

Investigating the human-nature relationship of wilderness leaders

by

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored how wilderness leaders view wilderness and understand their relationship with wilderness. The term wilderness leader denotes outdoor educators and guides who lead trips in backcountry wilderness areas. Guided by a narrative design, in-depth interviews were conducted with five Canadian individuals who have been leading multi-day wilderness trips for five years or more. During the interviews, leaders were asked to describe their experiences in wilderness, their relationships with nature, and explore their role as wilderness leaders.

Five main themes emerged through the interviews process. These themes included the leaders' definitions of wilderness, stories of time spent in wilderness and why they were drawn to wilderness in the first place, how they understood their relationship with nature, their notions of wilderness ethic, and how they see their roles as wilderness leaders. The underlying connecting theme of this research was that all the leaders felt strongly about their relationship with nature. Rooted in respect for nature, and a perspective of being a part of nature, they wanted to ensure that they travelled in wilderness in a way that was indicative of that respect.

This study supports environmental education research that calls for strong emotional connections to the natural world. This study also corroborates the critique that many outdoor education and wilderness programs lead participants to view wilderness and civilization as two separate entities. This study therefore advocates the need for wilderness leaders to continue to think critically about wilderness and be given opportunities to reflect and be challenged on their ideas of wilderness.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Description of Research Study

The intent of this research was to gain a better understanding of wilderness leaders' relationships to and understandings of wilderness and nature in general. The Canadian wilderness is a landscape that plays host to many recreational and educational pursuits. Employment in the outdoor industry has created a considerable network of outdoor professionals, many of whom spend a significant amount of time leading expeditions in remote wilderness areas. These people are often a gateway for others to experience wilderness. While expeditions in these areas allow leaders and participants an opportunity for discovery and exploration, the focus of these trips is frequently removed from direct connection with the earth and instead focus on recreation, leadership, and travel (Haluzá-Delay, 1999b).

At the root of my understanding of these human-nature relationships was the assumption that there exists a connection between an individual's understanding of and relationship to the natural world and the way that they teach and lead within natural environments. Starting with this assumption, I wanted to identify and understand the experiences and stories of leaders regarding their time spent in wilderness, in both leadership and non-leadership positions. In doing so, I hoped to explore how wilderness leaders have developed and come to understand their human-nature relationships, and the impact this has on their work as leaders.

My intention was to approach this research from a critical qualitative perspective using narrative inquiry to engage with the stories of others. Through qualitative interviews, outdoor leaders were asked to describe their experiences in wilderness and wilderness leadership, their relationships with nature and the influences on it, if it has changed throughout their career and

whether they feel their this relationship has had an effect on their practices as leaders. This research has not only allowed the participants and myself to consider more deeply our interrelatedness to nature and the lenses in which we view the land we traverse, but provides guidance for future research in this area on the pedagogical implications of human-nature relationships.

Personal Background

One of the first graduate level courses I took was focussed on decolonization and Aboriginal peoples. There has been a tradition of Aboriginal research being conducted by non-Aboriginals with little emphasis on the intentionality and investment of researchers, or the benefits of that research for those being researched (Smith, 1999). One way that academic research is being reclaimed and decolonized by Aboriginal peoples is by asking the questions “Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?” (Smith, 1999, p. 5). By asking these questions, researchers are being asked to situate themselves within their research. This idea is also prevalent in many of the now accepted traditions of qualitative research that suggest that the researcher is a biographically situated person. Their work is guided by their beliefs and feelings about the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). According to Absolon and Willet (2005), situating and locating oneself is “about relationship to the land, language, spiritual, cosmological, political, environmental, and social elements in one’s life” (p. 98). With these ideas in mind, it was important for me to share early on, and briefly, my voice and background experiences that connected me to this topic. This act of situating and locating helped to place myself within the

context of the research, and informed the lenses through which I see the world, make connections and draw understandings.

I identify as a white person, and as a woman. I am a first-generation Canadian from downtown Toronto where I spent most of the first 18 years of my life with my parents and two brothers. Situated in the middle class, my parents speak multiple languages and belong to the academic world (my father is a professor of history and my mother is a librarian). One question that I get asked frequently is how I grew up in such an urban environment only to choose a lifestyle that is quite far removed from urban centres. This is an interesting question, as I believe the transition has been both slow and continuous. Perhaps the seed was planted for me when my brothers and I were young and my father would take us on short canoe trips in Algonquin Park and weekends at Hart House Farm (a farm associated with the University of Toronto). Yet, when I was 13 my godparents took me on a hiking trip in Western Canada where my behaviour (hiding in my tent because of the bugs; complaining about the weight of my pack, etc.) likely led everyone in my family to believe that I would be a “city girl.” However, the following summer I attended Ontario Pioneer Camp, a residential camp in Southern Ontario as a camper for two weeks, and I was hooked.

I have worked as a leader in the outdoor industry for over 10 years. In high school I started spending my summers as a counsellor at Ontario Pioneer Camp. This experience opened the door to leadership in the outdoors by giving me my own cabin group and the opportunity to teach skills from archery to canoeing. During my undergraduate program at Queen’s University in Physical and Health Education, I took two outdoor education courses. These were very important experiences for me as they led me to apply for a job with Outward Bound Canada and begin work immediately following graduation in April 2003. Work with Outward Bound was

focussed specifically on self-actualization, group development and dynamics, skill acquisition and development, and leadership through multi-day expedition experiences. With operations across Ontario and Quebec, I had the opportunity to paddle many lake systems and rivers, using these places as areas for teaching and learning. These expeditions, for various reasons, often resulted in transformative experiences for participants. After a number of years at Outward Bound Canada, I was ready for a change. I wanted to continue to develop both my technical and leadership skills, work with new populations, and see new places in Canada.

I moved to employment with Black Feather: The Wilderness Adventure Company, which allowed me all these changes. I began leading adult populations on more technical white-water rivers, in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Without a specific curriculum or educational mandate, as is found at Outward Bound, these trips were travel and tourism-oriented, with learning and discovery more a result of participant desire, than leader orchestrated.

Background and Rationale

As an educator and an avid recreator with a sense of adventure, employment in the outdoor industry as a wilderness leader has allowed me the opportunity to explore the Canadian landscape and work with people. As an outdoor educator and a professional, throughout my leadership experience, I have always been aware of the environmental ethic of ‘leave no trace’ camping, and trying to tread lightly on the earth. As part of the curriculum taught at Outward Bound, we were purposeful about sharing these ideals with our students. However, this is as far as my explicit consideration of environmental/wilderness ethics went. And yet, upon exploring ideas of environmental ethics and sense of place in graduate school, I began to realize that my connection to nature goes beyond just seeing a new place, beyond improving my skills as a

paddler, beyond facilitating positive group experiences, and beyond mere employment. Although encompassing and informed by all the aforementioned components, I also felt a connection with nature that included a deeply rooted appreciation for the interconnectedness of the river as a life source. This growing recognition in graduate school of my latent ecological awareness led me to question how others in similar positions and roles viewed or have come to view wilderness.

Previous experiences also led me to ask questions about the human-nature relationships of wilderness leaders. In reflecting on dialogue with co-leaders before, during, and after trips, I have very little recollection of conversations that revolved around our perceptions of the wilderness around us, and how we wanted to include it within our trips. Our conversations were most focussed on logistics and human-human interactions. I speculated that there were at least three reasons for this. First and foremost, I believe it is because the organizations that I have worked for do not place ecological awareness high on their list of explicit goals. Second, as a wilderness leader, I belong to a community of leaders working within a particular genre of outdoor leadership. This genre is generally a combination of adventure and wilderness education. Finally, I personally may not have been ready to engage in the conversations I am now having. Consequently, I proposed the following research questions in order to extend conversation with fellow wilderness leaders.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe wilderness leaders' understandings of and relationship to wilderness and nature in general.

Specifically,

1. How do wilderness leaders describe their experiences in wilderness?

2. How do wilderness leaders view themselves within the wilderness context?
3. How has exposure to and time spent in wilderness areas affected wilderness leaders' relationship to nature in general?
4. What are the personal educational implications that arise from wilderness leaders' understandings of wilderness and their relationship with that wilderness?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review formed the framework for my methodology, data collection and analysis. I attempted to address the major themes that I believed would run through and situate the research and corresponding results. These themes were: wilderness, compassionate sense of place, deep ecology, environmental ethics, and the landscape of education, recreation and wilderness leadership. The first section, wilderness, was an attempt to create an understanding and definition of the term for the context of this study. Compassionate sense of place is a brief exploration of literature on ways that individuals can interact with their environments.

Descriptions of deep ecology and environmental ethics were to give this inquiry a theoretical foundation. And finally, the discussion of education, recreation and wilderness leadership, using a landscape metaphor, attempted to integrate the theoretical and practical in discussing the various fields of education and recreation taking place in wilderness areas, as well as the meanings of wilderness in outdoor leadership.

Wilderness

Wilderness is a widely used and highly contested term. Because this study focused on the understandings and experiences of individuals that have spent significant amounts of time in wilderness areas, it was important to consider briefly some of the uses of the term as it is situated historically and within academic literature. More importantly, the need to define wilderness for this research was threefold. First, in the parameters of this study, I chose to identify wilderness leaders as a specific kind of outdoor leader, therefore, it was important to make clear how I intended to use wilderness as both a descriptive and limiting term. Second, as a component of the

research question, understandings of wilderness by wilderness leaders themselves will be discussed and interpreted. Finally, wilderness in itself is a key term that provided context for the rest of this literature review.

The Oxford Dictionary defines wilderness as “an uncultivated, uninhabited, and inhospitable region” (Barber, 2004). This generic definition, rooted in negated verbs, connotes an undesirable quality to wilderness. In a duality that is culturally pervasive, we in the West are quick to distinguish wilderness from civilization. Historical definitions have helped to shape this attitude towards wilderness, rendering it uncivilized. “From the beginning... they [forests] appear to our ancestors as archaic, as antecedent to the human world. We gather from mythology that their vast and sombre wilderness was there before, like a precondition of a matrix of civilization, or that... the forests were *first*” (Harrison, 1993, p. 1). Ibrahim and Cordes (1993) and Knobloch (1996) make connections between deforestation and colonization, arguing that deforestation as a by-product of fear and animosity (towards forests) has resulted in the creation of civilization. This link between deforestation and colonialism has also been made in literature discussing early interactions between Europeans and Indigenous Peoples. Not only were the First People ‘savages’ in need of civilization, but the land they inhabited was equally savage and in need of civilization (Barman *et al.* 1986; Wilson, 1986).

As wilderness areas became smaller, there was a shift from wilderness being seen as fearsome and inhospitable to something worthy of protection, even if only as the location of potential useful resources. In 1964 in an effort towards wilderness preservation, the U.S. government created the Wilderness Act, a piece of legislation including the following definition: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man [sic] and his own works dominate the landscape is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are

untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain”

(<http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm?fuse=NWPS&sec=legisAct>).

Wilderness as both resource and the antithesis of civilization continues in the minds of many today. However, thanks to writings of poets and early naturalists such as Carson, Frost, Leopold, Thoreau, and Whitman, wilderness also becomes a place of beauty, escape and discovery. It was a place that enabled many a way to transcend the social reality of the time. As Evernden (1993) states, “Definable as the *absence* of social structure; [wilderness] is the realm of reality that humans have *not* fully interpreted” (p. 32).

In his *Introduction to the Wilderness Series*, Drengson (1986) summarizes these evolving attitudes towards wilderness:

The concept of wilderness for humans has both positive and negative connotations, for sometimes “wilderness” stands for a state of being uncivilized, lost, untamed, wild, unlearned, and uncontrollable, and so it is feared, for this wilderness as raw nature also exists within us as part of our biological and historical heritage. In addition, it stands outside of us as something totally and wholly Other than the human built. Wilderness has stood for the dialectic opposite of everything that civilization and artificiality represent. And yet there is another view of wilderness which sees it as a healing place, as the place of sacred groves, as a land with a will of its own. It is seen as a benign place wherein our own original, primordial, wild nature is revealed, a sacred space wherein is revealed to us the very source of human consciousness. (p. 1)

The description of wilderness with which Drengson concludes, as a sacred, healing, self-governed place, is the approach to wilderness with which I personally identify. Although it is idealistic to assume that wilderness is untouched, the wilderness with which I have chosen to associate is one that is separated from urban centres, a place where to some extent, “the processes of nature occur as they always have” (Miles, 1999, p. 321).

As discussed earlier, wilderness is a term that is often viewed as opposite or in contrast to civilization. This duality is often perpetuated in wilderness education and recreational contexts

creating a perception of nature being “out there,” resulting in a world-view that segregates nature and wilderness from civilization and human culture (Haluza-DeLay, 1999b, p. 449). In an effort to move beyond this duality, I would like to use the term “big wilderness.” For the context of this study, and in order to differentiate “wilderness” leaders from other outdoor leaders, that is, leaders of multiple-day expeditions, I believe this term to be most appropriate. Although the following quote does, to some extent, perpetuate the division between wilderness and civilization, it gives a feeling of the type of wilderness I would like to discuss further.

I am partial... to the moving trip that can give the visitor the feel of a big, continuous wilderness – one in which you can cross pass after pass and know that on the other side you don't drop into civilization, but stay in wilderness instead. In big wilderness you learn how important size itself is to the viability of the wilderness. It needs enough buffer to keep its heartland essentially free from the pervasive influences of technology. Such big wilderness is scarce, and is vanishing...People who know it can save it. (Brower, as cited in Devall, 1985, p. 238)

It is important to note that much of the body of literature discussing wilderness and definitions of wilderness are based in an American tradition. This literature has created and supported the notion of a continuum with wilderness and civilization on opposite ends. One end of the extreme continues to hold wilderness as ideal, intact, and protected ecosystems (Hendee, 2010, Henderson, 1992). This sense of an untouched wilderness is at the root of the preservationist philosophy. Those who subscribe to it assert that wild areas should be set aside from development of all forms. The conservationist philosophy, while still on the wilderness side of the continuum, advocates for responsible management and sustainable harvesting (Henderson, 1992). Recognized as a concept that began in the United States, wilderness today has achieved international stature (Hendee, 2010).

While it is the preservationist ideal that describes the wilderness in this study, it is necessary to identify that this study takes place in Canada, and that while there are many similarities between American and Canadian views of wilderness, there are some differences. According to Henderson in 1992, it was over the 20-30 years leading up to the 1990s that Canadian views of wilderness were beginning to merge with American preservationist views. In early settlement days, both countries shared a pioneering attitude towards nature, where forests were obstacles to be cleared rather than assets (Henderson, 1992). However, it was in the United States that they began to feel like they were running out of land, while Canadians persisted for a much longer time with a sense of abundant wilderness. As a result, Canadians have tended to have a much more utilitarian approach to wilderness, identifying the beaver and maple leaf as national symbols and the purpose of park development was to promote tourism and create employment opportunities alongside the notion of preservation and protection (Nelson, 1989). The large presence of the natural world in writing and literature results in Canadians seeing themselves as a part of the wilderness, identifying with the lakes of the boreal forest and the Rocky Mountains even when they live in highly urbanized areas (Henderson, 1992).

Compassionate sense of place

Place is a concept linked with human interaction and experience (Kupfer, 2007). In a discussion of place and space, Cuthbertson (1999) traces the identification of place from its origins in humanistic geography, and concludes that place is a human construct. It is a

phenomenon that is a product of values rather than logic and rationality. Place is distinct from the physical qualities of a space. Walter (1988) describes this distinction:

Modern “space” is universal and abstract, whereas “place” is concrete and particular. People do not experience abstract space; they experience places. A place is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered, enjoyed, or avoided. Abstract space in modern thinking means a framework of possibilities. A place is immediate, concrete, particular, bounded, finite, unique. Abstract space is repetitive and uniform. Abstraction moves away from the fullness of experience. (pp. 142-143)

If place refers to something concrete, sense of place is a term used to “describe the notion of attachment to the land or place...[it] is part of the inner landscape of the individual” (Haluzá-Delay, 1999b, p. 452). Sense of place has developed in the literature with a consistent assumption that it is best situated locally (Cuthbertson, 1999). It has been described as a strong sense of attachment and a quality of space that is influenced by residential status (Hay, 1998; Raffan, 1992).

There are many approaches to understanding sense of place. Geographers question ideas of rootedness, uprootedness and lived experience in relation to places (Ardoin, 2006). This vein of thought perpetuates the notion of a localized sense of place. Others, writes Ardoin (2006), “speak to the importance of firsthand experiences with nature to create a place-based sense of connection and compassion” (p. 113). These approaches, in conjunction with environmental education, use sense of place as an instrument to help develop environmental and ecological awareness, believing that encouraging emotional attachment to a place will lead to a desire to protect that place (Ardoin, 2006).

The combination of these two ideas then, the development of a local sense of place and a desire for place protection, has led to the research and development of a place-based educational model:

Emphasizing hands-on, real-world, learning experiences, this approach [place-based education] increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active contributing citizens. (Sobel, 2004, p. 7)

Gruenewald (2003), another place-based education scholar, extends this line of thinking by stating that “[p]lace, in other words, foregrounds a narrative of local and regional politics that is attuned to the particularities of where people actually live, and that is connected to global development trends that impact local places” (p. 3). Within a more focussed discussion on ecological place-based education, connections between the natural world and place-based education iterate the importance of bonding and developing mutually enhancing relationships with the natural environment before being able to act as a representative for its protection (Gruenewald, 2003, Sobel, 1996).

Significant Life Experience research is another large body of inquiry within the field of environmental education that corroborates the idea of the importance of formative childhood experiences in nature in producing environmental activists and educators (Tanner, 1998b). Inspired by conversations with conservationists, Tanner (1974) was inspired to ask the question: “What childhood experiences are necessary for a deep, abiding, and intelligent concern for the environment?” (p. 41). With his first article, “Significant life experiences: A new research area in environmental education,” Tanner opened a door that has developed into a field of inquiry that has produced a range of strong and conflicting opinions (Chawla, 1998a; Gough, 1999). The gamut of these opinions is broad: questions and challenges arise from research methods (Chawla, 1998b) to choosing the right subject (Tanner, 1998a) to theories of identity (Dillon *et al.*, 1999). What appears to remain unchallenged is Tanner’s root assertion, similar to place-based education, that experience, in some shape or form, can affect environmental concern.

Building on this idea of experiences affecting environmental concern, environmental educators are now asserting the importance of people's feelings about the environment. They are finding that feelings are more significant than knowledge of ecological concepts in affecting pro-environmental behaviour (Cachelin *et al.* 2009). Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) define pro-environmental behaviour as "behaviour that consciously seeks to minimize the negative impact of one's actions on the natural and built world (e.g. minimize resource and energy consumption, use of non-toxic substances, reduce waste production)" (p. 240). A prerequisite to pro-environmental behaviour is the need for outdoor experiences to trigger emotional bonds with nature (Louv, 2006; Orr, 2004; Sobel, 1996). This connection has been found in those who have chosen careers in conservation (Cachelin *et al.*, 2009).

These fields of inquiry in environmental education are important, yet where I believed the sense of place and place-based literature fell short was in its lack of attention to wilderness areas. I began to wonder where wilderness falls into the spectrum of places and spaces?

Are the people who travel within these areas unable to develop a sense of place related to these areas? Ardoin (2006), Cuthbertson *et al.* (1997), Cuthbertson (1999) and Haluza-Delay (1999b) all critique such a limited vision of sense of place, as it privileges a localized and rooted perspective. Cuthbertson *et al.* (1997) argue to expand "the concept of deeply felt sense of place to include another mode of acquisition, namely, one that is constituted by a lifestyle based on mobility" (p. 73).

In coining the term, "a compassionate sense of place" (p. 17), and addressing the limitations of previously discussed notions of sense of place, Cuthbertson (1999) explains that from a deep ecology perspective,

if place is indeed the junction between humans and nature, it is equally important for me to attempt to understand and value the places of others. Place becomes a

perfect meeting ground for a human understanding of others lives. While people should be encouraged to understand and gain a local sense of place in the way that is lauded by Berry, Ralph, Meyrowitz, and Kirby, we can also benefit from connecting our understanding – and our caring – of places to a more wholistic concept. This result may indeed be a more general and profound, and less geographically specific notion of place than we have managed to construct previously. (p. 17)

Haluza-Delay (1999b) expands this idea suggesting that a compassionate sense of place creates a desire in people to make full and genuine relationships with their surroundings, including the “whole earth, linking ecological sensitivity in a web of concerns” (p. 453).

This sense of place, in its greater breadth, may allow those who move across, or experience the earth differently from those who stay put, a means to consider their relationship to nature and the wilderness. It is the ability to connect to multiple landscapes, and weave that multiplicity into a whole. Snyder (1995) in a rich description of the interconnectedness of compassion, ecology and place, evokes a similar idea:

All of us can be as placed and grounded as a willow tree along the streams – and also as free and fluid in the life of the whole planet as the water in the water cycle that passes through all forms and positions roughly every two million years. Our finite bodies and inevitable membership in cultures and regions must be taken as a valuable and positive condition of existence. Mind is fluid, nature is porous, and both biologically and culturally we are always fully part of the whole. (p. 241)

Deep ecology

Deep ecology, a term coined by Arne Naess in 1972 (Devall & Sessions, 1985; Katz *et al.*, 2000; Taylor, 2001), is both a philosophy and a movement that developed as a reaction to anthropocentric views (Henderson, 1990; Sessions 1998). When gaining a broad understanding of deep ecology there are two important distinctions to discuss.

The first distinction is the differentiation between deep and shallow ecology. Shallow ecology identifies an environmental movement with an anthropocentric viewpoint: It is the “fight

against pollution and resource depletion. Central objective: the health and affluence of people in developed countries” (Naess, 1973, p. 95). It is the practice of attempting to fix ecological problems at the surface rather than looking at the root cause (Rothenberg, 1987). In contrast, deep ecology involves the act of viewing ecological problems systemically, and with an ecocentric perspective that asks deeper questions regarding the earth as an ecosystem. “The adjective ‘deep’ stresses that we ask why and how, where others do not” (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 74).

The second important distinction comes from understanding how deep ecology is often referred to in academic literature as both a movement and as a philosophy. In fact, the terms “deep ecology” and the “deep ecology movement” appear to be used interchangeably. However, Naess himself is careful in his use of these terms, using the term the “deep ecology movement” to “refer to a broad ecocentric grassroots effort...to achieve an ecologically balanced future” (Drengson & Inoue, 1995, p. *xxi*).

The deep ecology movement is mainly defined by 8 platform principles, developed by Naess and Sessions in 1984. Many authors (e.g., Devall, 1988; Henderson, 1990; Henderson, 1999) have reiterated these tenets since their conception.

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.” (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 70)

Deep ecology is also often referred to as a philosophy. Another term used to describe this philosophy of deep ecology is “ecosophy.” Coined by Naess as a shorthand for environmental philosophy (Taylor, 2001), Katz *et al.* (2000) define it as “a deep ecological worldview...a philosophical position or point of view that concentrates on the human relationship with the natural world” (p. *xxi*). It can then be said that supporters of the deep ecology movement come from a variety of different ecosophies. And so Katz *et al.* put forth 6 points that identify what is common to all justifiable deep ecological positions:

1. The rejection of strong anthropocentrism.
2. The consideration of ecocentrism as a replacement for anthropocentrism.
3. Identification with all forms of life.
4. The sense of caring for the environment is part of individual human self-realization.
5. A critique of instrumental rationality (the mode of thinking that makes efficiency and quantifiable results the goal of all human activity).
6. Personal development of a total worldview. (p. *xxi*)

Although it is not explicit in either the 8-point or 6-point positions above, writers in deep ecology consistently create a link with the natural environment when defining and describing the movement and/or philosophy. “Most deep ecology movement theorists now identify the movement with the deep questioning process, the eight point platform, and the need for humans to identify with nonhumans and the wild world” (Sessions, 1998, p. 173). This focus is evident in the development of deep ecology through Naess’ own personal experiences of nature. Well

known as an accomplished mountaineer, Naess has traced his identification with nature and strong attachment to the mountains to profound experiences with in the natural world (Taylor, 2001).

Sessions (1998) also identifies many early conservationists such as Thoreau, Carson, Leopold, Muir, and Brower as being influential to the development of the deep ecology movement with their ecological critique of anthropocentrism. Most of these writers were also deeply influenced by time spent in wild places. As discussed earlier, there are many different perspectives of wilderness and sense of place, however the connection between deep ecological thought and wilderness is prevalent. Deep ecological arguments are often explained in relation to its importance to wild places and personal connections to the natural world (Brown, 1997; Devall & Session, 1985; Henderson, 1990; Henderson, 1999; Katz, 2000).

It is important to note that published literature on deep ecology has declined over the past decade. Critiques of deep ecology have focussed on a flawed concept of wilderness that ignores human interaction and impacts, a socioeconomic and scientific naiveté, and the argument by ecofeminists that “deep ecology’s anthropocentric critique ignores androcentrism...women lose identity in merging with the larger ecological self” (Merchant, 1992, pp. 102-103).

Deep ecology jumps back and forth across the line of theory and practice and is self-proclaimed as ambiguous; readers of the basic principles of the deep ecology movement “are encouraged to elaborate their own versions of deep ecology, clarify key concepts and think through the consequences of acting from these principles” (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 70). Perhaps it is in the ambiguity and flexibility of the definition of deep ecology that it finds its depth and richness.

Deep ecology is emerging as a way of developing a new balance and harmony between individuals, communities and all of Nature. It can potentially satisfy our

deepest yearnings: faith and trust in our most basic intuitions; courage to take direct action; joyous confidence to dance with the sensuous harmonies discovered through spontaneous, playful intercourse with the rhythms of our bodies, the rhythms of flowing water, changes in the weather and seasons, and the overall processes of life on Earth. (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 7)

Environmental ethics: Anthropocentrism vs. nonanthropocentrism

The field of environmental ethics emerged alongside Earth Day in 1970 when activists began questioning the ethics of environmental policies (Hargrove, 1992; Knapp, 1999).

According to DesJardins (1999), environmental ethics were insignificant in Western philosophical thought until the earth's ecosystems were recognized as no longer able to sustain the quality and quantity of human life (p. 3).

An ethic is not easily defined. There are philosophical, moral, social, and personal ethics, as well as culturally and religiously associated ethics. Desjardins (1999) encapsulates a general definition of ethics in quoting Socrates' "how we ought to live" (p. 3). At a deeper level, ethics can also be conceptualized as the degree of consistency between a person's beliefs and actions.

Environmental ethics then, is a critical and rational inquiry into human responsibility and relationship and "how we ought to live" with the natural environment (Armstrong & Botzler, 1993; DesJardins, 1999; Kortenkamp & Moore, 2001; Zimmerman, 1998). It is perhaps the first philosophical field that calls for a viewpoint that is nonanthropocentric (Katz, 2000). Indeed, it is the distinction between anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric ethics that is central to the discussion of environmental ethics (DesJardins, 1999; Kortenkamp & Moore, 2001).

Anthropocentric views apply ethical principles to humans only. This perspective positions humans as the centre of importance, leaving other, non-human entities to be considered in relation to their contribution towards human well-being. Moral consideration and value, then, is only given to nature, plants and animals in regards to their service of human interests

(Armstrong & Botzler, 1993; Desjardins, 1999; Kortenkamp & Moore, 2001; McShane, 2007). Nonanthropocentrism is not just the opposite of this viewpoint, but the denial of it. It denies that “the centre of moral concern should be human interests, but leaves it open whether the centre should be something else, or whether we should think there is a centre at all” (McShane, 2007, p171). In a well-put question, Rolston (1999) asks, “Man [sic] may be the only measurer of things, but is man the only measure of things?” (p. 125).

Ecocentrism and biocentrism are two nonanthropocentric theories that challenge the more commonly accepted anthropocentric viewpoint by giving nonhuman entities inherent or intrinsic value (Armstrong & Botzler, 1993; Kortenkamp & Moore, 2001). Biocentric perspectives place value on all living things. Ecocentric perspectives move even further along the spectrum to include natural things that are not “living,” including, but not limited to, ecosystems, mountains, rivers, landscapes, and watersheds (Katz *et al.*, 2000).

McShane (2007) offers an interesting argument regarding the importance of a nonanthropocentric viewpoint. In a paper that discusses two specific ethical norms: “norms for action (what we ought to do), and norms for feeling (how we ought to feel)” (p. 173), McShane claims that from the perspective of norms for feeling, nonanthropocentrism allows for a caring of nonhuman objects that is inappropriate from an anthropocentric ethic (p. 179). In particular she identifies that love, respect and awe are feelings that are incompatible with anthropocentrism. Love gives value that “goes beyond what it can do for you... To respect is in part to see it as making a claim on your moral attention in its own right... To be in awe of something is in part to see it as having some kind of greatness that goes beyond you” (p. 176).

Wilderness plays a vital role in introducing many people to feelings of awe, respect and love towards the natural world. I myself have experienced many instances of these emotions,

often coupled with feelings of insignificance and humility when viewing a particular landscape, standing by a waterfall, or being caught in a wild storm, with little more than a tarp for shelter.

Do these experiences and emotions lead to a nonanthropocentric ethic?

Korentenkamp and Moore (2001) investigated the ecocentric and anthropocentric ethical reasoning of undergraduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Using four constructed ecological moral dilemmas, students “were asked to decide whether the main character [in each dilemma] should or should not support or perform the environmentally damaging action” (p. 264). They were then asked to list the factors that contributed to their decision making process. These factors were then coded as ecocentric, anthropocentric, or non-environmental. Non-environmental factors referred to moral reasoning that was unrelated to the environment, but instead to human relationships. Their findings showed that unless ethics were extended to the environment (i.e., there was information present regarding environmental impacts), moral reasoning tended to be non-environmental (p. 265). A suggested extension to their work that has relevance to wilderness leaders would be to explore ecocentric and anthropocentric ethical reasoning in populations

who use natural areas for recreation (hunters, anglers, hikers, campers, mountain bikers, etc.). It is likely that ecocentric and anthropocentric reasoning will vary among such interest groups because such groups have been shown to differ in their evaluation of recreational impacts on nature. (p. 268)

I anticipated that in my conversations with wilderness leaders, it would be evident that ecocentric and anthropocentric perspectives will have affected constructions and understandings of wilderness. I was curious how implicit or explicit these influences would be, as exposure to these ethical concepts would vary between leaders. In addition to considering issues of “right and wrong,” and issues of consistency between thought and action, I was curious to hear how leaders

identify and articulate their ideas of a wilderness ethic, how they may or may not have come to develop that ethic, and the importance they ascribe to it.

The landscape of education, recreation and wilderness leadership

Terms that identify activities of an educational or recreational nature that take place or revolve around the outdoors have created a landscape of terms that, without keen observation and distinction, can be tedious to sort through. As in a landscape that may be described with peaks and valleys, lakes and rivers, shrubs and trees, defining where one feature ends and another begins can be challenging. Haluza-Delay (2001) suggests that “adventure and wilderness programs exist on a continuum that blends recreation, education, and personal development” (p. 44). With this in mind, I will give a brief definition of terms, while understanding that the overlap and ambiguity amongst them in fact allows for a variety of education and recreational experiences. Thus, within the context of big wilderness and multi-day expeditions, it is unrealistic to limit these experiences to one particular definitional paradigm.

Not only do these terms overlap significantly, the individual terms can differ in themselves. This is the case for environmental education. The term’s first official use was in 1948 by the IUCN (The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, also known as the World Conservation Union), at a conference in Paris. Its first definition was published and spread internationally by this same organization more than 20 years later:

Environmental Education is the process of recognising values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness among man [sic], his culture, and his biophysical surroundings. Environmental education also entails practice in decision-making

and self-formulation of a code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality. (Palmer, 1998, p. 7)

Following this definition, the profile of environmental education became a hot topic globally in the 1970s with the Stockholm conference, the Belgrade charter and the Tbilisi conference. The 1980s was a time of consolidation, building on the foundational work of the 70s (Palmer, 1998). The 1990s saw the United Nations conference on the environment and development in Rio de Janeiro. The Treaty on Environmental Education for Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibility (1992) was drawn up at this conference. Written by an international group of educators and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), this treaty honours the cultural diversity of environmental relationships, and offers an inclusive and democratic definition of environmental education (Russell *et al.*, 2000). A young, dynamic and complex field for study and interpretation (Palmer, 1998), environmental education requires an interdisciplinary focus and holistic approach. All sixteen principles identified in this treaty challenge humans to consider their relationship with the natural world from a critical perspective that welcomes diversity of knowledge, culture and background. I have chosen to emphasize the five that I feel speak most specifically to this:

Principle 2. Environmental education, whether formal, non-formal or informal, should be grounded in critical and innovative thinking in any place or time, promoting the transformation and construction of society.

Principle 5. Environmental education must involve a holistic approach and thus an interdisciplinary focus in the relation between human beings, nature and the universe.

Principle 11. Environmental education values all different forms of knowledge. Knowledge is diverse, cumulative and socially produced and should not be patented or monopolized.

Principle 13. Environmental education must stimulate dialogue and cooperation among individuals and institutions in order to create new lifestyles which are

based on meeting everyone's basic needs, regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, religious, class, physical or mental differences.

Principle 16. Education must help develop an ethical awareness of all forms of life with which humans share this planet, respect all life cycles and impose limits of humans' exploitation of other forms of life. (<http://habitat.igc.org/treaties/at-05.htm>).

With this inclusive definition, let us consider environmental education as a broad starting point. It is an image of the overall landscape that we are working to understand. Our other related fields, outdoor recreation and pursuits, outdoor education, adventure education, wilderness education, experiential education, and place-based education, become features of this landscape. They are the rivers and lakes, mountains and valleys. It is important to note at this point, that I am using this metaphor in an effort to organize these definitions for the context of this study. By no means do I consider these definitions to be subsets of environmental education. In fact, each definition is a field of study in its own right. Instead, I intend to use environmental education as a big picture concept around which the other disciplines overlap in a way that contributes to our understanding of the whole picture. Each definition is distinct with its own specific qualities and merit, and yet at the same time, appears indiscrete. This view is then interchangeable and fluid, as the features both shape – and are shaped by – the landscape.

Let us first consider the lake of outdoor recreation. “Very simply put, outdoor recreation is any activity done outdoors” (Priest, 1999, p. 112). A subset of outdoor recreation is outdoor pursuits: Non-mechanized means of travel that maintain certain low-impact environmental expectations (Phipps, 1991; Priest, 1999).

Flowing out of this lake is outdoor education. Similar to outdoor recreation, the definition is extremely broad. Ford (1981) defines it as “education in, about and for the outdoors” (p. 12). However, Ford (1981) does elaborate on the meaning of *for* as the use (for leisure and economic

purposes) and understanding (the relationships to the natural world, the importance of stewardship, the history and culture and the aesthetics) of the outdoors. Outdoor education can often act as an umbrella term, able to encompass many of the ensuing definitions. The result of this is twofold: on one hand it helps to define a large movement linking education and the outdoors. On the other hand, it can also serve to diminish some of the important distinctions within the other educational paradigms that take place outdoors.

Let us move onto the mountain of adventure education. The main linking component in both environmental and adventure education is that many of the processes of teaching and learning take place in the outdoors (Haluzá-DeLay, 1999a). In adventure education the focus is on interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Haluzá-DeLay, 1999a; Palmer, 1998; Priest, 1999). These relationships are built and challenged using “kinaesthetic learning through active physical experience. It involves structured learning experiences that create the opportunity for increased human performance and capacity. There is a conscious reflection on the experience and application that carries it beyond the present moment” (Bailey, 1999, p. 39).

Perhaps the valley beside the mountain is wilderness education. Officially founded in 1977, the Wilderness Education Association (WEA) focussed on the importance of outdoor leadership to “improve the safety and quality of outdoor trips and enhance the conservation of the wild outdoors” (Teeters & Lupton, 1999, p. 77). In concurrence with the establishment of the Wilderness Act in 1964, Paul Petzoldt founded the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) in the same year. He saw wilderness education as “learning to use the wilderness with so little disturbance that the signs of our passing will be healed by the seasonal rejuvenation of nature” (Phipps, 1991, p. 5). He created the NOLS curriculum as an opportunity to train more people to use the wilderness properly (Bachert, 1999). Wilderness education has a definite focus on the

development of outdoor leadership skills. This may be due to the remote characteristics of wilderness environments.

The trees that dot and colour the landscape of environmental education represent experiential education. It is defined as “a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values” (Association for Experiential Education, 2007). Dewey (1958), one of the original thinkers in experiential education, writes that “[e]xperience” denotes the planted field, the sowed seeds, the reaped harvests, the changes of night and day, spring and autumn, wet and dry, heat and cold, that are observed, feared, longed for; it also denotes the one who plants and reaps, who works and rejoices, hopes, fears, plans” (p. 8). He emphasizes the importance of the connection between experience and theory. Experiential learning models build on Dewey’s early articulation of theory and experience in the learning process (Wurdinger & Priest, 1999). Although not asserted by Dewey, these models often suggest that the starting point of learning is concrete experience. Kolb’s (1984) model of experiential learning includes four steps. The first, concrete experience is followed by observation and reflection. The third step involves the formation of abstract concepts and generalization. This link between theory and practice then serves the fourth step, which allows for the testing of initial experiences to serve as information for future experiences. Although Kolb’s model generally starts with concrete experiences, it is explained cyclically, suggesting a continuity of experience and reflection. Experiential education is a bit of chameleon. Like the trees that grow up the mountainside, or line the shores of watersheds, it can find a place and enrich many educational and recreational models. “Much of environmental education is

experiential, involving outdoor experiences, issue investigation, role playing, service learning, and more” (Haluzá-Delay, 1999a, p. 129).

The final important terms are place-based education and a compassionate sense of place. As mentioned earlier, these terms focus on our landscape as a place. These terms turn our attention away from the specific features, and instead, consider our interaction and experience of a place, and our caring and connection to that place, whether we are dwelling there or passing through.

I chose to discuss these definitions specifically because the wilderness leaders interviewed in this study came from a combination of educational and recreational backgrounds. Wilderness trips are multi-day, self-propelled adventures. In this context, “the line between education and recreation is indistinct” (Miles, 1988, p. 1). They are opportunities for people to experience wilderness, begin to develop a compassionate sense of place, and find an avenue to challenge anthropocentric paradigms.

However, they also have the potential to do just the opposite. Societal and programmatic barriers limit individuals from taking experiences in wilderness environments and using them as an opportunity to critically examine human-nature relationships (Haluzá-DeLay, 1999b, Martin, 1999). This is because wilderness adventure programs often emphasize activity and travel over connection to place, a mentality of challenge and conquer towards wilderness environments, environmental practices that are limited to no-trace camping, and the perpetuation of the nature-civilization duality (Haluzá-DeLay, 1999b).

Leaders of programs that take place in wilderness areas are in a position to shape these programs. This ability to affect others and the land travelled upon is in itself a responsibility.

Yet, it is just one of many responsibilities. The following definition gives a brief and accurate description of wilderness leadership. Describing it as

a process of influence... Leaders influence others to create, identify, work toward, achieve, share, and celebrate mutually acceptable goals...designated outdoor leaders hold legal and moral responsibilities for teaching and supervising their groups as well as for ensuring safety and protecting the natural environment. (Priest & Gass, 1997, p. 3)

Raiola and Sugarman (1999) conducted a literature review in outdoor leadership that identified nine specific competencies for the education and preparation of leaders. Included as one of the nine is attention to environmental issues, asserting that “outdoor leaders and educators have important social and political implications for the use of and general attitudes toward the natural environment” (p. 245).

The outdoor wilderness leader has a weighty role. First, the implications of our discussion on the landscape of terms – as both individual and part of a whole – can give wilderness leaders a lot to think about. Often, their primary considerations are the mandates of their organization: What is the “main” goal of their program? Is it the environment and interactions with the environment? Is it personal growth? Is it leisure and relaxation? Or is it skill acquisition? Perhaps it is all of the above.

Second are the implications of leadership. What roles do individuals give themselves? As a teacher, guide, educator, instructor? Perhaps there is not time or a place in the program for formal lessons; does this make a program not educational? Do actions speak louder, or just as loud as words? Because leaders often act independently or in pairs, their support and resources to carry out or even consider all these roles is likely limited.

Of interest to me, given the importance and place of environmental issues in outdoor leadership, was how leaders construct and view wilderness. How have they come to these

understandings? Is wilderness a critical landscape with important social and political implications or is it a playground that is separated from civilization? Or is it something else entirely? Whatever their views on wilderness and the environment, how do these views affect their role as leaders? Have they even contemplated these questions? Do they consider these questions relevant?

Chapter Three – Methods

To reiterate, the purpose of this study was to explore and describe wilderness leaders' understandings of, and relationship to, wilderness and nature in general.

Specifically, I was asking:

1. How do wilderness leaders describe their experiences in wilderness?
2. How do wilderness leaders view themselves within the wilderness context?
3. How has exposure to and time spent in wilderness areas affected wilderness leaders' relationship to nature in general?
4. What are the personal educational implications that arise from wilderness leaders' understandings of wilderness and their relationship with that wilderness?

Research Design

In order to explore these research questions, I used a critical qualitative approach that was guided by narrative inquiry. In an introduction to qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). In an attempt to make the world visible, researchers endeavour to interpret experiences, events, and the meanings people bring to these phenomena. Dividing the history of qualitative research into seven moments, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) label the present – the seventh moment – as a time that asks the social science and humanities to “become sites for critical conversations” (p. 3). Data are collected using a variety of methods and are understood through a wide range of interconnected, interpretive practices. Implicit in this effort to gain better understanding is the idea that “each practice makes the world visible in a different way” (pp. 3-4).

Another characteristic of qualitative research is the inseparability of what Creswell (2003) calls the “researcher-self” and the “personal-self” (p. 182). The result of this close linkage is the responsibility of the researcher to reflect openly on his/her personal story, acknowledging that all inquiry is value-laden. With “no clear window into the inner life of an individual” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 19), qualitative researchers draw from multiple interpretive communities, moving fluidly between public and private, scientific and sacred, disciplined inquiry and artistic expression (p. x).

Given my personal background as a wilderness leader, and connection to the field of wilderness tripping, I wanted to use an approach that welcomed the researcher’s voice as part of the inquiry process. Narrative research allows space for the researcher’s voice in both the research process and representation, as it “is as much a way of knowing ourselves as a way of organizing and communicating the experiences of others” (Hart, 2002, p. 143).

Narratives tend to be strongly autobiographical (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Richardson claims that “[p]eople who write are always writing about their lives” (2001, p. 34). At the heart of a narrative inquiry is the relationship between the researcher and topic (Reid & Robertson, 2005; Spector-Mersel, 2010). The experiences of the researcher are directly linked with the experiences of the research participants, and it is experiences that are placed at the root of narrative research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the idea of experience in the context of temporality and continuity, as experiences fall on a continuum where they are not singular events. They have come out of previous experiences and will also affect future experiences. As a result, they are often fragments of another whole story. If experiences are studied and presented as narrative, as lived stories, it is important to remember that they do not finish at the end of the research.

An example of narrative inquiry in the field of outdoor leadership is a study conducted by Reid and Richardson (2000), who examined the development process of women as leaders in the outdoors. Their study was important to them personally, as the authors were themselves women who lead in the outdoors. They shared a self-proclaimed passionate interest in this area of inquiry, and believed that there was need to study the individual perspectives of women in the field. They found that narrative inquiry was well suited to their study as they were able to write and position themselves into the story as both researchers and participants. Through narrative inquiry, they were able to honour the creation of knowledge from individual responses, and were able to provide a representation of their findings for the non-academic community that increased accessibility to the research.

I must note that while I intended to use a narrative research design for this study, there were some ways in which I did not follow the narrative approach completely. In arguing for a narrative paradigm, Spector-Mersel (2010) explains that narrative ontology, epistemology, and methodology focuses on stories, and “for this reason narrative interviews often begin with an open, non-direct question (*Tell me the story of your life...*), encouraging the flow of a story and inviting a temporal account” (p.214). While I did collect stories in my interviews, my questions were more direct than Spector-Mersel (2010) would suggest. Perhaps this was a result of me not completely understanding narrative research prior to the start of my study. Nonetheless, I still left much room in my interviews for other topics to emerge, and given it was stories and understanding that I wished to draw out, I believe that narrative was indeed the correct approach.

Methods

Interviews

Interviewing allowed me to hear other people's stories. Stories are one particular way of knowing (Seidman, 1991). Interviews are a way of accessing people's experiences and the meaning made from those experiences. Traditionally, interviews were seen as face-to-face, verbal interactions between two people, although phone interviews, email conversations, and focus groups can also be seen as a type of interviewing. They can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Fontana & Frey, 2000). In structured interviews, interviewers ask the same set of questions to each interviewee, allowing for little variation in responses. Conversely, unstructured, open-ended interviews allow for a rich variety of information, but may be limited in focus.

Although interviewing often focuses solely on the stories of others, Ellis and Berger (2001) advocate reflexive dyadic interviewing as one way of including the researcher's experiences within the process of research. Central to this method is to facilitate the interview as a conversation rather than relying on a more conventional hierarchical structure. This gives the researcher a chance to share and reflect on personal experiences during the interview allowing for the co-production of meaning with the interviewee. When describing the outcomes of the interview, it is not only a reflection on the stories shared by the interviewee, but the interaction of the researcher's personal stories and their use and understanding of the knowledge shared. "Thus the final product includes the cognitive and emotional reflections of the researcher, which add context and layers to the story being told about participants" (pp. 853-854).

I conducted five semi-structured interviews, one in person, and four by telephone. All interviews were with individuals who have been leading multi-day wilderness trips for five years

or more. I intentionally chose to interview leaders with at least 5 years of field experience, as I wanted to discuss how time spent in wilderness has affected them. I chose to focus on this small number of participants to allow for greater depth of exploration (Glesne, 2006), as I could allot more time to each interview. In order to increase the breadth of this study, the leaders had experiences working with a variety of recreational and/or educational organizations. However, it is important to note that participants still worked within a specific genre of outdoor leadership that is denoted by the term “wilderness leader.”

It is also important to note that I was previously familiar with all of the research participants, either directly or through a mutual acquaintance. The benefit of these prior relationships was that it allowed for a deeper level of dialogue and easier conversation, and it gave us mutual understanding and a starting point for our interviews. Conversely, a limitation could be decreased breadth due to somewhat similar work backgrounds.

I interviewed participants of both genders. As with the field in general, participants were of a socio-culturally homogenous background: identifying as white, lower-to-upper middle class, Canadian citizens.

Interviews were audio taped and varied from 60-150 minutes in length. There were a number of scripted interview questions, however the atmosphere of the interview remained open-ended and allowed for conversation involving both shared and diverse experiences between the participant and myself. In order to enhance the interview conversation I sent the participants a number of the interview questions in advance to allow them a chance to reflect prior to the interview. Some participants took the time to think about these questions, others only had time to glance at them prior to the interview. All interviews followed standard ethics protocols.

In the spirit of a narrative research design, I sent the participants the transcript of their interview asking for comments and agreement. Some participants replied, others did not. All who replied were satisfied that the transcripts accurately reflected their interview and their experiences; presumably those who did not reply felt the same way as they expressed no concerns.

Data Analysis

After I transcribed the interviews from the audio recordings, I read through each transcript at least three times while making a list of any words that appeared to be significant. Using these theme words I eventually came up with five meta-themes that captured most of these words.

For each meta-theme I read through each interview transcript again while cutting and pasting direct quotations into a word document. These documents became the basis of my findings chapter. Re-reading the direct quotations from the interviews alongside the compiled theme words helped me to make connections between the narratives.

One challenge I faced was deciding how to best represent the voices of the participants and whether to use pseudonyms to highlight individual responses. In the end, I decided not to focus on individuals as I found that the writing was more fluid when I grouped their voices together.

Representation

“It is widely agreed that in every report of narrative research the narrators’ voices should be heard clearly, mainly by way of extensive quotations of their own words” (Spector-Mersel,

2010, p. 218). In trying to follow a narrative research design, I have tried to leave the voices of the participants clear and intact by using many quotations in the findings chapter.

I am inspired by academic writing that engages readers through the telling of stories, writing that blends theory and practice in an attempt to make theory relevant and tangible, writing that makes connections to both a bigger and smaller picture, and writing that occasionally pulls at the emotions of the reader. I hope that I was able to write in these ways and also in a way that is easily readable and interesting to the reader. I also hope that if wilderness leaders choose to read this study that the results will resonate with their own experiences yet also challenge them to consider their own stance on the ideas presented.

Ethics

All individuals who participated in this study did so with written consent. Prior to data collection with participants, formal approval for this study was obtained through the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. Potential participants were approached via email with a brief introduction to the study (Appendix B). Upon expressed interest of participation, they received an official letter (Appendix C) explaining the study in more detail, as well as the appropriate consent form (Appendix D). These forms were exchanged in person or via mail/email and informed the potential participants that participation in the study was voluntary and that they were able to withdraw at any time. Once consent is established we set a time for an interview.

Data collection was done through face-to-face and telephone interviews. All data collected remains confidential, as does the anonymity of the research participants. All participants were treated with respect throughout the interview process. Participation in the study did not pose any chance of physical or psychological harm or potential risk to the participants at

any time during the study. There was no deception involved in the study. Data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years, after which it will be destroyed. The findings of the study will be available to participants upon the completion of the thesis if they request it.

Chapter Four: Findings

Five main themes emerged in the interviews giving context to how the wilderness leaders understood their relationship to wilderness and the influence of that relationship on their role as leaders. First, the participants offered their definitions of wilderness. Second, they shared stories of time spent in wilderness and why they were drawn to work in those areas. Third, they described how they understood their relationship with nature. Fourth, they discussed their notions of wilderness ethic and what led them to their ethic. Finally, the participants described their roles as wilderness leaders.

At the start of each interview I began with a word association, asking each participant to respond to the words/phrases I gave them with the first word that came to mind. The seven words/phrases I used were: wilderness, anthropocentrism, bear, sense of place, river, education, and mosquito. These words were chosen following the literature review and prior to interviews. I chose four of the words (wilderness, anthropocentrism, sense of place, and education) as a result of the themes identified in the literature review. The other words were drawn from my experiences in wilderness and a curiosity how the other leaders would respond. River was chosen because much of my time in wilderness has been spent on rivers and I feel a strong connection to them. Bear and mosquito were both chosen because they exist as a prevalent part of the Canadian wilderness experiences, and I hoped that time and experiences in wilderness might affect the way the leaders related to bears and mosquitos. I have begun each of the five sections with one or two of these words in bold followed by the responses as an evocative way to kick off each section.

Theme One: Wilderness

Wilderness

Summer

Lakes

Canoeing

Trees

Rivers

Here participants offered their definitions and understanding of wilderness. They also described how their definitions of wilderness were tied to their Canadian identity. Not surprisingly the first and most common answer to my question, “How do you define wilderness?” was that of specific examples of wilderness as devoid of human interference. All participants described wilderness as without much infrastructure in the form of cities, roads, towns, dams, bridges, and motorized boats or cars. They described wilderness as places that are unchanged by humans or outside of the control of humans.

As wilderness leaders, all participants are certified or have been certified as Wilderness First Responders, thus for them, wilderness is also defined as being 2 hours away from a medical facility. Once outside of this specified limit, certified responders are able to implement “wilderness protocols” for certain injuries or conditions. Two participants specifically referenced this definition as they talked about wilderness.

Another interesting factor that was mentioned often was how much the presence of others affected the *feeling* of an area being wilderness. For example, one participant said,

If I was floating in the middle of North Tea Lake in the middle of summer and every campsite was full and there were campfires all around and motor boats zooming up and down, it wouldn't feel like wilderness to me. But if I was standing in the middle of North Tea Lake in the middle of winter, in the exact same spot, it would be wilderness to me.

In a similar vein, another participant described the disappointment of a client on one of his trips:

He in particular wanted the typical wilderness trip where you don't see anybody, there's not a sign of anybody, and it just so happened that we were crisscrossing other parties... and you could see this fellow's mood would be shot for the next little while.

As we discussed their understandings of wilderness further, participants recognized quickly the contradictions and caveats that were popping up in their examples of wilderness. While their initial definitions emphasized nature without people and human-made things, the examples given through their practical experience of guiding and instructing wilderness trips sometimes did include evidence of people and their structures. This raised the question: how much human interference and infrastructure can be present before a place is not wilderness anymore? One participant described a "certain scarcity" of the built environment (i.e., not very many roads, houses, buildings, and motors), another referred to a dammed branch of a river that was still wilderness to him, and another mentioned that a single cabin or hut was obviously a sign of human life, and in some way a part of the experience, so long as overall, the place is still separate from towns, cities, and roads. Another example given was the campground at Virginia Falls on the Nahanni River, NWT. While paddling the rest of the river there is very little control on the guide and their choices, but upon arrival at Virginia Falls, there are boardwalks, assigned campsites, fire pits, and outhouses. Planes fly in at least twice each day. For some river travelers, it is exciting to see others and to enjoy certain 'comforts.' For others, it is difficult and may take away from the sense of wilderness.

There was an interesting contradiction that emerged when discussing how the presence of others affected the feeling of wilderness. It was the divergence between the obvious that there are not a lot of people in wilderness and the reality that when you are leading a trip, you are usually in a sizable group of people. At the end of answering the question on wilderness, one participant commented that he never travels by himself for work, noting, "I guess that's sort of the flaw in

my little definition there... I can be with my group in the middle of wherever, and feel like I'm in wilderness, but I could also be with my group and not feel that way."

One participant had put some thought into the question prior to the interview, and defined it slightly differently than the rest:

I think I define wilderness in two different ways. One is sort of a physical location, and one is a state of mind. And they can overlap, but they don't have to either... One is being removed physically from infrastructure and people, but I think it can also be just a state of mind, away from those things as well.

He went on to give an example of a "state of mind" by situating himself at the bottom of a big valley, paddling the river, while knowing that on top of the valley there is a road; without the evidence of the road (traffic, honking, horns), one is able to stay in a state of mind that defines the location as wilderness.

I concluded my questioning on "How do you define wilderness?" by asking most participants whether they would define a big city park, one that may be less touched by infrastructure and landscaping, and big enough that it did not feel like there were people everywhere, as wilderness. All participants said no. One said that before he had spent time in more remote places he might have considered such a place wilderness, and another linked it back to the idea of a "wilderness state of mind," making a connection to the *experience* of remote and wilderness places and how one's experience or inexperience of those places would allow people to interpret the city park one way or another.

Canadian wilderness. For all participants, their view of wilderness was inextricably linked with their identity as Canadians. The main distinction the participants made between Canadian wilderness and wilderness areas in other countries was that they felt Canadian wilderness to be more accessible in terms of availability and safety. For them availability described the amount of wilderness space in Canada. Two participants noted that one can find

wilderness in every province; for example, one explained, “I can paddle rivers in Newfoundland, Labrador, I can sea kayak in Nova Scotia. I could do trips in every province in this country and territory and there would be wilderness to it.”

One aspect of the discussion regarding available wilderness space centred around a comparison between Canada and the United States. Many participants, having worked in wilderness areas in both countries, said that they felt that available space and population size resulted in two different mentalities about wilderness. The words and phrases used to describe American wilderness included: circumscribed, corridors, pockets, finite, and boundaries. Conversely, the words and phrases used to describe Canadian wilderness included: frontier mentality, vast, boundless, massive, little ribbons of settlement, and open space. One participant remarked that in Canada he could “just go north and go paddling for 35 days and not see anyone and not even be in a park or anything.”

The second aspect of availability was the sense of safety leaders felt in Canadian wilderness as compared to other international wilderness areas. One participant, having spent time in India, Nepal, and South Africa as well as other countries, described the potential for:

...a greater sense of fear because you might end up in situations that weren't safe, maybe because of the wildlife that you might encounter, but also perhaps because of an unstable socio-political situation where you might encounter violence. So, the relative peace that we experience in Canada [as well as] the absence of firearms in our culture also contributes to a sense of safety.

All participants felt that the effect of growing up, living, and working in a country where wilderness is so accessible gave them increased opportunities to experience and develop a sense of wilderness. They also felt it gave them more opportunities to connect with nature. Some participants also described a sense of pride and loyalty; as one participant explains, “My sense of

pride in being Canadian is in part because I have this fierce loyalty and love of our lakes and rivers and forests... It definitely shapes my identity of being a Canadian, [this] landscape.”

Theme Two: Time spent in wilderness

Mosquito
Laughing
Bzzzzzz
Buzz
Acceptance
Bite

Bear
Past Experience
Raven
Caution
Fish
Black

This section presents some of the formative and influential experiences of the participants in wilderness areas. In order to gain a better understanding of my participants’ experiences, I asked them questions about why they started working in wilderness areas in the first place, what drew them back to these areas, their most memorable trips, their favourite places, and their ideal length for trips.

Childhood experiences. I did not directly ask my participants to share experiences or memories from their childhood. However, through the process of asking other questions, whether it be about their involvement in wilderness programs, why they started working in wilderness areas, or descriptions of a favourite place, at some point each brought up a story from their childhood or youth.

One participant recollected that when he was really young he went camping on Georgian Bay with his family, and these trips included much swimming and hanging out. Although he does not think he was conscious of it at the time, he remembers feeling at home. As he got older he went to camp and started going on trips. On his first trip he remembers it rained every day and that he was wet the entire time. He also remembers returning the next year and signing up for the biggest trip he was allowed to go on.

Another participant's childhood memory and favourite place overlap. Her family owns a cottage in the Ottawa Valley, where the lake side of the road was mowed and the other side of the road had long grass and forest. Although this place does not fit into her current wilderness definition, she remembers that from a child's perspective, she found it wild:

I just remember there was this one place that I used to go to if I just wanted to be alone, or if I was upset. I would just cross the road and feel really brave and walk through the long grass, and then there was just this little patch where there was a bunch of rocks sitting together and long grass that if I sat down on the rocks, then the long grass would hide me on all sides.

Another participant's father owned fly-in fishing lodges. The first one he experienced from ages 1 through 12 was one his father owned in the Temagami area. After that his father bought a lodge in Labrador, and the participant spent an entire summer there when he was 13 and a few weeks there the following summer.

Another participant described being "shipped off" to a camp in the Laurentians the summer after grade four when her family was moving to Canada from the States. She spent a month there that first summer and then returned every summer for the next five years for one month. It was there that she started going on short canoe trips. At 16 she knew she wanted to seek out something new and ended up discovering a camp in Temagami where she was a camper for three years, after which she started working there.

Only one participant shared very little from his childhood, although he did note that: "my initial exposure was through my parents and grandparents, and at that point it was just fun... playing, hiking, paddling, sailing, you know, whatever, fishing, whatever it happened to be."

The draw to working in wilderness areas. Why did these participants start leading groups in wilderness areas? For some it was linked to childhood or youth experiences, for another it was linked to his experience of the job market. Three participants were drawn to

wilderness leadership through camp experiences. For one, following her time as a camper in Temagami, she continued to work in the area for 6 years, and after that she worked with other wilderness organizations. Similarly, another participant began to lead trips at camp following his experiences there as a camper. When he finished university he spent a year in the city looking for jobs and was not able to find anything. After taking off to Central America for a year, he realized that “the reason I wasn’t finding any work was because I didn’t really want to do any of the jobs in the city.”

The third participant who also went to camp as a child remembers her experiences being integral to who she became as a person: “I really loved it and loved my experiences as a participant and thought there could be nothing better than being in the role of inspiring other people to have, you know, not similar, like it’s their own experience, but to inspire other people to have incredible experiences in the wilderness for themselves.”

One participant saw his father’s fly-in fishing lodge in Labrador closing as pivotal. When he was 13, after spending the summer at the lodge, his father mentioned that he could take a role the following year in the camp. Soon after the camp came into financial troubles. The participant remembers thinking, “I’ve got money saved up and I can help out a little bit and keep it going. That’s when I started thinking about [working in wilderness areas].” He also notes that working outside, going places and being with people were large draws. Like the participant mentioned above, he found that working in wilderness was better for him than anything else, certainly better for him than a city job or an office job.

While most answers to this question described a clear path to choosing work within wilderness leadership, one participant offered a broader explanation that ultimately resulted in him feeling at home working in wilderness: “Everything I’ve learned in life I’ve watched and

learned from the wilderness, I've either watched happen or watched mimicked in the wilderness...The dynamics that take place in the outdoors makes sense to me. So I guess I felt at home eventually, and I felt like it's just where I belonged."

Memorable trip. When asked about a memorable trip, the participants' stories shared many similar threads. All trips recounted were at least two weeks long, and two of the trips were seven weeks long. Three participants chose to share stories from when they were in a leadership position, another from when she was a participant, and for another, it was a personal trip, which in this context describes a trip where no one person was a paid leader and all members shared equal responsibility.

Two participants described the natural environment as the reason for that particular trip having made such a big impression on them. One described the terrain during her seven week trip in Northern Labrador: "It was the vast expanse of land...like I've never been anywhere else that felt so incredibly remote and raw and rugged and absolutely beautiful, and just so far away from anything that I could ever explain or imagine in any other context of life." Another described a trip on Ellesmere Island. His memory was of a place that "felt untouched, or unimpacted by humans." He talked about meeting animals that were curious rather than afraid of people, plants flourishing in the only spots they would be able to grow, and geology that told the story of the past thousand years.

Two other participants described trips of adventure and exploration. One was leading a 26 day trip down the Moisie Rivier in Quebec. It was a not a trip that he nor any of the other members had done before, and all they had to guide them were topographic maps. They did not see anyone else and there were very few signs of people. The other participant's trip was on the Kanairiktok River in Labrador, where his end goal was to write a guide book. The trip was

significant to him because it was the first trip that was really his own trip, designed specifically by him. It was also significant to him because he chose to do it in Labrador, a place important to him because of his Dad's fishing lodge. In different ways, both participants described feeling a spectrum of emotions on their respective trips and used words like: exciting, hard, relaxing, intimidating, and overwhelming.

For two participants, their memorable trips were linked with the beginning of a new chapter in their lives. One described his trip as "really the start of my own path." The other explained that her trip from Yellowknife to the community of Kugluktuk on the Arctic Ocean gave her a new sense of direction in her life:

I feel like it's in part what directed me further into the realm of teaching and education, because we were re-tracing the historical route of the first Franklin expedition. It was just amazing to see, like, how ripe a situation like that is for learning. So, there was a natural curiosity about the landscape that we're travelling through and the vegetation and the animals that live there. And then, we were also reading a work of...historical fiction written about the characters around the first Franklin expedition... so there was this literature component to it as well, and then also people's interests, and photography and reflection and it really made me appreciate all the learning that could happen through the vehicle of a canoe trip.

Ideal length. When asked about the ideal length of a trip, all participants said that two weeks was the minimum, with one participant arguing for a month. They argued that two weeks was necessary in order to get into what one participant called "trip time," that is, when the group has gelled and acquired the skills it needs to be comfortable and connected to the wilderness in which they are travelling, and settled into the routine and rhythm of daily wilderness travel. In addition, two participants described the length of trip in context of needing to be far enough from the beginning and the end of a trip to really lose track of time and enjoy the middle of the trip. One participant suspected that being in a leadership position may influence this way of looking at trips. It is also important to note that two participants specified that after three weeks, the trip

is long enough. One said this because it is nice to return home to a shower and fresh food, and the other argued that it is nice to end a trip before members have a chance to get sick of each other!

Favourite place. The descriptions of favourite places can be divided into two main categories: places that felt like home and places that gave perspective. In some cases the favourite place was able to do both.

One participant, unable to specify an exact place, described any set of rapids as a place he was drawn to: “I could just sit on a rock with my feet dangling in the water, looking at the rapids, all day...just being there and feeling the water and hearing the water and seeing the water.”

Another participant also did not choose a specific place, but did focus on the Temagami area because it was significant to her due to all the time she spent there as a camper, staff, and then returning as a director after 10 years away. She described a short personal trip she took with her boyfriend that allowed for re-discovery of this familiar place, where travelling by canoe allowed her to re-capture the place of Temagami: the old growth forest, the mixed boreal forest, the lakes, and bedrock of that area.

One participant’s favourite place was the same as the one she described from her childhood, that is the place across the street from her cottage: “I just remember feeling, sort of, comfort, and I remember the smells, like comfort in being that close to the ground and the earth and just smelling them all and feeling sort of sheltered by the grass that was kind of protecting me, and it was just this special place that helped me when I needed something.” She explained that this place created a very peaceful feeling for her and connected her to something that was bigger than herself.

Two participants described places that were humbling to them and gave them perspective about themselves and/or the world. One described a spot on the Kanairiktok River:

We had this one campsite...and I think it was the first little bit of a sunny day we'd had since the start of the trip, so it was eight or nine days of pretty gloomy weather, and we camped right down by the river, but there was this good steep bank, and I just climbed to the top of the valley and the whole world opened up, you know, suddenly there were caribou trails everywhere, and very, very little in the way of vegetation. But that perspective I guess, you know, I think anywhere, where there's kind of a high spot where you can go...yeah, those places that allow you to kind of look down on, look down at, where your little boat is in relation to that big place.

The other participant said his favourite place is on Ellesmere Island, a place on the Airforce Glacier, which is a huge glacier where the river is raging just below it. He chose that spot because,

...those forces that are going on there are happening continually, and it doesn't matter if anybody's there, doesn't matter what time of day it is, or what time of year it is, it's just constantly happening, and it's humbling. And I guess that's why I like it. It makes it very evident that we are just a very small, but important part on this planet.

Continuing to work in wilderness areas. I asked all the leaders: "Why do you keep going back to working in wilderness areas?" Since I conducted the interviews 3 of the participants have stepped back from spending significant time in the field as a result of shifting lifestyle priorities. However, they indicated in the interviews that even though they knew that shift was coming, they also felt that they will continue to make a priority of spending time in wilderness areas on both paid and personal trips.

The participants identified many different reasons for why they had continued to work in wilderness areas for many years and over different seasons. These reasons included: a sense of comfort in wilderness, opportunity to share the experience with others, love of being out there, adventure, professionalism, and continued learning. This question elicited a variety of answers

that were very specific to each person. In order to keep the participants' voices intact, I will share a piece of each specific answer:

Well, it's still the place that I guess I'm still familiar with, it's also the place I like to teach in. When I think of teaching in a different sort of environment, it just doesn't work with me...Wherever I am out in wilderness, I just always feel comfortable and relaxed. I'm not really sure why but I do.

I feel like something, like a whole different energy comes over me. And I feel really humbled by the land, and everything about interacting with the land and interacting with the people that I'm with out on the land feels more authentic. It feels more real, [as though] you're interacting at a different level, and I feel like that sort of just renews my energy and renews my spirit and sense of zest for life, and all those things. And I think it works, I've led all kinds of different groups...and I've just seen some really incredible transformation for people when they're in these amazing settings and when they're learning to interact with the wilderness.

It was the life that I wanted to live, and still, that notion that it was better than anything else... There was an element of growth..., canoeing in particular and becoming a better canoeist...wanting to get to a certain level so I could actually look at a river and say, "Oh, this is my interpretation of the river and I think it's pretty accurate because this is the scope of my experience."

There's just a love that I feel for wilderness and my time in wilderness. And whether it's being stirred by it, [or] by experiencing awe and beauty, quietness, contentment, [it is] very much alive, you know, because there's definitely times, I've had times in wilderness where I've also felt uncomfortable and anxious and stressed, but at the same time I don't have negative notions of that...I think I lead trips because it's an opportunity to share that experience with other people. But also, selfishly, because it allows me to continue to have those experiences myself.

Everything that I've learned in life, I've watched and learned from the wilderness... Going back into the wilderness is, sort of a way of me going home, but it's also a way of continuing to learn from other people as well, which keeps it interesting.

Theme three: Relationship with nature

River
Wet
Coppermine (2)
Beauty
Boating

Sense of Place
Outside
Temagami
Brent
Home (2)

In the previous section, time spent in wilderness, the focus was on stories of the participants' significant moments and experiences. This section looks specifically at the relationship with nature that developed out of time spent in wilderness areas. Participants described their relationship with nature, shared stories of the awareness and appreciation they feel comes from extended time spent in wilderness, and finally, discussed the idea of sense of place from a perspective of movement.

Description of human-nature relationship. When asked specifically to describe their relationship with nature, participants used the following words: humility, joy, satisfaction, beauty, respect, inspiration, spiritually connected, and home. These positive feelings have contributed to their desire to share and facilitate wilderness experiences, to protect wilderness areas, to learn from their experience in wilderness, and to improve their teaching ability. (This latter idea will be explored further in the final section.)

One participant saw his relationship with nature as a “work in progress.” When he first started spending time in wilderness areas he felt right away that he was learning obvious lessons from wilderness, but thought that it was his secret, and a special ability that he was born with. However, as he began spending time in the outdoors with other people, he realized that the feeling he had was actually quite universal:

Everyone is connected on some level to the wilderness. Whether it is the white seal out on the east coast, or whether it's a massive tree, or whether it's a tulip in their garden in the middle of Toronto. I don't know of anybody that I've ever

come across that at some level isn't connected or isn't awestruck by something that happens in the environment. I guess that's how I started out, and then I sort of learned, or maybe still am learning, that everyone has their connection...I have been working towards trying to facilitate or remind people of that connection. It's easy to fall away from that, or to lose those skills or that awareness. I guess I see my relationship with wilderness as just facilitating that connection.

Another participant's description of her relationship with nature is one that she finds very nurturing. For her, spending time in wilderness inspires an appreciation for life that is joyful and satisfying, deeply affected by the beauty of wilderness, creatures and plants. She feels that she has had this instinctive connection to wilderness areas from a young age, and shared an experience from when she was 17:

It was my first experience of a clear-cut. There was logging right down to the river, there was no buffer. Just seeing this after paddling through forest, the boreal forest and wilderness, and all of a sudden arriving in this clear-cut... it was devastating. I just remember, and I have such a strong memory of this, of walking around in this clear-cut and seeing the devastation, and it really felt like devastation. And just seeing heaps of trees and logs...it was very visceral, the sense of hurt that I [felt].

Another participant said that he is still trying to understand his relationship with nature. Recently, he has returned to university to pursue a degree in a very competitive program. He often gets a sense of competitive culture that is intended to weed out students and is in some ways "out to get you." In this culture the connection between action and consequence is not always clear to him. Conversely, he described nature as a place that is logical, where things happen as they happen, and we as humans need to adapt. This understanding results in a relationship with nature that is rooted in respect and humility:

When I was leading trips, if we had a string of really bad weather, or if I flipped my boat in a rapid, or anything you know, I didn't ever feel like I was being attacked. I did feel like I was being humbled a little bit... It was like there was that thing, that thing just reminding me that this is a big place, and you're a part of it, but don't ever forget you're a part of it, and not it.

Three participants made connections to spirituality when describing their relationship with nature. One, for example, said, “I feel like, if I’m feeling down or low or things are not going well in my life, then I will purposefully and intentionally sort of call on nature, like ask for help from nature, like it’s in a way my definition of god in a sense.” The second participant noted that her exposure to nature came before her exposure to spiritual practices that she considers earth-honouring:

Whether it’s certain Native American traditions, Buddhism, or Taoism, or just spiritual teachings, [I feel] that [they] really acknowledge nature and wilderness. And so it’s interesting because there’s a part of my own path that feels like it’s kind of intertwined with a spiritual path as well, but I feel like it emerges from my time in wilderness.

The third participant, when discussing what he gets out of spending time in wilderness said he felt a certain connectedness and fullness that pertains to something bigger that he and others understand as a more spiritual perspective. He explains,

When I say connectedness, it’s about being connected to a bigger world. And then, the much bigger world. People will often ask if I’m religious, well no, I’m not, but do I believe that there’s a bigger world at play? Well yeah I do, and it’s a world that is not a human-based world you know, it’s the reality that we are a part of this place and we didn’t make it ourselves, we were here not because we wanted to be here, we’re here because we’re here.

Context of relationship with wilderness. I asked all the participants how they see themselves within the context of the wilderness they describe. Two of the participants struggled to answer this question, whereas the other three gave very distinct answers. While the specific answers to the questions took quite divergent paths, what is interesting is that each nonetheless continued to demonstrate the depth of their relationship with nature and how they approached that relationship.

The first participant saw himself as traveler, and hopefully, a traveler who is accepted by the wilderness and who does not leave a negative trace. The second participant saw himself as

both an ambassador of wilderness and a teacher in wilderness. As an ambassador for wilderness, he hopes to expose people to a certain understanding or appreciation of that part of the world. Though he did not choose the word “teacher” to describe how he sees himself and his context, he did feel he has chosen to use wilderness as a classroom. The third participant, in perhaps the most colourful answer, saw himself as:

An elephant in a china shop...I could go into wilderness and I could have a very small impact...I can kind of sneak around and see the sights and do my thing, or I can go sort of thundering through and knocking everything over and breaking everything in sight.

Awareness and appreciation of wilderness. Stories touching on this theme peppered the interviews as participants shared experiences that they felt came as a result of their relationship with nature as well as a result of the sheer amount of time spent in wilderness. In the three stories I share here, one participant described the pleasure in his awareness of songbirds in the spring, another shared a connection with Northern birds that spend their winter in Canada, and the final story evoked the delight and appreciation of discovering a new ecosystem.

In his story of hearing the songbirds, one participant described his awareness of the changing of the seasons as well as his heightened ability to notice things in wilderness that may keep himself and his groups safer:

Well, I think that I have the ability to see and discern things in nature that people that don't spend time out there don't have. So I think that when I'm with a group, often I'm going down [the river] and [saying], “Do you see that? Do you see that over there? Look at that, look at this, look at that”. And people are like, “What? What? What are you talking about?” “You don't see that? Look at that?” You know, so I think that... just by being out there on trips so much and in so many different places and seeing so many different things, that I notice a lot of things, and I think that affects the way that I interact with nature...Because I might notice that there's a birds' nest over there and we shouldn't camp near there, or that animals don't usually act the way that animal's acting, or whatnot. I've seen those sort of things, so I think I just see a lot more and can appreciate a lot of things, right? On this last trip I was just on, it was pretty amazing because spring just came. The first night we went out, it was hailing and snowing, [we] woke up in

the morning and there were no songbirds because there hasn't been any songbirds yet. And then the second morning we were woken up by songbirds, so it was the first thing that I noticed, like right as the sun's coming up I hear songbirds. It's like, "Oh, that's the first day there's been songbirds". The woodpeckers were out the first day. And then there were songbirds, and then the ice left on the lake, and then some flowers started coming up, and it was only a four day trip, but over those four days there were so many changes in the transition from winter to spring... My sense of comfort and familiarity with being out there allows me to see a lot of things in the wilderness which makes me act different.

The second participant described a similar awareness of the seasons and the birds. He recollected his final trip after leading five or six trips down a particular river one summer:

On my last trip, the only birds that were really left were blue jays, chickadees, woodpeckers, you know, the things that would be wintering over here. And it was just that feeling of being like, oh yeah, this is where I'm from, and I stay here along with all these other critters. A lot of things that have passed through here this year are now heading back to their other places. So it was that sense of home, but much broader home, we're in this northern area.

The final participant, now living on the west coast, shared an experience from when she was leading a trip for high school students:

It was a really low tide and so there was this really rich inter-tidal zone and the [co-leader] was pointing out all these creatures to me, all these different sea stars and things that, because I'm new to the west coast, I don't really know what some of these things are. And her enthusiasm and excitement about it was so contagious, and I loved learning about it, and I was thrilled...I just had such a sense of a joyfulness, seeing all these new creatures and getting a sense of learning about them a bit. And I just was really happy, after poking around in the tide pools, you know?

This story was significant to her and she used it to describe her relationship with nature because she feels she continues to have a renewed appreciation for spending time outdoors and discovering new places.

Sense of place. The idea of sense of place arose in three of the interviews. In the previous section, one participant referred to feeling a sense of home on a river because at the end of the summer he was still there with the birds that would stay the winter and not

fly south. Along this vein, he and others described rivers as conduits, corridors for travel for animals and people, especially when understood from a historical perspective. This same participant equated spending time in places with a sense of place: “You’ve seen beautiful places and they’re places that just touch something in me and so yeah, I wanted to go to those places and spend time in those places. Not just see them, but spend time in them, which is sense of place I guess.”

The second participant linked energy and movement when she described her notion of sense of place:

Sense of place, it’s almost more from an energetic/spiritual level that I feel I am connecting with it, because you know I’m not hunting and fishing and building on it, and I don’t get to know it the way that I would if I needed to live off it...so it’s a different relationship. Most of the tripping I’ve done has been river tripping and so I think of it as getting to know the river and just being part of this moving body of water that is always flowing and always moving, but a more spiritual energetic relationship with the movement and that flow as I travel through it.

The final participant believed that he is able to feel as though he has a sense of place when he is not at home; for him a big part of this is based on a sense of comfort. For example, in terms of rivers he feels that no matter where he is, the mechanisms that make a river what it is, and a rapid what it is, stay the same.

Theme Four: Wilderness ethic

Anthropocentrism

Question mark

Human

Bullshit

The weather

City

When I asked the participants if they considered themselves to have a wilderness ethic, all responded that they did. Indeed, this was something that they had all thought about frequently throughout their time as wilderness leaders. For most, the notion of a wilderness ethic has changed, been developed and challenged as a result of time spent in the field. Following their descriptions of wilderness ethics in general, much of the discussion focused on post-secondary education or experiences that helped them to define their own ethic, a Leave No Trace approach to wilderness travel, as well as self-reflection about the costs and benefits of traveling in wild places.

Descriptions of a wilderness ethic. There were many commonalities in how the leaders understood and described their wilderness ethic. All leaders pointed to the idea of respect and/or the notion of traveling responsibly. In fact, the leaders asserted that one way to show respect is by traveling in a way that minimizes impact. One participant explained that “wilderness ethic is just making sure that I have a feeling of respect in the place I’m in. And so, it does come down to collecting my garbage, having the fire that we need versus the fire that we want.”

For most, this co-mingling idea of respect and responsible travel comes from a nonanthropocentric belief that we as humans are a part of the wilderness environment as much as other animals. One participant specified that we are allowed to use the resources available, as do all animals, but need to do so responsibly. A second participant echoed this idea of being a part of the environment, but struggled at times with the impact on the environment:

I’m aware of the impact of my footprints. I also recognize the fact that I am an animal like other animals. I will have an impact as I move through an area, you know, I can take care not to run over fragile flowers or other plant life, but sometimes I can’t avoid it...And that’s where sometimes I have that sense, like, I am an animal like other animals, I can’t float over this land... And so having awareness of it can be painful sometimes because I’m aware of the damage that I might be doing, but I guess it can help me to mitigate against ignorant actions, and try to be as careful as possible, while still being in an area and recognizing the

relationship I have... I guess ultimately, though, what it all points to is, like a relationship, an ethic of respect. Respect, you know, really respecting the areas that I'm traveling.

A third participant took her description of wilderness ethic one step further, describing an ethic that is connected to a conceptualization of her personal ethical beliefs:

I believe, you know, in a very sort of basic frontline basic concrete level in "Leave No Trace" practices. And on that level I think that it is very respectful and very important to be as minimal impact as possible as I'm travelling through the land...My greater wilderness ethic...is kind of like a world ethic, and what I have sort of developed and come to believe in and understand is that everything is connected, and so harming the environment is...akin to harming another human being.

While this global perspective of a wilderness ethic was not a common position among the participants, it does demonstrate the nonanthropocentric viewpoint that was common to all answers.

Post-secondary education and experience. All participants referred to some sort of post-secondary education or experience that led them to consider their idea of a wilderness ethic more deeply. For two participants they refer specifically to courses they took that helped them to identify and describe their wilderness ethic. One participant referred to a Deep Ecology class she took during her undergraduate degree. Another explained the importance of reflection that she was exposed to when did her graduate degree a few years ago:

[We took] a class called Reflexive Ecological Identity, where we reflected on what were influences in shaping our own ecological identity. And all through grad school in general we were doing a lot of reflecting and processing, maybe that's where I could start to put some language towards [identifying my wilderness ethic].

Two participants noted that it was the culture of their undergraduate class that challenged them to think about where they stood on wilderness issues. For the first participant, he described being challenged to ask himself questions:

I think when I started to formalize or think about these questions [related to wilderness ethic] and think about my place within the environment is when I started outdoor rec... [Most people] were far more connected to the environment than I was, and [they] had these positions on these issues, whether it was the hunting crowd within the class, or whether it was the people who refused to wash their hair for three years because of taking up water resources. The whole gamut, the whole spectrum was there, and it was just a little bit of “Oh, okay, where am I? How do I fit in to this mess of people?” And, “Am I in the right spot right now?” So I think by default it forced me to sort of start to ask some questions, but I think it has and is going to take me a lot of time to actually answer those.

The second participant, who went through the same program at the same time as the first, explained that he reacted quite differently to many of the people in the program, feeling that many were environmentally self-righteousness. Despite this critique, the program still challenged him to ask questions and make decisions: “I still think about what was being presented to me, and how, and what I perceived of it.” He then continued to explain that he is hesitant to label himself as an environmentalist or to ascribe to a specific ethic.

Unlike the others, the final participant did not describe an experience where he was a student, but instead a teacher. The wilderness school he instructs for in the United States gives university credits in environmental education. The curriculum is focused on the value of wilderness and saving wilderness in a country where it is becoming highly defined and protected. He explains that reading American authors Leopold, Thoreau, and Muir inspired him to consider ideas of wilderness and a wilderness ethic more deeply.

Leave No Trace. Four of the five participants made reference to Leave No Trace principles when describing their wilderness ethic. Leave No Trace refers to an educational policy that has been adopted by many organizations to manage recreational users in parks and wilderness areas (Simon & Alagona, 2009). It offers tangible practices to behave in wilderness areas that are centred around 7 principles: plan ahead and prepare; travel and camp on durable

surfaces; dispose of waste properly; leave what you find; minimize campfire impacts; respect wildlife; and be considerate of other visitors.

Two participants described their dismay at arriving at a campsite covered in garbage or cleared with pre-made tables and benches or with initials carved into trees. This disappointment led both of them to buy into Leave No Trace principles early on. Another participant did a semester with the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) when she was 21 and returned from that semester believing very strongly in principles of Leave No Trace, thinking that she should never build a fire again. One participant, who has struggled most with the idea of Leave No Trace, nonetheless affirmed an underlying belief in the principles by wondering, “If I wasn’t told about no trace camping, what would it mean? Who would I be [as a leader] if I didn’t have that instruction in my head?”

At the start of their careers as wilderness leaders, Leave No Trace helped to define each person’s wilderness ethic and served as a baseline for their behaviour and practices in the wild. However, time, experience in the field, education and life experience have broadened each leader’s descriptions of a wilderness ethic to one that goes beyond just leaving the place untouched to one that includes respect and the notion that we are part of our wilderness environments.

One participant started to think more about Leave No Trace and how it fits into the bigger picture of personal and cultural beliefs when she took a Deep Ecology class in her undergrad as it gave her a framework to ask questions and see greater connections. Following university she experienced a period of depression that forced her to use the Deep Ecology framework to reconsider her beliefs and her environmental practices. This led her to the “world ethic” she

described above, that is, a belief that everything is connected; for her, while Leave No Trace remains important, it is also vital to continue to ask questions about the concept.

Another participant, an instructor for NOLS as well as many other organizations, attempts to follow Leave No Trace practices as much as possible. However, he recognizes that while Leave No Trace principles can help to protect wilderness areas, his ethic has been affected over the years by learning to do things differently, and by the needs of the groups with whom he works:

I think in some places I travel with less impact than other places. I think that some places I don't have as minimum an impact as possible. When I'm bush-crashing around with young offenders I think that sometimes I do make a few campsites off in the woods somewhere, and sort of no-trace them. But in the end I [did make] a fire pit and cleared some area for tents and tarps to go up. At NOLS, we don't even cook on fires, so I probably have a different standard that probably has to do with the organization. I think that my standards have changed as I've learned different practices, and being able to follow through with those practices by having stoves that I can actually cook all my meals on, for instance.

A third participant also described a belief in Leave No Trace that has changed over time,

Certainly when I was working with young people I was much more explicit about laying out a Leave No Trace ethic, and really helping coach young people around why it's not okay to carve your name into a tree, or whatever it may be, managing human waste and toilet paper, and all that stuff. I was really, really, really buying into that ethic, and it's not that that's radically changed at all, but, it's interesting: I feel like when I'm leading adults, I'm more inclined to sort of set up a container of expectations around things...trusting that the experience will touch people. And through people being touched by the experience, through their own sense of meaning or relationship, they will have a greater interest in ensuring wilderness areas are protected.

While this participant attributes some of her changed attitude to be a result of the age group she was working with, in general she feels that she's "been more willing to sort of engage people where they're at as opposed to being an advocate for something." In line with this train of thought, she also describes a by-product of Leave No Trace camping as the opportunity to arrive at a campsite after others yet continuing to get that sense of being in wilderness: "Some people

might come up to a campsite and be, like, ‘Great! Look, there’s all this firewood stacked up here for us,’ or ‘There’s a table and it’s, like, how convenient’” whereas she really “appreciate[s] showing up at an area and having little sense of other people having been there.”

Another participant had a different view on finding evidence of others. He explains,

It was welcomed when I found that there were other people using this exact same site. You know, somehow on this big long stretch of the Coppermine, where it’s difficult to find a campsite, other people have found this exact same spot even though you can’t really see it from the river. But you know [others were here, because] there’s some branches, there’s some axe marks, poles tied together, whatever.

While Leave No Trace practices do factor into the way this participant leads his trips, he struggles with the ideology that we are affecting the land we travel on. In many ways he sees the parameters of Leave No Trace camping to be anthropocentric, explaining that,

The land is not going to be happy or sad that we’ve been there or not, it doesn’t care. If we leave a pile of garbage there, if we don’t leave a trace, it doesn’t care...Well, I guess I mean that it’s not the land we’re affecting, but it’s us that we’re affecting.

This same participant also struggles with how Leave No Trace dictates the way people are able to interact with nature, finding it restrains the ways in which people can camp, travel, and experience wilderness areas:

[Hunting and trapping] doesn’t fit into the idea of no-trace camping. You know, somehow fishing is okay, but if you talk about hunting [it] crosses that border. If we were setting up camp each day by clearing an area and chopping down trees and setting up ridgepoles for canvas tents, we’re obviously leaving a very visible impact, but does that impact my respect for a place? No. You can do that sort of thing while maintaining respect for the place you’re in.

While one participant never referred specifically to Leave No Trace camping, many of his answers to the interview questions revolved around the idea of making as minimal an impact as possible given the clear effects of our impact in some places. For example, he stated, “on Ellesmere I can find a footprint that I left 3 years ago.”

It is clear that the wilderness ethic of all the leaders has been affected by the concept of Leave No Trace, but also that their ethic has evolved as they questioned and considered different ideas and practices, whether it be the area in which they are traveling, the population with whom they are working, or the organization for whom they are working. It is here that I could see them trying to find the balance between theory and practice, in making daily concrete decisions about behaviours to demonstrate, model, and advocate for respectful travel in wilderness areas. For example, two participants discussed the practice of burning garbage, specifically burning plastic as an area of learning and challenge for them. They both had similar experiences where a client explained to them the environmental impacts of that practice. The first participant recounted,

[He] explained more of the science around it, that because the fires aren't hot enough and it actually does put these harmful things into the environment, let alone to our own bodies. And that gave me more information about why it was bad, [and so] I don't do it anymore... unless it's the wrap that the meat came in that's going to have food smells on it – I'll burn that because it might be a safety issue in terms of attracting animals.

The other participant's conversation with his client was similar, but sparked deeper questions for him:

The bigger issue is not whether we're burning that garbage or carrying it out with us, the bigger issue is that we've got that garbage. That's what I feel is really the bigger side of that ethic. [It] is that it doesn't matter if we carry it out, leave it here, or burn it, the fact is that there is still garbage, and whether we contain it in one area, bury it in a big landfill, [or] burn it in a proper incinerator, the ideal would be that the garbage wouldn't be there in the first place. And that's not something we're willing to confront yet. Because taking plastic bags on trip is really convenient.

Environmental cost/benefit. One question that I asked all the participants was, "How do you think our trips affect the land that we travel on?" In the first interview it became clear to me that this was not actually the question that I was trying to ask, as almost all the participants immediately responded that wilderness travel has an impact on the land, and thus it is our

responsibility to travel in a way that minimizes that impact. I then changed to a question and asked the participants, based on their own personal environmental cost/benefit scale, if it is beneficial to continue to run and lead trips in wilderness areas. Most of the participants remarked on the difficulty of actually measuring the costs and the benefits. Four of the five participants felt very strongly that what they perceived as benefits outweighed what they perceived as costs.

In terms of costs, most participants did not go into much depth about what their specific perceived costs were but did give some examples of their impact on the land. These included collecting groundfall for firewood, leaving traces of canoe paint on rocks or footprints in sensitive eco-systems, and using biodegradable soaps for dishwashing. The cost that seemed to be in the forefront for most of the leaders was the use of fuel to travel to the places they were doing trips, whether by car, train, or, for most, airplane. As many of the participants are wilderness leaders in remote northern places, the visual impact of human travel is less apparent, but the environmental cost of flight is more obvious.

One participant used an interesting example to think about how much impact was too much impact:

You know when people talk about loving wilderness to death? Like when you see a new hotspot, [for example], where there's a dive area somewhere where hordes of tourists come and they are all out snorkelling or scuba diving and destroying the coral reef by standing on them and not being well informed about how to manage them. Or, huge tour buses or people will pull into an area and sort of ooh and ahh over a big vista. For instance I look at a place like Niagara Falls as an example: Niagara Falls is an extraordinary natural phenomenon, if you came across that falls in the wilderness it would be staggering. But, to experience it in this place where there's this huge built environment and there's cheesy hotels and cheesy gift shops, and this railing around it, it diminishes its majesty. It's still really impressive, but for me, all of those other pieces clutter in and it makes it more like an amusement park... I have to block out those other features to really look at the falls and say, "Wow, this is amazing." So what's the line between experience of wilderness at what cost and how do you determine what that line is [that defines] minimum impact and heavier impact?

She continued with a second example of another waterfall, Virginia Falls in Nahanni River National Park:

If you think about Virginia Falls..., the park has established this campground there and it sort of starts to encroach a little bit on the sense of wilderness... And at the same time, at a place like Virginia Falls, the park is putting in the boardwalk and the tent platforms to reduce certain impacts in those campsite areas or on those trails because it's a really fragile environment. You know, so there is a trade-off.

Nonetheless, the benefits that the leaders perceived as a result of wilderness travel tip the scales for them. The main reason is that they believe that people need to be able to participate and interact with nature in order to value it and be motivated to protect it. They see a direct connection between spending time in wilderness areas and caring for it: "If you don't have opportunities to have a sense of connection or build relationships or caring then you aren't going to care for those things [in wilderness]. They will have no meaning to you, and so how much can those relationships be built and created in urban settings."

One participant explained that if he did not believe in the benefit of spending time in wilderness areas he would not be doing it. In fact, he says, "quite simply, we need to [take people into wilderness areas]." He sees the importance of helping people make connections and appreciate wilderness as a way to reach out to all kinds of people. The company for whom he has guided most recently leads expensive trips in very remote areas. He argues that their clientele is often people who are able make changes that have a greater influence. He shared a story about another guide that continues to motivate him:

She was running a trip down one of the northern rivers and a massive forest fire had gone through just before the trip. Things were still smoldering, and they paddled through the burn for 4 or 5 days or something, it was quite big. And one of the guys on the trip was heavily impacted by this, the devastation that had happened and what it looked like when it was burned, even though he knew it was a natural process. He owned a packaging/manufacturing company in Toronto, and he went back and over the next few years completely revamped the materials.

How they designed and made these packaging materials, and [the company] went from being a massive contributor to plastic pollution and whatnot, to leading the way and winning international awards for leadership and product development when it came to designing environmentally friendly packaging materials... You hope somebody on your trip makes that connection... Every time I go out there I hope that that's kind of waiting in the mist.

Four of the five participants felt strongly about the benefits outweighing the costs. While one participant did not necessarily feel differently, the environmental cost of trips in wilderness areas is much less of a focus for him as he does not believe that travelers have that much effect on the land. In response to the question, he shifted to the idea of the economic and cultural costs and benefits, specifically how local inhabitants of the communities near our travel routes are affected by our presence. Although this question and the ensuing conversation were interesting and important, it is beyond the scope of my thesis question, so I merely mention it here without elaboration.

Theme Five: Role

Education
School
Learning
Intentional
Experiential
Outdoor

In this section participants described the many facets of the role of a wilderness leader, including: a sense of professionalism and organizational affiliation; their responsibility to demonstrate a wilderness ethic; their role as educators; the affect of their relationship with nature on their teaching and leading practice; and the importance of reflection.

Upon asking my interview question, "How do you see your role as a leader on these trips?" it became clear that an integral part of being a leader was the ability to wear many hats.

One participant commented, “I don’t really see my role as exactly the same cookie-cutter sort of thing every time. I see it as a big problem to be figured out and a big puzzle to be put back together and made into a successful outcome in the end.” This statement captures the bigger picture of wilderness leadership, one that involves skills and tasks that take place on three different levels: daily and concrete; problem-solving and logistical planning; and relationship-building and facilitation.

On a basic level, concrete and daily skills consist of tasks like fire-building, setting up tarps, cooking, equipment repair, map reading, etc. On a second level, the skills related to problem-solving and logistics include safety, risk management, holding the vision of the trip, adaptability, as well as being constantly prepared. The following statement describes such preparedness: “It’s a mindset when you’re guiding, you’re just always ready... you’ve got everything that you need in case whatever happens, and you’re ready on a daily basis.” Another participant explained that “[we are] taking people who, for whatever reason are seeking out immersion in wilderness and want people who have the skills and knowledge to allow them to have that experience safely, and also [be able to plan] the logistics of it all.”

Regarding the third level, participants described their role as acting as a facilitator, as a steward of the environment, and finally, as simply being there to share in the experience with the clients on the trip. Most participants focused on the idea of facilitating connections between people and the environment. As described by one,

[I see my role] as a facilitator, and the word “guide” is actually quite a good word...like, facilitating or guiding peoples’ experiences... I find it rewarding when people are touched by their time in wilderness...when it touches something more deeply in them, whether it’s encounters with wildlife, or just adjusting to that rhythm that’s different than the urban day-to-day existence and appreciating the simple things of sunsets and sunrises or amazing views or whatever it may be.

While stewardship and facilitation of environmental connections was the focus of many answers, all participants also referred to the significance of relationship-building. One participant in particular spent some time emphasizing the importance of ensuring the comfort of his clients, explaining, “I think my role as a leader was just to be there with people that wanted to be in these places too...to help people relax a little bit... and basically just making sure that people were happy.”

As the leaders discussed how they saw their role as wilderness leaders, their descriptions moved fluidly between all the levels of tasks. For example, in one interview, the participant described an important link between river safety and respect for the river:

As a canoeist you [have] all of those safety things, but [you have] to have respect, that's a part of respect for the wilderness. If you're going to be travelling on these rivers that have the potential to be dangerous, [you have] to know how to work with them, rather than against them.

Professionals and organizations. Whether explicitly stated or not, it was clear from all the conversations that participants considered themselves to be professionals in the field of wilderness leadership. Early on in the interviews this became apparent not only because of the time each had spent leading trips, but also in the way some of the leaders described that time. One said, “I think I have 189 weeks...that's just leading trips, that's not [my time] at outdoor centres, or doing high ropes courses or anything like that, that's just on trip.” Another leader described his time in days: “I think I'm just over 1000 professional paid days right now... and most of those are 24-hour days.”

This sense of professionalism comes as a result of investment of time and competence in the field, as well as the ability to carry out the vision and mission of whatever organization for whom they are working. One participant mentioned that earlier in her career she was very focused on appearing as a professional on paper, asking, “Do I have the right certifications? Can

I paddle the right strokes? What does my resume say?” Another participant described looking up to other guides in his company when he started there and seeing competence as a standard: “It really felt like I was working with people that were ultra-competent, whether it be white-water paddlers, sea kayakers, [or] hikers...,they were pretty high-end folks.”

Two participants described their roles as akin to other professionals. In this one example, parallels were drawn between the competence of the professional and the trust of the clients:

And then a big part of the role is just for people to know that they're in competent hands. That if things go funny that it'll be okay, knowing that we'll get through because we've got someone who can help us do that. You know, it's [like] when you buy a plane ticket, you're buying it with the notion that the pilot is going to get you where you need to go, and knowing full well that stuff could go wrong, but that person who's leading the plane will do what needs to be done to make sure it's okay.

While many people enjoy spending time in the outdoors, one participant explained what sets him apart as a leader: “I don't think there is anything wrong with a weekend warrior, but [in our role] that's one of the things that make us professionals in the field. This is where we have invested our time and our energy.” Organizational affiliation also distinguishes between those who like to recreate in the wilderness and those who lead others in the field. While working for organizations, leaders are not only accountable to the organization as well as the client, but are usually entrusted with being the main representative and executer of the organization's values and programs while in the field. One participant, who has worked at a number of different organizations, describes the diversity of his clientele as well as the many different programs he delivers for different organizations:

I guess one thing that I've noticed is that all the people that come out there don't normally come out for exactly what your vision or the organization's vision of the program is...So, if I'm working with [organization A], and I'm working with youth that are addicted to drugs my role is a lot different than if I'm running the instructor development program at [organization B] or doing a course for university credits at [organization C].

Responsibility to demonstrate a wilderness ethic. Earlier in this chapter, I shared participants' descriptions of their personal wilderness ethic. The connection between their wilderness ethic and their role came through in the assertion made by all participants that it is important as leaders to demonstrate a wilderness ethic in the field. In line with the idea of professionalism discussed above, one participant felt that demonstrating a wilderness ethic is part of the professional role:

We're putting ourselves in a position where we are a professional. If you need to build a building you go and talk to an engineer who is a professional and they tell you that you need to have a support around a door so it doesn't fall in on you, so you believe them and you build that into your house. Or if you're going to a university professor and they tell you that you need to approach your topic this way, then you believe them. Whatever aspects of life, we have these people who determine how followers follow. And essentially, I'm not trying to say that tons of people are following us, but at the same time, they are, not only looking at our gear and seeing what we're wearing, how we're acting, but they're also looking at how we're impacting the environment.

The importance of role modeling an ethic by making a minimal environmental impact was echoed by the other leaders. One participant described the importance for him to "walk my talk. I would lack integrity if I didn't feel like I had a responsibility to pass that on." The idea of respecting place and the environment was central to many of the participants' personal definitions of a wilderness ethic, as well as how they demonstrated their ethic. One participant explained: "It makes sense that if we are bringing people in this area that they should see that I hold a good deal of respect for this place and that this place deserves respect." Another participant took it a step further, saying: "It's important to communicate those notions of respect and...some sense of humility...appreciating the opportunity we have and the environment that we're traveling through and how to minimize our negative impacts."

Education. The type and level of education taking place on the trips varied due to a number of factors, including the perspective on education of the leader, their desire to educate, and the purpose of the organization for whom the leader was working. When I asked leaders, “Do you consider what you are doing to be educational?”, four said yes and one said no. All believed that learning was occurring on their trips, and while some believed that any time you are learning, education is happening, others believed that education was a result of more explicit teaching.

For one participant, the educational opportunities were clear. She argued that regardless of how it happened, lessons are out there to be learned, and an important part of the leadership role is to point them out:

There’s definitely no question I consider it to be education work in whatever position you’re in. One, because you’re taking people out of their daily routine and bringing them into another and there’s always stuff that can be learned... That’s because there is continually things or processes that happen outside that mimic processes and thoughts and feelings and life trends that we see or that we go through as a person... So, one thing that I think I’ve been able to build on in my own skills, regardless of age group or motivation for people being outside, is pointing out those lessons. And I don’t mean lessons as in formal teaching...[these lessons] can be incredibly subtle, but sometimes they are quite stark and obvious and painful as well.

Two of the participants focused on intent as the clear distinction between guiding and instructing. For them, the intent to change people or the intent to measure the experience or understanding of their groups was key. One participant, who identified himself primarily as a guide, is very clear that the work he was doing as a guide was not educational. In fact, the distinction between education and learning was linked with how he identified his role.

[The work I was doing was not educational] because that wasn’t my intention. You know, I’m sure it is educational because invariably people are learning about the area, they’re learning about whitewater, they’re learning about cooking, and they’re learning about each other. But that’s learning, that’s not necessarily education...If somebody asked me about something, about the place [we’re in], of

course I'd share everything that I know, but my goal was not to change them...But then, when I was in an instructor role... it was education because I was trying to give them whatever I could to allow them to grow to do what they're hoping to do.

The other participant who identified intent as the distinguishing element between learning and education came at it from a slightly different perspective. She desired to educate whenever possible, and at times felt confined by the designation of her role:

You know it's interesting because, having different demographics and having been drawn to teacher's college and then working at Shackleton School [an expedition-based high school], I'm definitely drawn to the educational elements in what we do, and I see tremendous potential for the learning involved in what we do. But I'm often quite dissatisfied with how I perceive the learning to be arising, and maybe I'm not really aware of what, you know, I haven't ever debriefed clients or, more recently students to know what their take-away is from the experience, to know what their learning has been. I feel like a lot of the learning might be sort of implicit in what we do and not so explicit, but that's been a bit of a frustration because I see tremendous learning potential if there was more explicit teaching involved. And so when I think about guiding for [organization], there's a certain amount of teaching about skills, [specifically] around camping and paddling and getting down the river and what have you. [However], the more that we can bring in terms of knowledge of the natural environment and the plants and whatever, I think people are hungry for that. But at times I don't necessarily feel very well prepared, though I often have resources in my barrel for people to look up stuff, I'm not a walking encyclopedia of the plants and things that live in an area and how they've adapted to survive or what their medicinal uses might be... Maybe that's why I'm moving towards not guiding is because it's just not as satisfying to just take people down a river or through a wilderness area without a richer learning experience... It's not really satisfying to just take people out into wilderness, and maybe it is satisfying for those people, to go out and just have that experience – maybe they have fun, or they're touched, or it's beautiful, and it's an amazing experience, but it's just not very rewarding for me anymore, unless there's more explicit learning opportunities.

This division between guide and instructor was less evident for the final two participants. They had predominantly worked for organizations geared to young people in their early teens to mid-twenties with mission statements that emphasize education and change. In this context, then, one described how this one organization's leaders focused on education: "The [organization] encourages instructors to debrief every night and to create and implement really creative lessons

and activities that draw up on different senses.” Both of these participants primarily referred to the members of their groups as “students,” and brought up the notion of outcomes as underlying motivators for the trips and thereby indicators of education:

I keep coming back to this idea of student-centred learning, but I sort of see the educational outcome as varying, so I see that as a part of what the puzzle is. [That is], coming up with the curriculum that’s going to match the outcome that I decide once I assess the group...And I don’t just see it as teaching hard skills and exactly how to travel in the wilderness, although that’s part of it, I see it as philosophy, I see it as life skills, I see it as leadership skills and learning about the world around you and there’s all sorts of different sort of things it can be, but yeah, I do see what I’m doing as educational.

This distinction between hard skills (for example, fire-building, tarp set-up, navigation, etc.) and life skills (communication, conflict resolution, group dynamics, etc.) was described in more depth by the second participant. An important outcome for her is helping students to transfer life skills to a non-wilderness context.

You know anytime you’re learning something it could be considered educational. If someone is going out into the wilderness and they’re learning new skills and they learning how to survive outside, and how to canoe and how to maneuver canoes in whitewater, you know all of those are learning and educational... The idea being that you’re trying to help students to transfer what they’re learning out in the wilderness and apply it to their lives outside of a wilderness context. That’s learning things like self-reliance and taking responsibility for themselves...but [it’s also] inspiring them to think about wilderness in different contexts...I think that being out [in wilderness] and the power of nature and the power of beauty can be so profound on people. And them interacting within [nature] and learning about it and through it and about themselves through it, it’s all educational, it’s the best kind.

Effect on teaching and leading practice. “Does your relationship with the natural world affect the way you teach and lead?” was the final structured question I asked the participants. Consistent in all the answers was an underlying respect for wilderness and the desire for others to cultivate similar respect. Three of the leaders specified that this insistence on respect has led them to facilitate trips that go beyond adventure.

For one of the participants this meant that his focus is no longer just about going down the river and running big rapids, but instead about passing on an appreciation of wilderness to others. For a second participant, she argued that her relationship with the natural world has affected her interactions:

I feel a sense of humility and respect towards wilderness and natural areas... I know some leaders might be more inclined towards adrenaline experiences, or more of the flashy experiences, but I guess I feel like I am in part a reflection of my relationship with wilderness. That it absolutely does shape how I interact with other people and probably how I teach because those values are communicated through those interactions.

For a third participant, respect was an underlying factor in decision making. One way it is reflected is in understanding the natural consequences of wilderness travel. He explains,

Part of the respect idea that we've been talking a lot about is respecting that place [that I am in]. So when I lead people, I can say it's not about leading adventures, it's about taking people through a pretty spectacular area. For me, when we come to a set of rapids, or if we go on a hike, we're not going to be taking chances that I don't like the consequences of...I don't think I'd let somebody do something when they're not understanding what that means. [For instance], if they're looking at a set of rapids and thinking, "Oh yeah, I'm going to run that," and I'm thinking "No, because you're going to flip and it's going to be an ugly swim." It's either you're not respecting or you're not understanding.

From a slightly different angle, another participant used his knowledge of natural consequences as a teaching tool:

I feel that we all learn stuff from experiencing the environment, so experiential learning essentially. That allows, or, that dictates how I set my boundaries when I'm outside...So, I will let people feel very cold and very uncomfortable in certain situations so that they get pushed close to that learning point. As close as is safe for me, if I'm in a position of responsibility and am comfortable letting them go. I'll let them feel some pain, I will obviously let them in a swift water course bounce themselves off a rock and gain appreciation for moving water and rocks. Or you know, mosquitoes and sun, or whatever it happens to be.

The final participant explained that the effect of her relationship with nature on her teaching and leading practice included coaching others to create their own ethic:

I think it's a great privilege to be traveling through...the wilderness environments that we do. I think it's a great honour and privilege to be in a role of leading people in general. And so I take a great responsibility in that, and try...not to preach and not to tell students how it should be and all that, but to ask them questions and get them thinking and create engaging activities that are going to help inspire them and get them to develop their own appreciation and their own ethic.

Reflection. A final point related to role that emerged in a number of interviews was the recognition of the importance of reflecting on the various skills and tasks necessary to carry out. Participants recognized that reflecting on their relationship with wilderness and their own wilderness ethic was a continuous practice. Some also mentioned that they do not always have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss these questions as much as they would like and thus they were appreciative of the opportunity to do so during these interviews. As one said,

I think it's good for me to think about these things every once in a while too, so I appreciate the opportunity to be put on the spot and answer questions. I think I can do that more. Often you just get into contract, contract, contract, contract, on and on and on, and I don't get to stop and think about what I'm doing...time to reflect is important, so I appreciate all your questions.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In this final chapter I review the main themes that emerged from the interviews. In discussing each one, I make connections with the bodies of literature reviewed in the second chapter: wilderness, compassionate sense of place, deep ecology, environmental ethics, and leadership in education and recreation. In a few instances, the findings prompted me to revisit the literature and search for additional writing. Also in this chapter I revisit the research questions, offer my own reflections, and finally, note new questions that have come up for me.

Wilderness

The original purpose of this study was to explore and describe wilderness leaders' understandings of and relationship to wilderness and nature in general. Wilderness was thus placed centrally in the study. In general, defining wilderness was difficult for the participants. This challenge is not a surprise and echoed in the literature; wilderness is indeed a concept that is “hazy and ill-defined” (Nelson, 1989, p.83), and is culturally, socially, and nationally constructed; as a result, it is fraught with problematic assumptions.

The process of writing this thesis has reinforced to me the challenge of defining wilderness as I found myself continuously reconsidering the decisions I made throughout the thesis journey. For example, I worried that in choosing one definition I might exclude the wisdom and understanding that may come from another, differently lived sense of wilderness. When I was guiding in the Northwest Territories a few years ago I described my study to a Dene woman who explained to me that there is no word for wilderness in her language. Since then, it has been shared with me by others that wilderness is not a term often found in Aboriginal

cultures and languages; “home,” or “the bush” would be words to describe what I think of as wilderness.

Henderson (1992) writes that wilderness is difficult to define precisely, and individual judgement of a given landscape’s wilderness content is “partially subjective, dependant on cultural background and previous experience, and variable over space and time” (p. 394). Nonetheless, at the outset of the interviews, these participants’ definitions of wilderness consistently began as places devoid of human interference and presence. From a western perspective this definition is well supported historically (Harrison, 1993), with wilderness envisioned as the polar opposite to civilization (Drengson, 1986; Evernden, 1993; Haluza-DeLay 1999; Henderson, 1992; Miles, 1999).

Beyond the importance of cultural background and experience and time spent in wilderness areas, another very important aspect to consider when looking at how the leaders identified their definitions of wilderness was role. The wilderness leaders interviewed in this study shared similar cultural and demographic backgrounds: white, upper/middle class, and born in North America. Their experiences in wilderness were also very similar: all participants had the opportunity to spend time in natural areas outside of urban centres during their childhood; they all spent significant amounts of time leading in areas they would define as wilderness; and they all attached strong and positive emotions to wilderness and the importance of spending time in wilderness areas. Finally, their role as leaders of wilderness trips linked them to wilderness education and recreation in a way that can perpetuate the distinction between wilderness and civilization (Haluza-DeLay 1999).

While it seems that all the factors listed above led the leaders to identify and idealize a wilderness separate from civilization, nevertheless their experiences in wilderness also resulted

in an inability to oversimplify their ideas of wilderness as an untouched, pristine, natural ecosystem. Through the interviews, they all struggled with the implicit question: how much human interference and infrastructure can be present before a place is not wilderness anymore?

The participants recognized that in most places they had travelled they had seen evidence of people, whether in the form of a small abandoned hut or a built up campsite or something much bigger in the form of a hydroelectric dam. For me personally, I recall paddling rivers in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut and noting the high number of planes. While I was cognisant of the amount of mining and other industry happening in the Canadian North, it was not visible from the river and surrounding river banks, yet the evidence in the form of flight traffic was obvious.

Another factor that complicated a simple idea of wilderness for the participants was the presence of other wilderness travellers. While the leaders seemed unaffected by the number of people in their travelling party, it was clear that running into other groups affected the feeling of wilderness for both the leaders and their clients. This again supported the idea of wilderness as separate from civilization.

For the leaders, this privileging of the pristine is very much in line with an American preservationist philosophy that has its roots in a growing population and shrinking wilderness areas (Henderson, 1992). However, it seems that these leaders' ideal of wilderness comes more from a place of experience and enjoyment than a fear that we are running out of wilderness areas in Canada. Indeed, when identifying the difference between wilderness in Canada and the United States, the leaders noted availability as the key difference. American wilderness was described in finite terms in contrast to the boundlessness they used to describe Canadian wilderness. Interestingly, this is incongruent with Henderson's statement that "essentially, what has

happened is that Canadians have accepted the American view that wilderness is a scarce commodity (1992, p. 394)". While many of the leaders would share and even advocate a preservationist or protectionist viewpoint, they nonetheless all felt that we are surrounded by abundant wilderness areas in Canada.

For these leaders, the picture of wilderness they evoked in their descriptions was one of pristine lakes, and rivers. This was particularly clear when I analysed the word associations. For wilderness, the word choices were: "summer, lakes, canoeing, trees, and rivers." The snapshot, then, is of a body of water, whether it is a lake or river, surrounded by forest. In this snapshot one can easily picture a canoe half in the water, half on the shore and it unclear whether it is coming or going. Is this not also the picture of the quintessential Canadian summer canoe trip?

This vision is promoted in popular literature. Just the other day I was reading National Geographic and the introductory caption to one article was, "The Swiss have mountains, so they climb. Canadians have lakes, so they canoe" (Jenkins, 2011, p. 69). Although most of the Canadian population is urbanized, as a nation we still hold onto this notion of a wilderness backyard in our psyche (Henderson, 1992). For many of the leaders the idea of wilderness in our backyard rings even truer, for we have the privilege of continuing to travel, lead and explore these still relatively accessible areas.

As I wrote the proposal and then revisited the literature to write this last chapter, it became clear to me that there is a lack of *recent* literature on wilderness and on Canadian wilderness specifically. While the number of organizations that aim to protect the environment are growing alongside our ever increasing industrial development, hydroelectric dam projects, oil recovery, and mining to name a few growing incursions into wild areas, the current Canadian understanding of wilderness is not entirely clear; this deserves further scholarly attention.

Time spent in wilderness & relationship with nature

Within the larger question of how wilderness leaders understand wilderness and their relationship to it was a more specific question about how these wilderness leaders described their own experiences in wilderness. As I read and re-read the findings in the sections on time spent in wilderness and relationship with nature, and made connections to the pertinent literature, I found it increasingly difficult to separate them into two distinct entities. For this reason I have chosen to discuss them together here.

To get a sense of the participants' experiences I asked them what drew them to working in wilderness areas as well as why they have continued to do so for an extended period of time. I also asked them to describe their favourite places, memorable trips, and ideal length of trip. In their responses to these questions, as well as other comments throughout the interviews, it became clear that their experiences in wilderness have resulted in feelings of both comfort and perspective. These same feelings were reiterated when they described their relationships with nature. These feelings, they argued, led them to want to share and facilitate wilderness experiences, protect wilderness, and continue to learn from their experiences in wilderness.

Chawla (2006) writes that the environmental education field contains two sides: “one that emphasizes scientific knowledge and technical or managerial solutions to environmental problems; and another that seeks to instil a sense of care and responsibility for the earth among the general population” (p. 359). She continues to explain that the latter side corresponds with “an emotional need for identification and affiliation with the earth” (p. 359). While there was little emphasis placed on scientific knowledge by the participants, they did highlight learnings they argued came from time spent in wilderness, noting heightened awareness of their

surroundings and a familiarity with flora and fauna. Indeed, the emotional connections came through loud and clear in the findings.

The concept of an emotional connection leading to pro-environmental behaviour is echoed in both the place-based education and significant life experience research. In both of these fields emphasis is placed on childhood experiences in nature that then lead to active caring for the environment, for example, as educators or activists (Cachelin *et al.* 2009; Gruenewald, 2003; Sobel, 1996; Tanner, 1974). All participants did indeed share their experiences or memories of time spent in wilderness or natural areas when they were children, and all shared that they had exposure to wild spaces as children, whether through camping and hiking with parents, in an overnight camp environment, or at a family cottage or camp.

When the participants described their favourite places and memorable trips, they were mostly in places off the beaten path that would take days to access. As mentioned, these and other experiences in wilderness have led to feelings of comfort and perspective for the participants. The feeling of comfort came from a sense of belonging, an understanding of certain processes in nature (e.g., how a river flows), and a sense of being at home while in wilderness. The feeling of perspective came from moments of awe when looking at something particularly beautiful and/or powerful (e.g., waterfalls, glaciers etc.) and from moments that have left them feeling humbled.

Participant descriptions of these places reinforce the notion of “big wilderness” described in the literature review. This is a place where you can “cross pass after pass and know that on the other side you don’t drop into civilization, but stay in wilderness instead. In big wilderness you learn how important size itself is to the viability of wilderness” (Brower, as cited in Devall, 1985. p. 238). Feeling a connection to this “big wilderness” resonates with writing in Deep

Ecology as time spent in wild places is evident in the development of deep ecological thought (Sessions, 1998; Taylor, 2001). In identifying points common to all Deep Ecology positions, Katz *et al.* (2000) notes that “the sense of caring for the environment is part of individual human self-realization” (p. *xxi*). When describing their human-nature relationships, the participants related feeling part of the wilderness, and of feeling a small part of a big place. Environmental education researchers continue to ask: whether time spent outside in nature translates to care and protection of natural places.

I think this question needs to be extended to include wilderness, and could be rephrased as: does time spent in wilderness, as children or adults, develop compassion and caring for natural areas? The answers given by the leaders make it easy to argue that it can. While research has been done to show a connection between experience, an emotional bond with nature and conservationist’s career choice (Cachelin *et al.*, 2009), it is clear that there is room for more research examining how exactly wilderness and wilderness trips help foster emotional bonds to nature that result in connection(s) to places and careers in outdoor and environmental education.

When answering the questions about time spent in wilderness, the participants described many different places. It is important to note that they used the word ‘places’ in their descriptions. In differentiating between places and spaces, Walter (1988) explains that spaces cannot be experienced, while a place is “seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered, enjoyed or avoided” (p. 142). Taking the idea of place two steps further, Haluza-Delay (1999b) describes sense of place as the attachment to a place and compassionate sense of place as the desire to create a full and genuine relationship with a place.

A compassionate sense of place does not have to be rooted in a single place, but can occur through mobility (Cuthbertson *et al.*, 1997). I believe the leaders in this study have indeed

developed full and genuine relationships with wilderness areas through movement. This is most evident in the descriptions that three of the participants used when describing rivers, seeing them as conduits for people and animals, understanding that no matter where the river is, it always follows the same principles of movement. This sense of the river comes from travel, especially the opportunity to travel a river from start to finish, from its headwaters to where it joins with a larger body of water. This connection to rivers is one that I too feel deeply. More than five years ago, I came across the following quote:

At any rate, there was a strong sense of riveriness, now, and that much was good. Rivers were the primal highways of life. From the crack of time, they had borne men's dreams, and in their lovely rush to elsewhere, fed our wanderlust, mimicked our arteries, charmed our imaginations in a way the static pond or vast and savage ocean never could. Rivers had transported entire cultures, absorbed the tears of vanquished races, and propelled those foams that would impregnate future realms. Everywhere dammed and defiled, they cast modern man's witless reflection back at him – and when on singing the world's inexhaustible song. (Robbins, 2000, p. 59)

It describes the excitement associated with being on a river, acknowledging its importance and power, while mocking the anthropocentric viewpoint that we humans can use the river to do what we want.

Spending time in wilderness and moving across landscapes has allowed the leaders in this study to develop relationships with wilderness that are very important to them. There is a sense of journey in the participants' approach to understanding their relationship with nature, a desire to continue to grow and connect with nature, while figuring out how to make those connections possible for others.

Wilderness ethic

As discussed in the previous section, time spent and experiences in wilderness resulted in feelings of comfort and a sense of perspective for the participants. These ideas were further developed in their discussions of a wilderness ethic. The participants used both abstract and concrete ideas to explain their own wilderness ethic. They described human-nature relationships that they felt were built on respect and on an understanding that they are a part of the wilderness in which they travel. They then described how this respect is manifested in the responsibility they felt to travel in ways that minimized their impact in the areas they worked.

The leaders all named respect as the sentiment underlying their wilderness ethic; in fact one participant even used the phrase “an ethic of respect” to help describe her relationship with nature. The leaders viewed themselves as part of the wilderness environment as much as other animals, needing to move through it and sometimes use components of it (e.g. wood for fires), and doing so respectfully. This exemplifies a nonanthropocentric perspective, one that denies that humans sit at the centre of importance and that value is given to the non-human solely based on its service to human interests (Armstrong & Botzler, 1999; Desjardins, 1999; Kortenkamp & Moore, 2001; McShane, 2007).

Biocentrism (value given to all living things) and ecocentrism (value given to all natural things, even those that are not “living”) are two nonanthropocentric theories that emphasize the inherent or intrinsic value of nonhuman entities (Armstrong & Botzler, 1993; Katz *et al.*, 2000; Kortenkamp & Moore, 2001). While it is clear through their descriptions of wilderness ethic that the participants ascribe to an ethic that is nonanthropocentric, it is also arguable that most of the leaders uphold a viewpoint that is ecocentric. I argue this because of the struggle many of the participants identified regarding the impact they perceive they have as they travel through

wilderness environments, and because of their sense of being a part of the greater wilderness environment.

An unexpected finding in this study was the identification by most of the participants of the role of post-secondary education in leading them to consider the idea of a wilderness ethic more deeply. For some, their education gave them a framework and language to explain and explore their wilderness ethic. Regardless of when the participants attended school, their exposure to environmental education at a post-secondary level either gave them their first opportunity to consider and develop their environmental ethic or it allowed them to critically reflect on their experiences and their ethical stance after having spent a significant amount of time in the field.

Although this finding was unexpected, it is upon reflection, important to note that it was precisely this same experience that led me to this research question in the first place. While time spent in wilderness changed how I viewed wilderness, it was graduate school in education, specifically environmental education, that facilitated my ability to be critically reflective about my experiences in wilderness and to ask these questions. Palmer (1998) defined environmental education as “the process of recognising values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness among man [sic], his culture, and his biophysical surroundings” (p. 7). She also argued that environmental education “entails practice in decision-making and self-formulation of a code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality” (p. 7). I think the institutions our leaders have attended have successfully achieved both the process and practice goals through encouraging the development of a nonanthropocentric wilderness ethic and critical reflexivity.

In the rationale for this study, I mentioned that my own early understanding and practice of environmental ethics was greatly informed by a general understanding of Leave No Trace principles. In this study, many of the participants echoed this. Reviewing the results, I was surprised by the sheer volume of references to Leave No Trace and the pervasiveness of Leave No Trace principles in the leaders' understanding of their own personal wilderness ethic regardless of how much they agreed with the principles.

Upon further review of the Leave No Trace literature, this connection makes even more sense. According to Simon and Alagona (2009), "one of the great strengths of Leave No Trace is that it distils an entire environmental ethic to seven simple principles" (p. 31). They cite numerous commercial and educational networks that have helped Leave No Trace grow into a commonly accepted set of programs, policies, principles, and practices. Ultimately however, they state that the great achievement of Leave No Trace is:

Even with minimal enforcement, many people who enter wilderness areas after being exposed to Leave No Trace programs show a greater respect for the land... They do so because practicing Leave No Trace has become part of their identity as an educated outdoor enthusiast. They do so because Leave No Trace has become an essential part of the American wilderness culture and experience. (pp. 24-25)

Leave No Trace is an environmental ethic that is easy to adopt. This is particularly beneficial when people have not had the time or interest to develop their own personal wilderness ethic to guide their behaviour and decision-making. It is particularly helpful to wilderness leaders as they lead and teach other people in wilderness areas. For the leaders in the study, myself included, Leave No Trace is a tangible and straightforward way to show respect in wilderness areas, especially when travelling with large groups of people.

In their article, "Beyond Leave No Trace," Simon and Alagona (2009) do identify two conceptual flaws of Leave No Trace, however. One flaw is that Leave No Trace encourages a

view of current wilderness areas as being in a “natural,” pristine condition, in the same form as they have always been. This perspective ignores that these areas are also cultural landscapes and ignores the history of human relationships with these areas. This flaw reaffirms an underlying problem identified earlier in the chapter when discussing participants’ definitions of wilderness. On one hand, Leave No Trace offers a wilderness ethic that has successfully helped to promote appropriate behaviours in backcountry environments. On the other, it perpetuates the notion of wilderness as separate from a history of human interaction. Attending to evidence of human interaction led to different feelings among the participants with some welcoming such evidence while others preferring no evidence in order to maintain their sense of wilderness. Some participants also argued that their desire to interact with the land through activities such as hunting, trapping, and cutting trees for ridge poles was restrained by Leave No Trace principles.

The second flaw identified by Simon and Alagona (2009) was that Leave No Trace is usually limited to parks and wilderness areas. They write, “If global chains of commodity production and consumption make the contemporary American wilderness experience possible, then Leave No Trace offers an incomplete account of the social and ecological consequences – the traces – that stem from outdoor recreation and extend far beyond the park or wilderness boundary” (p. 27). This challenge was also something that most of the leaders touched upon in their discussion of Leave No Trace and of a wilderness ethic in general. Two leaders shared their struggle with the practice of burning plastic, making links to the bigger picture of leaving some trace. One, for example, argued that bringing plastic bags to wilderness in the first place was at the root of the problem, but noted that leaders and organizations were not yet ready to confront the problem as plastic bags are convenient.

In the asking of the question, “How do you think our trips affect the land that we travel on?”, the participants continued to tackle the question of their trace on both the wilderness itself as well as the larger environment through their use of fuel to travel to and from wilderness areas. The aim of my question was to get a sense of how the leaders balanced their potential negative impact on the land in relation to the benefits of taking people into wilderness areas. While all did believe that there was a cost associated with wilderness travel (in terms of trace), the bottom line for most of the leaders was that people need to be able to participate and interact with nature if they are to value it and care for it.

Valuing and caring for nature and wilderness, like many of the ideas surrounding a wilderness ethic, can be difficult to measure and define. Unlike the story shared in the findings chapter about the owner of the packaging/manufacturing company who felt so strongly impacted by his wilderness trip that he changed the practices of his company, we rarely know most of the connections that were made by the individuals on our trips and what outcomes may have come from the experience. It is our hope that we can instill an ethic of respect in the participants of our trips and Leave No Trace principles can assist with that. Our hope, too, is that the impact of these trips allows for a practice of respect that extends beyond the boundary of the park or wilderness area.

Role

What defines an outdoor wilderness leader? There are competencies associated with working in wilderness areas and there are competencies that are required to be an effective leader. Complicating this further are the numerous educational and recreational backgrounds leaders understand as significant to their role. Further, the various organizations that operate wilderness programs place differing emphasis on education versus recreation.

The participants in this study described the role of the wilderness leader as multi-faceted. They identified three different types of competencies required in a wilderness leader: 1) daily concrete skills; 2) decision-making and problem solving skills; and 3) facilitation, environmental stewardship, and socio personal skills. Raiola and Sugarman (1999) identified the following nine elements as ideal curriculum content for outdoor leadership education: leadership style, judgement, trip planning and organization, environmental issues, risk management, instructional principles, navigation, group dynamics, and nutrition. All nine elements easily fit into the three types of competencies identified by the participants.

Another facet influencing how participants understood their role as wilderness leaders was related to the fields that shape the goals of the particular programs including: outdoor recreation, outdoor education, adventure education, wilderness education, experiential education, and place-based education. As noted in the literature review, these terms can be difficult to completely separate from one another as all of the programs “exist on a continuum that blends recreation, education, and personal development” (Haluza-Delay, 2001, p. 44). While an organization may ascribe to one particular mandate, programs generally draw from an array of recreational and educational designs and employ leaders with different backgrounds.

Another complicating factor is that the work available to wilderness leaders is often short-term and contract-based. It is common for someone to work for a number of different organizations in a relatively short period of time. For example, one of the participants described how his wilderness ethic is affected by the organization for whom he is working at the time: for one organization he is teaching college-level environmental education courses and modelling Leave No Trace principles, and for a second organization he is working with young offenders and at times needs to stop and make camp even if there is no sanctioned site in the vicinity.

The participants in this study did not only choose to physically work in wilderness areas, but chose to be *leaders* in wilderness areas. Interestingly, when asked to describe their role as a wilderness leader, none of the participants spoke specifically about types of leadership or even the importance of leadership. Leadership seemed to exist as an assumed component of their role. Perhaps this is because in their organizations they are identified from the beginning as leaders, so it seemed not worth mentioning because it was too obvious.

Yet leadership is identified by Miles and Priest (1999) as “the most critical ingredient” (p. 235) of adventure programs. Leadership is a “process of influence” (Priest & Gass, 1997, p. 3). What kind of influence are these leaders trying to have? In general, the leaders in this study want their participants to have safe trips in which they show respect for the wilderness and learn something. However, it is almost absurd to put it so simply, as every leader influences their trips in different ways. Even in just these five interviews, it was clear that while the participants’ definitions of their general role was in sync, their personalities and experiences had tremendous influence on their leadership style and were indeed “the most critical ingredient.”

Notably, they diverged in their understanding of and comfort with the titles ‘guide’ and ‘instructor’ which aligned with the amount of deliberate teaching involved in the trip. For example, participants used “instructor” to denote trips that included high school or university credits, trips with youth, and courses that taught specific skills (e.g., white water paddling). The title of “guide” was used more often to describe trips predominantly made up of adults that had little explicit curriculum beyond seeing the place and providing a wilderness experience.

The distinction between being a guide versus an instructor was particularly obvious when examining the participants’ desire to educate and their understanding of education. I asked them all if they considered their work as wilderness leaders to be educational. While they all agreed

that learning took place on any trip, one participant staunchly argued that unless education was an intentional component of the trip he was leading (i.e., he was in an instructor role), then it was not educational. The others felt, however, that because of the existence of learning opportunities on any trip, it was part of their role as instructor or guide to point out these learnings and help their clients make greater connections.

One area where all the participants agreed was that they all saw themselves as professionals. This is an interesting assertion because previous research shows that it has been challenging to verify professionalism in the adventure programming industry because there are certain aspects required of outdoor leaders that are hard to accredit or certify (Gass, 1999). While the ‘technical’ skills (activity and safety related technical skills) are easier to train and assess, skills described as ‘interpersonal’ (instruction, facilitation and communication) are much more difficult. Another reason certification has proved to be challenging is that “geographic diversity (e.g., different environments) and programming differences (e.g., varying client groups, different program lengths) [make] the development of one set of standards for all programming formats often impossible” (Gass, 1999, p. 248).

These participants did not offer a list of what might be necessary to accredit them as professionals, rather they appeared to base their sense of professionalism on both their investment of time and their competence in the field. One specific aspect of being a professional identified by all the participants was the importance of demonstrating a wilderness ethic. While the demonstration of a wilderness ethic can be linked directly to a certain set of ‘hard’ skills (e.g. following Leave No Trace principles), the more important aspect appears to come from the relationship each leader had developed with the natural world. When the participants answered the question, “Does your relationship with the natural world affect the way you teach and lead?”,

all of the answers were affirmative. The leaders described an underlying respect for wilderness and the desire to cultivate in others similar respect.

Another common feature of the wilderness leadership role was the importance of reflection. Most notably linked with experiential education, reflection can be described as the “process of making sense from what is learned” (Knapp, 1999a, p. 219). While all the leaders indicated reflection was vital to their role, they also noted that it could be difficult to find the time to reflect; many of them thus appreciated this interview process as it gave them a chance to reflect on their relationship with wilderness and their ideas about wilderness ethics.

As noted earlier in this chapter, in reflecting on their relationship with nature and ideas of a wilderness ethic, a tension arose between seeing wilderness as a pristine isolated place and seeing wilderness as a place that has been shaped and changed by human interaction. Organizations that run programs in wilderness areas have the power to challenge this false dichotomy. Arguably, of even greater influence are the particular individuals who lead people in wilderness areas. While the leaders in this study have been given the tools (through education, experience, and reflection) to identify some of the problematic assumptions surrounding wilderness, do they have the desire or tools to challenge these assumptions? This is an area of study that I believe needs more attention. If outdoor wilderness leaders are the critical ingredient in programming, if they are professionals in their field and looked to for that expertise, then more research is needed to understand their influence and effect of leaders on their clients’ understandings of wilderness.

Conclusion

I set out on this study to understand more about how wilderness leaders view and understand their human-nature relationships as a direct result of time spent in wilderness areas.

While this research question was quite broad, my interview questions were able to guide the conversations towards specific topics such as stories of experience in wilderness, definitions of wilderness, a wilderness ethic, leadership, and educational implications.

What I came to understand was that all the leaders felt strongly about their relationship with nature. Rooted in respect and a perspective of being a part of nature, they wanted to ensure that they travelled in wilderness in a way that was indicative of that respect. The participants in this study treasure the time they have spent and will spend in wilderness areas as well as what they have learned there. As a result of these relationships with nature and experiences, as leaders they wish to help others have experiences in nature and develop their own relationships. This desire is summarized well in the following quote from one of the participants: “I don’t know of anybody that I’ve ever come across that at some level isn’t connected or isn’t awestruck by something that happens in the environment...I guess I see my relationship with wilderness as just facilitating that connection.”

So what does all this mean for environmental education? Most obviously, my study resonates with research that shows the importance of emotional connections to the environment (Chawla, 2006), that environmental education is about both process and practice (Palmer 1998), and finally, that environmental education, “whether formal, non-formal or informal, [is] grounded in critical and innovative thinking in any place or time, promoting the transformation and construction of society” (<http://habitat.igc.org/treaties/at-05.htm>, 1992).

A number of times throughout this study I have asked myself, where does wilderness fit into environmental education? It is evident from this study that one area of strength is its ability to provide opportunities for strong emotional connections with the earth. In listening to the leaders discuss their experiences in wilderness, describe their roles as leaders, and wrestle with

ideas of wilderness and environmental ethic, it was also evident that both process and practice are important in their work. While not all of the participants in this study would call themselves environmental educators, I would argue that regardless of their official title, the unique environment in which they are leading precipitates both learning and education.

Another aspect that became clear to me in this study is the need for wilderness leaders and environmental educators in general to continue to think critically about wilderness and participating in this study gave the leaders an opportunity to reflect and be challenged on their ideas of wilderness, particularly the problematic implications that can arise from assuming a complete separation of wilderness and civilization. However, I have a suspicion I just witnessed the tip of an iceberg here. What I can say for certain is that my own personal understanding of this dichotomy was certainly challenged and stretched in this thesis experience. Ideas about wilderness can lead to cultural divides and problematic behaviours and this is an area that deserves more study.

Wilderness leaders are our environmental educators in wilderness environments and we need to gain better knowledge of what informs or could inform both their understanding of wilderness and their leadership practices. As identified by all the wilderness leaders in this study, environmental ethic is an important component of practice and being a professional in the field. While their perspectives on environmental ethic varied, they were unified in their ability to articulate their ideas. In taking this one step further, we also need to ensure that future wilderness leaders have the opportunity to discuss, reflect, challenge, and build an articulated ethic. If incorporated early into trainings and programs, seeing ethic as a professional aspect in the field of wilderness leadership may help leaders to integrate these ideas more fluidly into their role,

allowing their participants and clients in turn to think more critically about their adventure experiences.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. Word association: what is the first word that comes to mind when I say:
 - Wilderness
 - Anthropocentrism
 - Bear
 - Sense of place
 - River
 - Education
 - Mosquito

2. How old are you?
3. How long have you been involved in wilderness travel programs?
4. How much time have you have spent leading wilderness trips?
5. Why did you start working in wilderness areas?
6. Why do you keep going back?
7. What do you get out of working in wilderness areas?
8. How do you define wilderness?
9. What is your most memorable trip? Why?
10. Is there one place, a favourite place for you in a wilderness area? Please describe it.
11. What is your ideal length of trip? Why?
12. How do you see yourself within the context of the wilderness that you describe?
13. How do you see your role as a leader on these trips?
14. Do you consider what you are doing to be educational? Please explain.
15. How would you describe your relationship with nature? Has this changed since you started working as a wilderness leader?
16. How does being a Canadian, and working in Canada, affect your relationship with nature?
17. Have you worked in the field outside of Canada?
18. How do you think our trips affect the land that we travel on?
19. Do you consider yourself to have a wilderness ethic? Please describe.
20. Do you think we as leaders have a responsibility to portray/ instil/ demonstrate a particular wilderness ethic? Why? Why not?
21. Has your ethic changed since you started working in the field?
22. How do you feel wilderness trips affect your interaction with nature in general?
23. Does your relationship with the natural world affect the way you teach and lead?

Appendix B

Initial Introductory E-Mail to Participants

Dear [potential participant's name],

Hello. I would like to invite you to participate in a study exploring your experiences in nature as a wilderness leader. This study is part of my Master's thesis research at Lakehead University. The project is entitled, "Investigating human-nature relationships of wilderness leaders." Your knowledge and experience are important elements in this research journey. Your participation will be an opportunity for you to reflect upon your experiences and understanding of wilderness.

Your commitment would involve one 60-90 minute audio-taped interview, in person or by phone/skype, to discuss your experiences as a wilderness leader. The interview would take place during the month of April 2009.

My research has been approved by Lakehead University's Research Ethics Board and follows strict ethical guidelines to ensure confidentiality, anonymity and your safety. If you agree to participate, you may choose decline to answer any question or to withdraw at any time. (More information on ethics and research procedures will be offered upon request and will be covered in the official cover letter you will receive if you are interested in participating.)

If you are interested in being a part of this study, please respond to this email.

Thank you,

Alexa Haberer

Appendix C

Cover Letter to Participants

Dear Potential Participant,

I would like to invite you to participate in a study to explore and describe your experiences and understandings of wilderness. Part of my Masters in Education at Lakehead University, this thesis is entitled, “Investigating human-nature relationships of wilderness leaders.” The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of how wilderness leaders relate to the natural world and the potential implications of our perspectives on our leading practices.

If you choose to participate, we will arrange a time to meet in person or over the phone or through skype for an interview that will last approximately 60-90 minutes. These interviews will be semi-structured allowing for dialogue and sharing of ideas between myself the researcher, and you the participant. I will send you some of the interview questions in advance of the interview for your reflection.

I plan to audio-record the interviews. To ensure your anonymity, data collected will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in my thesis and any associated writing and presentations. There is no foreseeable risk, harm, or inconvenience to you to be involved in this study. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, as well as decline to answer any question. Data will remain stored at Lakehead University for five years and then will be destroyed.

The findings of this project will be made available to you at your request upon the completion of the project. The completed thesis will be available at the Education Library at Lakehead University.

Please complete and sign the attached consent form. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me (phone: (807) 252-3922, email: aphabere@lakeheadu.ca), or direct your inquiries to my faculty supervisor, Dr. Connie Russell (phone: (807) 343-8049, email: crussell@lakeheadu.ca), or Lisa Norton, Research Ethics and Administration Officer, Lakehead University (phone: (809) 343-8283, email: lisa.norton@lakeheadu.ca).

Thank you,

Alexa Haberer

Appendix D
Consent Form for Participants

My signature below indicates that I have read the accompanying explanation of “Investigating human-nature relationships of wilderness leaders.” It also indicates that I agree to participate in this study by Alexa Haberer, and that I understand the following ethical considerations:

- My participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time.
- I have the right to choose to decline to answer any question.
- There is no apparent risk of physical or psychological harm.
- All information gathered about me will be kept confidential.
- My identity will be protected by the use of pseudonyms in my thesis and any associated writing and presentations
- The data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years.
- The findings of this project will be made available to me at my request upon the completion of the project. The completed thesis will be available at the Education Library at Lakehead University.

Name: _____
Please Print

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If you would like a synopsis of the thesis, please provide your email or mailing address here:

