradation discourse has been the need to use science and the state to protect nature from the recklessness of rural folk” (p. 198; also quoted in Boglioli, 2009, p. 6).

This history reaches further back than the mid-nineteenth century writings of George Perkins Marsh, however. It is linked to the early days of European settlement in the New World, when subsistence hunting was understood to be a feature of the most savage, primitive human societies and was considered a threat to the civilized world of agriculture and its moral codes (Herman, 2001). And it leads up to present-day urban characterizations of hunting as “a morally deficient aspect of rural American culture” (Boglioli, 2009, p. 4). Thoreau (1854) voiced this tension between civilization and savagery a century and a half ago: “There is unquestionably this instinct in me which belongs to the lower orders of creation; yet with every year I am less a fisherman...at present I am no fisherman at all. But I see that if I were to live in a wilderness I should again be tempted to become a fisher and hunter in earnest” (p. 201).

Finally, participants made various references to self-reliant living, survival skills, homesteading, and the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This talk can be heard as evoking a range of cultural ideals and histories, from rugged, frontier-style self-reliance in the model of Daniel Boone to voluntary simplicity and ecological and

social responsibility in the model of *Living the Good Life* (Nearing & Nearing, 1954). (The Nearings, it should be noted, were committed vegetarians. Yet the basic tenets of their back-to-the-land ethic are echoed in participants' discourses of hunting.)

To summarize briefly, I have suggested that participants' discursive practices are rooted in historical expressive practices including (1) discourses of sustainable, healthy, local, ecological food and agriculture, (2) discourses of ecological degradation and environmental awareness, (3) discourses of humans living in a state of natural harmony, (4) discourses of American Indian ways of relating to nature and animals, (5) discourses of religious and spiritual practices including Buddhism, (6) various U.S. American textual discourses on hunting and conservation, (7) anti-hunting discourses, (8) discourses of animal welfare, (9) region- and urban/rural-specific discourses of animals and hunting, and (10) discourses of self-reliant living.

The patterning of these interwoven roots is part of what makes these participants' discursive practices intriguing. Broadly speaking, their talk emphasizes the importance of healthy food, ecological sanity, responsibility and self-reliance, and harmonious connection with nature; in mainstream American discourse, all of these are depicted as morally worthy. Yet participants' talk also emphasizes the achievement of these ends, in part, through the practice of hunting, which is only depicted as morally worthy in some strands of American discourse; in others, it is depicted as morally suspect.

### Future Research

This study and its tentative interpretations only begin to scratch the surface of the topic at hand. The central research question—"How do people create and use discourses

of hunting?”—was only explored using interview data from a small group of adult-onset hunters.

In future research, several avenues could be beneficially pursued. First, other aspects of these participants’ interview responses—their forms of expression, for example, on which I did not focus in this study—could be described and interpreted, thus fleshing out the rough sketch I have begun. Second, various studies—of interview data, focus group data, “naturally occurring” talk, and written materials—could be undertaken with a greater number of adult-onset hunters in various regions across the U.S. and in both rural and urban settings, allowing for broader findings and comparisons among discursive practices and underlying beliefs. Third, explicit comparative studies could be undertaken, comparing, for instance, (1) the discursive practices of adult-onset hunters and lifelong hunters, (2) contemporary and historical hunting discourses in U.S. American, American Indian, and European cultural contexts, or (3) the discourses of hunting created and used by hunters, non-hunters, and anti-hunters, and the various premises underlying each. Each of these avenues would yield additional insights.

It is my hope that future research efforts will constitute a portion of the “ethnographic, meaning-centered studies” for which Boglioli (2009, p. 13) has noted the pressing need. It is my hope that they will contribute to both scholarly and public understandings of—and dialogues about—the practice of hunting.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### Becoming a hunter

- How old were you when you started hunting (or got interested in hunting)? (So you've been hunting/interested for how many years now?)
- Growing up, what impressions did you have of hunting? Did you know any hunters?
- As a teenager or young adult—before you started hunting (or got interested in hunting)—what impressions did you have of hunting?
- Can you tell me how you got started/interested in hunting? What prompted it?
- What was it like to become a hunter? (What do you imagine it will be like?)
- How did you learn to hunt? (How do expect to learn to hunt?)

#### Hunting

- What is your favorite game to hunt? (What kind of animal do you expect to hunt?)  
Why?
- What kind of firearm or bow do you mostly hunt with? Why?
- What previous experience with, or impressions of, firearms did you have?
- Can you think of a particular event or experience that captures what hunting means to you? (Or: What is your typical hunting experience like?) (Or: What do you imagine your hunting experiences will be like?)

- Could you tell me what it's like to take an animal's life? Does taking an animal's life prompt particular thoughts or reactions for you? (Or: What do you imagine it will be like? Does the idea of taking a life prompt particular thoughts or reactions for you?)
- After you take an animal, what do you do with it? (Or: What do you plan to do?) Why?
- What is it about hunting that keeps you doing it?

#### Places and people

- Do you have favorite places (or kinds of places) to hunt? (Or: Where do you think you will hunt?) Can you describe one or two of these places? Why these particular places?
- Who do you hunt with, if anyone? (Or: Who do you expect to hunt with, if anyone?) What makes someone a good hunting companion?
- How have people responded when they find out that you hunt (or are interested in hunting)? (Or: How do you expect people to respond when they find out?)
- If you wanted a stranger to understand your hunting, what would be most important to tell them?

#### Closing

- Is there anything else about hunting that's important to you?
- Is there anything else about hunting that you find yourself thinking or talking about?

## APPENDIX B

### TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

- (#) Number in seconds and tenths of a second of silences, pauses, and gaps
- (.) A pause or gap less than three-tenths of a second
- :
- Prior word or phrase cut off
- ? Rising intonation
- x Emphasis
- ( ) Uncertainty in transcription
- (( )) Details and vocal sounds such as laughter
- [ ] Pseudonym
- ... Utterances omitted

Note: Emphases, pauses, and other details are noted to give the reader a sense of each speaker's pace and tone. Other details are omitted, as the author believes they would clutter the transcripts without adding information valuable to the kind of analysis being done here. For example, speech markers such as "you know," "uh," and "um" are typically omitted, as are most of the author's back-channel utterances, such as "uh-huh." Likewise, a two-second pause bisected by an omitted marker such as "um" might be transcribed as a one-second pause; here, again, the author's aim is to not to present an exact record of the audio recording, but to give the reader a feel for the pace and tone of utterances and the length of the silences between them.

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